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Systemic change theory applied to organizational consulting in independent alternative schools.

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SYSTEMIC CHANGE THEORY

APPLIED TO ORGANIZATIONAL CONSULTING

IN INDEPENDENT ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS

A Dissertation Presented

By

JUDITH REED

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts in partial fulfullment
of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

May   1985
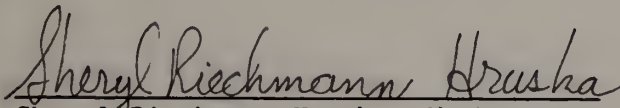
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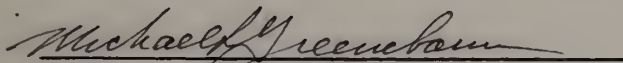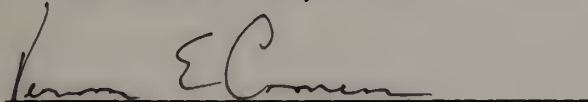
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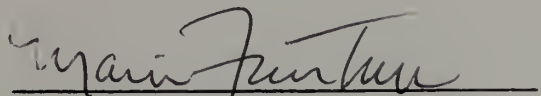Approved as to style and content by:

Sheryl Riechmann-Hruska, Chairperson of Committee

Michael Greenebaum, Member

Vernon E. Cronen, Member

Mario Fantini, Dean
School of Education

For Magic Mountain

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ABSTRACT

Systemic Change Theory

Applied to Organizational Consulting

in Independent Alternative Schools

May, 1985

Judith Reed, B.A. Antioch College

M.A.T., Ed.D. University of Massachusetts

Directed by Sheryl Riechmann-Hruska

This dissertation synthesizes a theoretical foundation for a
systemic approach to organizational consulting in independent
alternative schools with non-traditional organizational designs. Such
schools are beset with organizational problems not always ammenable to
the traditional solutions of specialists in business and industry.
Little has been done to explore how the theory and methodology used in
systemic family therapy may be applied to organizational consulting, but
the author proposes that this stone be turned on behalf of independent
alternative schools.

A review of literature on the organizational characteristics of
contemporary independent alternative schools describes their beginnings,
their mission, and the people in them.

A theoretical section presents three concepts that are key in viewing a human social group as a whole system: (1) the relationship of wholes to parts, (2) a reflexive view of causality, and (3) a notion of "reality" as relative.

The concept of "structure" in human systems is seen as involving rules, resources, and patterns of interaction. The application of this concept to independent alternative schools is illustrated through three cases from the literature.

The nature of "second-order" change in human systems is described as involving change in the rules and patterns of interaction that define the structure of the system. It is proposed that human systems are capable of changing their own structures. Evidence is examined that organizations may undergo recognizable patterns of development involving second-order structural self-change, and the literature on independent alternative schools is analyzed to discern their developmental patterns.

The author discusses planned intervention aimed at fostering second-order change in troubled human systems, as practiced in systemic family therapy. Systemic approaches to problem definition are offered. There follows a discussion of systemic intervention methodologies from family therapy practice. Previous applications of those methodologies to organizational consulting are reviewed.

Systemic problem formulation is illustrated in application to the three cases used earlier. Recommendations are made for systemic consulting in independent alternative schools, and a set of heuristic propositions is offered.

Finally, the work is critiqued and implications and recommendations for future research and theory building are discussed.

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SECTION A: THESIS INTRODUCTION

C H A P T E R   I

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

The Plight of the Independent Alternative School

The 1960's and 70's saw a profusion of experiments in educational
practice. In those days, solitary teachers in their public school
classrooms quietly struggled to introduce new ways of teaching; upon
occasion a public school system joined in embracing new educational
principles; or, as in the case of North Dakota, programs were
instituted statewide to incorporate new educational approaches. In
many other cases, however, innovators threw up their hands and went
off to the redwood forests of California or the storefront jungles of
Philadelphia to "start our own school."

For the most part, both public and non-public experimental
efforts were inspired by particular innovations in educational theory
and practice. Many drew upon Dewey's (1938) philosophy of education
or the British infant school open education model, for example. Some
others took A.S. Neill's Summerhill (1960) as bible, and became a part
of the controversial free school movement in this country. Still
others, such as the freedom schools in the South, stemmed from civil
libertarian concerns.

2

A framework of humanistic values underpins many of the innovative techniques of teaching adopted in such schools during the 60's and 70's. The strong influence of these inherent values is also sharply evident in the organizational structures of the non-public independent organizations that were begun specifically to implement alternative approaches to teaching and learning. The organizational designs of these schools often embodied egalitarian or democratic values. Their structures often incorporated highly participative forms of governance, including, for example, non-traditional hierarchies and consensual decision making. Some were parent-run cooperatives, some were managed collectively by the staff, and many involved students in their governance. Thus, these alternative schools were experiments in organizational form, as well as in educational practice.

This dissertation is particularly concerned with the alternative organizational structures that were adopted in order to implement the educational ideals. A distinction is made, therefore, between educational practice and organizational structure. The former refers to the body of practices concerned with learning and teaching. This includes the instructional methods, classroom organization, curriculum design, teacher-learner relationships, and all else directly related to the educational process itself. Organizational structure refers to the operation of the school as a whole. Included are its hierarchy, its mechanisms for decision making and control, the rules and patterns for relationships among members, and communication with the outside world. A school's organizational structure involves the ways in which

members and resources are organized both in its internal operation as a system and in its relations with the wider community.

While educational practice and organizational structure may be seen as distinct from one another, it must be remembered that the two are actually interdependent. Educational practice can be an integral force in determining how a school must operate as an organization. Some educational practices may require that teachers be able to extend class periods as needed or to work together in teams, for example. The organizational structure also helps determine the parameters of possible educational practice. A vertical decision-making structure, for example, may heavily influence educational practice in the direction of whatever precepts are held by upper-echelon decision makers. More subtly, the manner in which adults in the school organize their interactions with one another may be reflected in the relationships between students and adults and within the student body. Because educational practice and organizational structure are highly interdependent, it is probably inevitable that in newly formed schools innovative educational programs have usually been implemented within innovative organizational structures.

These new schools, with their experimental organizational structures, have had a woefully short life expectancy. "If you can make it through the second year, you can probably make it," was the folk wisdom among alternative school people in the 1970's. The high rate of "infant mortality" among independent alternative schools no doubt stems from many complex factors. It may be safely surmised,

however, that their "alternative" organizational structures involve them in unprecedented problems. These schools are experimenting with unusual organizational forms that are very different from the norm in public and in established private schools. Because their structures are different, their organizational problems may not be those commonly experienced in traditional schools or other organizations. Members of these non-traditional schools may not expect the problems that arise, and may not know what to do about them. Indeed, neither "conventional wisdom" nor the advice of the "experts" about traditional organizational forms is likely to apply in these cases. Thus alternative school people cannot turn to the sources of organizational help available to other small businesses.

The main body of literature on educational innovation focusses on instructional rather than organizational issues. There are various studies involving children, teachers, administrators, parents, and teacher educators. Some very worthy volumes written for parents, teachers, administrators, and teacher trainers describe innovative teaching techniques and educational programs in alternative schools. (The reader who is interested in the effects on students of innovative teaching methods and alternative school practices is referred to studies such as Harvey's, 1974; Jencks and Brown's, 1975; and Oliver's, 1980. Those interested in descriptive material on alternative classroom methods have a wealth of works from which to choose. Prominant are such authors as Busis and Chittenden, 1970; Dennison, 1969; Kohl, 1969; Kozol, 1972; Neill, 1960; Rasberry and Greenway, 1971; and Silberman, 1970, 1973.) These writings are not

generally concerned, however, with the organizational structures within which the innovative educational practices are implemented.

Yet, as stated above, innovative educational programs are often interdependent with innovative organizational structures. However, alternative schools have no models or "conventional wisdom" to help them anticipate and cope with organizational problems associated with their non-traditional organizational forms. Unable to make needed organizational changes and transitions, they often flounder helplessly and heartbreakingly in a morass of interpersonal conflict and burnout. It is tragic that such patently benevolent intentions and such a heavy investment of energy and care, not to say professional competence and practical effectiveness, should succumb to what may likely be organizational, not pedagogical, problems.

Yet there is little or no outside help available that acknowledges the particular position of these schools as non-traditional, experimental organizations possibly in need of non-traditional solutions to their organizational problems. While there is some literature on change and innovation in schools, these works are generally concerned with large public school systems and other institutions of a more traditional nature. (See, for example, Gross, Giacaquinta and Bernstein, 1971; Herriott and Gross, 1979; Havelock, 1973; Sarason, 1971; and Schmuck, Runkel, Arends and Arends, 1977.) The overall purpose of this dissertation, then, is to contribute to the development of a much-needed body of theory and practice whereby consultants may help independent alternative schools to resolve their organizational problems.

The Relevance of Systemic Theory

In seeking organizational help for independent alternative schools, the author proposes to consider the school organization from a particular point of view, one that is associated with a class of theoretical work that falls generally under the rubric of system theory. Theorists in widely varying fields, from physics to biology to sociology and beyond, have developed various versions of system theory, in application to their various disciplines. In the process, "system theory" has garnered so many different meanings as perhaps to have lost its meaning as a term corresponding to some discrete and limited set of concepts. Systems theories abound, and their respective axiomatic foundations vary as widely as the fields in which they are rooted. Cybernetic system theory, for example, is constructed differently from biological system theory, or yet again mechanical system theory.

This dissertation will focus on one set of systemic concepts from selected authors in the social sciences, including such fields as anthropology, communication theory and family therapy. As in other disciplines, theorists in various branches of the social sciences have taken a "systemic approach" to understanding human systems. The term "systemic" has come to imply quite different principles and practices in the work of different theorists, however. This dissertation will call upon certain concepts which, taken together and expanded upon, comprise a particular and unique understanding of human social systems. The author will focus especially on the nature of systemic

change in this context.

The systemic theory presented herein offers a special view of complex phenomena like organizations. It is a perspective that looks at an organization as a whole, interacting and interconnecting within itself and with other systems. The systemic view yields particularly useful information about the organization's interworkings, both internally and in the environment. Most especially, this view of the organization as a system gives access to a set of concepts concerning systemic change, together with corollary notions of problem formation and problem solving in human systems. Systemic theory and systemic change, in this dissertation, are terms used to denote a particular complex of ideas and concepts propounded by those writers alluded to above, and synthesized by this author in the chapters that follow.

Systemic theory

In order to sketch an understanding of systemic theory, the reader is invited to imagine a pair of spectacles which, when worn, transform the world of the wearer in the following ways:

Whole systems are now seen to be qualitatively different from their summative component parts. When parts are isolated from each other and studied as particulate entities, some of the qualities formerly seen in the whole are now invisible and unguessable. Had one seen only these separated parts, one could never have predicted the whole that would emerge from their association with one another, their organization together into a system.

Wearing these spectacles, one sees most vividly the <u>relationships</u> among parts, rather than the parts themselves as separate components. On a micro level, one sees <u>interactive behavior</u> taking place. Moving to a higher level, the interactive behavior is seen to be <u>patterned</u> and <u>rule governed</u>. The systemic spectacles provide the wearer access to the rules that interactive behavior follows in the system. They also show a perhaps astounding phenomenon: The interactive behavior appears to be changing and formulating the rules, even while it also follows them.

In this way these systemic spectacles introduce one to a world wherein causality is not linear, but rather a process of mutual and self-reflexive interaction among agents. In the systemic view, causal relationships are seen to be reflexive and cyclical. As an obvious example, the causal relationship of chicken to egg, viewed reflexively, is such that chicken ultimately creates chicken, and egg egg, as well as chicken egg and egg chicken. All are part of a single causal cycle without beginning or end.

Through such reflexive causal loops, the system maintains and changes itself as a system. However, portions of such ongoing processes may sometimes be problematic in one way or another to some or all of the members. Thus, individuals organized together into an alternative school, for example, may become involved in repeated interactions that are personally difficult and even anguished, yet which continue insofar as they have become integral in the ongoing functioning and the continual recreating of the system. In such an

unfortunate instance, the system must change, <u>as</u> <u>a</u> <u>system</u>, as a wholeness, if its operation is not to rest upon a mode of functioning (including a mode of solving problems) that is in some ways dysfunctional for individuals that make up the system.

The metaphor of the "systemic spectacles" employed above stands for a set of concepts that will be denoted collectively as <u>systemic theory</u> in this dissertation. As the concepts are laid out in the pages that follow, it will be made clear how they may be used as "lenses" through which to view the workings of an organizational system; and how, with the understandings thus gained, a consultant might design new ways to help the system solve its organizational problems.

<u>Systemic</u> <u>change</u>

From the remarks in the section above, it follows that in order for a system to solve its problems, it may need to experience <u>change</u>, as a whole system. This dissertation will be especially concerned with <u>systemic</u> <u>change</u>. Change is continual in human systems, but not all change is "systemic" change. Thus, for example, individual members of a school may come and go, or may swap roles, or may interact with each other in different arenas, yet the <u>patterns</u> of behavior of the system, and the <u>rules</u> that govern interactive behavior in the system, might remain essentially the same. This dissertation will present "systemic change" as change in <u>patterns</u> that characterize the interactive behavior of members with each other, the <u>regulative</u>

<u>rules</u> that the interactive behavior both follows and creates, and the <u>semantic</u> <u>rules</u> that guide members in interpreting the meaning of other members' behavior.

<u>Systemic</u> <u>theory</u> <u>and</u> <u>alternative</u> <u>schools</u>

Other authors have applied various versions of "systems theory" to organizations. However, progress is only just beginning in the work of applying to organizational systems the particular version of systemic theory advanced here, with its concommitant concepts of systemic change. This approach has never before been applied to the particular case of independent alternative schools.

From the wealth of already existing literature on organizational development, one might surely find many approaches to problem solving that would be helpful to alternative schools. Why, then, turn to a body of theory that is only just beginning to be applied to organizations at all, alternative schools aside?

Proponents of systemic theory envision it as useful in a wide variety of settings. They predict its applicability in virtually any situation where human beings are interactively involved over time.

Watzlewick, Weakland and Fisch (1974), in their concluding chapter, state the following:

> Throughout this book we have tried to show that our approach to problem formation and resolution is by no means limited to clinical cases, but has much wider applicability in most areas of human interaction. If many of our examples are taken from the field of psychotherapy, this is merely because it is the area with which we are most familiar.

As we have tried to show, these basic principles are few, simple, and general; there is no reason why they cannot be applied to problems regardless of the size of the social system involved. . . .

To sum up: We see our basic views on problem formation and problem resolution, persistence and change, as usefully and appropriately applicable to human problems generally. (pp. 158, 160)

The above authors would certainly see their ideas as applicable to alternative school organizations, among many others.

This author acknowledges her belief that the systemic perspective does indeed offer a useful way to understand the interworkings of any human system. Powerful tools for helping family systems to change have already co-evolved with this theoretical outlook. Alternative schools may comprise an especially fitting field of application for these concepts, since the schools are usually small and family-like, and since they see themselves as "experimental" organizations and thus may be willing to try something new by way of organizational problem solving.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this dissertation is to synthesize a theoretical foundation for a systemic approach to organizational consulting in independent alternative schools with non-traditional organizational designs.

In pursuit of this aim, the dissertation will explore in depth two different areas that have not before been brought together. A close examination of the world of the independent alternative school

will provide the "laboratory" for a theoretical discourse on concepts
of systemic change. In turn, this particular theoretical base
promises to bear important implications for developing new methods of
organizational problem solving in the real life situations of
independent alternative schools.

Guide to Reading the Dissertation

The dissertation is presented in five parts, the final part
consisting of a conclusion in one chapter. Each of the first four
parts of the dissertation is broken into two main sections. Section A
in each case presents and discusses theoretical concepts, with
examples taken from various human situations, including schools.
Section B in each case presents information about independent
alternative schools. In Parts Two, Three and Four, each "B" section
shows how the theory presented in the immediately preceding "A"
section applies to the case of these schools. Thus the reader whose
interest lies mainly in the synthesis of theory may with impunity skip
the sections devoted to independent alternative schools and read only
those labeled Section A. In this case, the reader will miss the
closer understanding that a "laboratory demonstration" might provide.
The reader who is mainly interested in the schools may wish to read
only the sections labeled Section B. In this latter case, a certain
amount of conceptual confusion may accrue, but the author hopes the
reader will be thus encouraged to peruse the theoretical material.

P A R T   O N E

INTRODUCTION

SECTION B: INTRODUCTION TO THE SCHOOLS

OVERVIEW

Introduction

This chapter and the two that follow paint a general picture of the independent alternative school organization. The main purpose here is to highlight the organizational characteristics of alternative schools, their special circumstances and common problems. This will define the type of organization to be considered in the rest of the dissertation. In addition, it will provide cases and examples of independent alternative schools that may serve as illustrations of theoretical concepts in the chapters that follow.

Not a great deal of data exist describing alternative schools in quantitative terms. The following chapters survey the quantitative information that is available, and also review the much larger body of anecdotal and qualitative literature on alternative schools. A scan of the sources for this chapter will reveal that most of the literature appeared in the early nineteen-seventies. Since the mid seventies, interest in these schools has waned, and few have attempted lately to study them in depth or to number their lives and deaths.

What follows is an attempt to characterize these schools as fully as possible, using the existing literature, which includes mainly chronicles and anecdotal accounts, most written by members of the schools they document. It is not out of keeping with this tradition that this author draws upon her own several years' experience in the early seventies in an independent alternative school called Magic Mountain, in order to draw a more immediate and realistic picture. (Fortunately, the creation and the first two years of Magic Mountain's existence have also been chronicled by Harvey, 1974.)

An attempt is made here to lend order to the wide-ranging information about independent alternative schools, and to illustrate the common themes and the variations thereon. This chapter offers an assessment of the extent of the recent alternative school "movement" in this country. Following chapters will explore the beginnings and the goals of alternative schools, and portray the people who create and populate them.

Independent Alternative Schools

First, to sketch the broad outlines, let us consider just which schools might be termed "independent" and "alternative."

Independent schools. An independent school is one that is not an appendage of a larger public institution. A public alternative school, for example, is still under the organizational umbrella of the local public school system, and thus it is organizationally

constrained by the forms and patterns in the larger system. Some
public alternatives, in spite of this fact, have won a degree of
autonomy, and operate under fundamentally different organizational
structures than do their parent public systems; such schools are
"borderline independent," in that some of their experiences are often
similiar in many ways to those of their non-public counterparts.

However, those public alternative schools with no greater
autonomy than is granted to traditional public schools are clearly
outside the scope of this work, since organizationally they are
closely involved with a much larger, very complex bureaucracy. The
principles to be explored here may well prove applicable to an entire
public school system, but the implications for intervention in such a
large bureaucratic system will be different from procedures for
working with a more contained, smaller, non-bureaucratic organization.
In the business world, one might compare a Stop and Shop supermarket
operated under the aegis of a nation-wide chain, and the Mom and Pop
store on the corner. Confining discussion to the "Mom and Pops" of
the educational world affords us a less complex arena in which to gain
an understanding of new ideas, and of implications for their
application to tangible problems.

Alternative schools. According to Duke (1973), any school may be
termed an "alternative" if (1) it "is accessable by choice rather than
assignment," and (2) it embodies "substantive differences in
curriculum, instruction, methods, and/or school organization" (p. 66).
Alternatives to traditional public education have existed for many

decades, including religious schools, elite private schools, and "progressive" schools incorporating the pedagogical ideas of Dewey (1938). More recently, we have seen a host of new forms: public "schools within schools" and "schools without walls," "freedom schools," and the radical "free schools" modelled on the ideas of A. S. Neill (1960). By and large, however, even the "progressive" alternatives begun before the late 1960's embodied few substantial innovations in organizational form, but rather offered a new curriculum (such as religious education or college preparation) or innovative teaching methods (such as Montessori or open classroom methods). (See Duke, 1973.)

The alternative schools that will concern us here are specifically those that operate under innovative organizational structures, as well as offering a different curriculum and/or new instructional methods. These alternative structures are non-bureaucratic and include experimentation with various hierarchical formats and decision-making procedures. For our purposes, in other words, the term "alternative" does double duty, indicating substantial difference in both instructional approach and organizational form.

The Alternative School "Movement"

Most schools that are independent and alternative, as defined above, have grown up only very recently. The earliest, by most accounts, were founded in the mid-sixties, and most sprouted in the

early seventies. Many survived only a few months or years. Even
those still in existence today are probably organizational youngsters.
Very likely, few are over fifteen years of age, and most are ten years
old or less.

Reliable statistics on numbers of alternative schools started
(and ended) do not exist. Writing in 1972, Graubard postulated the
emergence of a "free school movement" between 1967 and 1971.

> A very few progressive or Summerhillian schools (less than
> five) were founded every year during the early 1960's. Then, in
> 1966 and 1967, the real rise of free schools began, simultaneous
> with the growth of a widespread movement for social change and an
> increasingly radical critique of American institutions. Around
> 20 free schools were founded in 1967 and 1968. Over 60 were
> founded in 1969. By 1970, the number was around 150, and . . .
> the number of new free schools begun during 1971-72 is
> substantially greater.

> A considerable number of free schools close after one or two
> or three years of existence. Although the existing data does not
> present an entirely accurate picture, my sense is that the
> oft-quoted figure of an eighteen-month average life-span is very
> wrong. Since most of the schools are less than two years old, it
> is difficult to get a meaningful figure, but it seems that at
> most one out of five new schools closes before the end of its
> second year, and perhaps not more than one out of ten.
> (Graubard, 1972a, p. 355)

In 1971, the New Schools Directory Project attempted to compile
an accurate list of all "free schools" in the U.S., selecting for the
list those schools that embodied "the sense of being part of a
conscious movement to create schools very different from the normal
public and private schools," and which were not part of a public
school system (Graubard, 1972a, pp. 354-355). Between March and
August of 1971, Graubard surveyed the 346 schools thus identified.
His study has provided much of the basic data available on alternative
schools (Graubard, 1972a).

TABLE 1

INDEPENDENT ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL CHARACTERISTICS

Elementary	51%	Day	91%
High School	29%	Boarding (and	
Elementary-High	20%	Day-Boarding)	9%

Note. Adapted from Graubard, 1972a, p. 357.

Graubard estimated that a total of 350 to 400 "free schools"
existed in 1971, enrolling in all 11,500 to 13,000 students. A
majority were elementary schools or included elementary age children,
and most were day schools. (See Table 1.) Fully 27% of all the
schools surveyed were in the state of California. Five urban areas
contained a marked concentration of these schools, namely the San
Francisco Bay area, Chicago, Boston, Madison-Milwaukee, and
Minneapolis-St. Paul.

> There is good reason to think that cosmopolitan urban areas,
> especially those with high concentrations of university and
> college-associated people, generate the critical masses of people
> who share the philosophy of free schools and have the willingness
> and capability to commit the necessary time, energy, and
> resources to such efforts. (Graubard, 1972a, p. 357)

Size. These were small schools, having an overall average of 33
students per school. About two-thirds of the schools enrolled less
than 40 pupils. (See Figure 1.) Schools were usually small by
choice, rather than default. Kozol (1972a) states the case as some
alternative school people saw it:

> It has been my experience that something bad happens often to
> good people when they go into programs that involve large numbers
> of young people and a correspondingly extended political
> constituency. The most gentle and least manipulative of people
> often prove to be intolerable "operators" once they are faced
> with something like two thousand children and four thousand angry
> parents. Even those people who care the most about the personal
> well-being of young children turn easily into political
> performers once they are confronted with the possibilities for
> political machination that are created by a venture that involves
> so many people and so much publicity. . . .
>
> The likelihood of going through deep transformations and
> significant alterations of our own original ideas (by this I mean
> the possibilities for growth and for upheaval in our
> consciousness of what "school" is about) is seriously
> circumscribed when we become accountable to fifteen city blocks
> and to ten thousand human beings. . . . I just think many more
> remarkable things can happen to good people if they happen in
> small places and in a multiple of good ways. (pp. 15-16)

For Kozol large size leads inevitably to certain political
pressures that contaminate the ability of those in power to deal
optimally, maybe even benignly, with the teachers and children and
parents in whose lives they figure so importantly. In addition,
largeness mitigates against experimentation and change.

Another view, stressing the importance of small size purely in
terms of educational benefit to students, is provided by Harvey
(1974):

> To preserve a personalized program, we limited our program
> to fifteen students a year. . . . It is possible the necessary
> demand for responsiveness and proximity to the individual student

FIGURE 1

PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF
INDEPENDENT ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS BY PUPIL ENROLLMENT
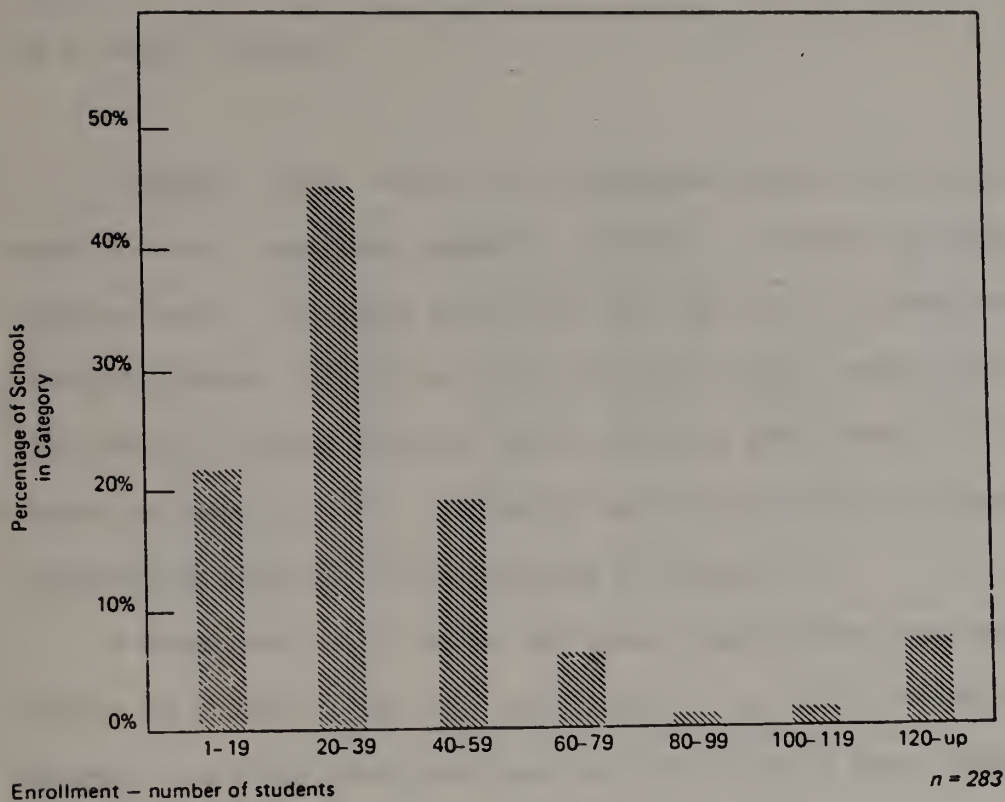
Note. From Graubard, 1972a, p. 360.

precludes application of holistic education for larger class sizes. (p. 187)

Thus, to Kozol's political reasons for "small is beautiful" are added Harvey's valuation of the quality of relationship between adult and child. Such relationships were important to the educational program, and they were deemed difficult if not impossible to achieve in a larger setting.

Finances. Most schools (81%) depended upon tuitions for some or most of their financial support. Typically, tuition was charged on a sliding scale. Graubard estimated that tuitions at these schools normally ranged from $0 to about $1200 per year, compared with traditional private schools, where tuitions were normally $1500 to $4000 per year in 1971. Per-pupil expenditures for non-boarding alternative schools are represented in Figure 2.

A comparison with public per-pupil expenditures may help the reader to interpret the data in Figure 2. In 1971, according to Graubard, wealthy districts such as Beverly Hills spent $2000 per student per year. The average for urban areas was in the range of $1000 to $1500. There were some poorer districts spending $500 to $1000 per student per year. In contrast, more than a fourth of the independent alternative schools managed on less than $300 a year per student, including rent, and over ten percent spent less than $100. At the same time, they were operating with staff-student ratios on the order of 1:5 to 1:10, compared to the 1:25 that is typical of public school classrooms. In explanation, Graubard offers the following:

FIGURE 2

PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF
INDEPENDENT ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS BY PER PUPIL EXPENDITURE
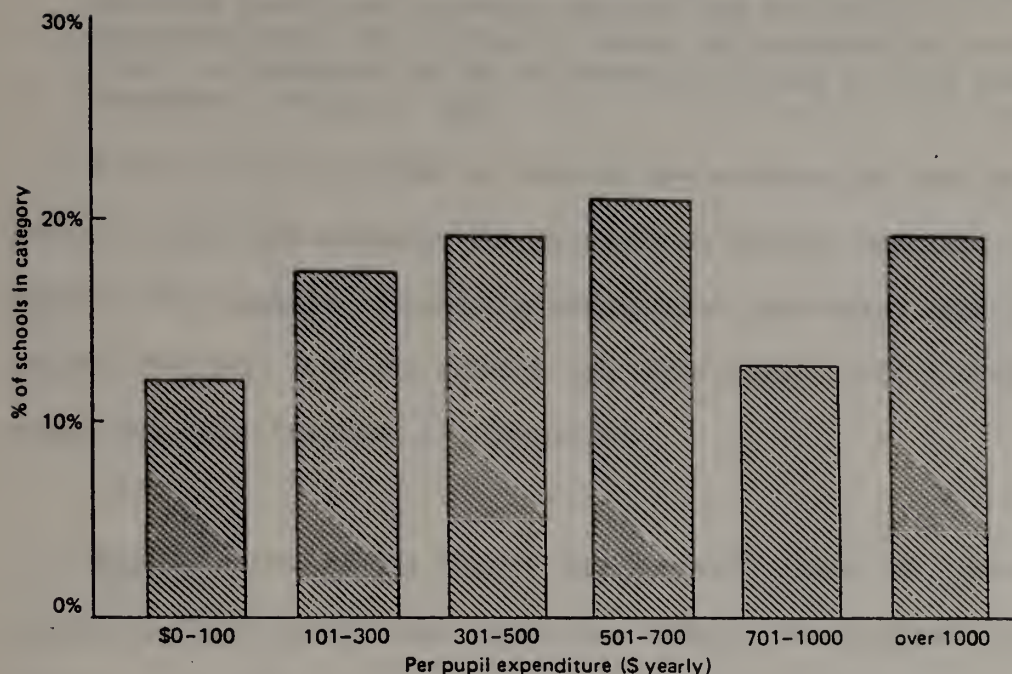
Note. From Graubard, 1972a, p. 363.

Of course, many free school teachers work for very little
money, often for room and board or less. In addition, many free
schools use volunteers from local communities and nearby colleges
and universities. Parents often take major roles in the
classroom and especially in administration, fund raising, and
building maintenance. Students, parents, and staff donate or
scrounge up much of the material. Thus, the financial figures as
represented on the graph systematically understate the resources
used by free schools. If one could assign true value to the work

of the teachers, the time of the volunteers and parents, the homes often used for classrooms, the gasoline and cars volunteered, the out-of-pocket unreimbursed expenses of volunteers, and the donated materials, the cash value of resources invested in the schools would be much higher than the actual money figures.

Still, the survival of most free schools depends on the fact that many people, often highly qualified and capable of holding teaching positions in public schools and elsewhere at $9,000-$15,000, are willing to work, for at least one or two years, at salaries in the $2,000-$5,000 range or even lower. (Graubard, 1972a, p. 364)

Withall, most alternative schools see salaries as the top priority, and they endeavor to pay staff as much as possible, over and against, for example, purchasing educational materials. The above figures indicate that few schools can offer their staff a true living wage, even with the best of intentions.

Housing. Graubard's study, unfortunately, does not include data on the physical plants that housed the schools he surveyed. Housing, however, is seen as an ever-present problem for these schools throughout the anecdotal literature. For example, Magic Mountain, where this author worked for several years, had to move at least once a year during its first five years, and in one year relocated three times. Visits from the fire marshal were occasions for fear and trembling, and staff admonished students to be on their best behavior so as not to adversly impress these all-powerful persons. Quarters were usually cramped, often dank and subterranean (church basements were the common lot), hard to afford, and easy to lose. Keeping in the good graces of the landlord, despite the wear and tear inevitable

where youngsters are present, was a constant concern.

Conclusion

The brief overview provided above suggests the existence of a "movement" involving the swift creation (and too often the subsequent demise) of unprecedented numbers of independent alternative schools during a decade or so of U. S. history. The data indicate that the schools functioned in the face of considerable hardship and adversity. In order to complete this background to viewing their organizational problems, we now turn to a closer examination of various facets of alternative school life.

The school's sense of mission and the people in the schools are discussed in the next two chapters. The reader may bear in mind, however, that all aspects of school life involve all parts of the school. A school's sense of mission is not a thing apart from the people who make up the school. In order to present a complete picture of alternative school life, we will wish eventually to consider how all the various elements of school organization come together to be the school. With this in mind, we proceed first with a look at how and for what deeper purposes independent alternative schools are conceived and born.

C H A P T E R   I I I

MISSION

This chapter is about how and why independent alternative schools were begun. The first section characterizes the events and the climate out of which they typically grew. The rest of the chapter is devoted to understanding the espoused goals and the sense of mission that enspirited founders and joiners of independent alternative schools.

Beginnings

The asphalt churned toward Sara, slipping through the steering wheel and the blur of her tears, to join the miles and the ruined hopes lying now behind her. On this day in the spring of 1971, 34-year-old Sara Homewood had been brought before the Board of the prestigious California private day school where she worked. Or rather, where she used to work. For she had just been ordered by the Board Chairman to leave the school campus immediately, never to set foot on school soil again.

No, Sara had not been caught selling hallucinogens to the school children. The crime was of a different nature altogether, and in the eyes of some, perhaps more severe.

At the behest of the headmaster of this school (in which Sara's two children, now ten and twelve, were enrolled), Sara had been coordinating the adoption of humanistic educational principles into the school program.

For nearly two years, she had worked with administration and faculty to help the school begin to consider the "whole child" in designing educational experiences and curriculum. On this day, many months of slowly brewing foment over the religious (or irreligious) connotations of the term "humanistic," and over the generally progressive direction the school was taking, had finally boiled over. The headmaster and Sara and six other teachers were summarily dismissed by the Chairman of the Board.

The tale of this painful ending is the story, too, of a beginning: That summer a small group of Sara's supporters, also disaffected from the same private school, met with Sara at her home, and a school named Magic Mountain was born.

Struggle, certainly, and often pain, mark the births of many an alternative school. "Reaction against" is a common theme: against a previous bad experience in a hostile environment; against a "repressive" or "oppressive" public system or private school; or against economic and social conditions in the inner city. Here are some other examples from the literature:

[The New School in Plainfield, Vermont,] was started by a half-dozen families in response to a despair about the local public schools. (Graubard, 1972b, p. 46)

Mary Lunde [another public school teacher] and I decided we were tired of taking the garbage we had to take from the administration. (Graubard, 1972b, p. 50)

Our core group had in common a dissatisfaction with the public schools and, more fundamentally, with the patterns of coercive authority embodied in them. But we knew much more about what we didn't like about public school than what we wanted to erect in its place. (Bhaerman & Denker, 1982, p. 65)

Magic Mountain was created after a devastating failure to implement an educational ideology in an already established setting. The founders of the school had, in contrast to the last example above, a definite set of educational ideals and at least some tentative ideas

as to how best to put their beliefs into practice:

> In time we came to agree it would be better to work in a small setting, beginning with nothing and creating a program around our beliefs, than to dilute our energies in working to adapt the old and traditional.

> It was with that as background that I elected to knock a hole in the wall of the basement and convert the family garage and basement into a small, modest setting, where we could work on developing some of the methods and ideas we had been incubating. (Harvey, 1974, p. 158)

Occasionally, but rarely, an alternative school grows out of happier circumstances. Community High School in Santa Barbara, for example, grew out of an after-school program for adolescents that was begun on the premises of an elementary alternative school.

> After a month or so of after-school classes, a small group of ten students felt they wanted a full-time alternative school program. . . . A storefront in the downtown area of the city was rented . . . and the high school officially opened on April 7, 1970, with an enrollment of twelve. By the end of the month the enrollment had jumped to forty-four, even though the school year was almost over. (Graubard, 1972b, pp. 54-55)

In contrast, the beginnings of the New Educational Project (NEP), a "free" high school in Washington, D.C., were typical of the "disillusioned and disaffected" whose main motivation was dissatisfaction with "the establishment." Writes one of the founders,

> The kids . . . who were attracted to the project and I had one thing in common. We were all bored. No common ideology, no common view of what our school's purpose should be, bound us together. The atmosphere at [our public] school was choking us to death and we wanted out. It was the atmosphere more than any specific acts of repression directed against us that made us leave; we were rebelling against a total environment. (Bhaerman & Denker, 1982, p. 62-63)

On one hand, the school that is motivated mainly by "rebellion against" grows from a sense of deficit and want, and thus may lack a sense of direction <u>toward</u> specific goals; on the other side of the same coin, the school grows out of a deeply felt <u>need</u>, and is accorded a basic importance in the lives of its members. Not all new organizations, we must remember, carry such depth of meaning or such heavy social and personal consequences for their members. A new private business creating softwear for computer games, for example, may not carry such a burden of responsibility. This is an important theme, one that will be found winding through the entire fabric of the alternative school experience, and one that deeply involves the sense of mission embodied in these schools.

Goals

It was a chilly October evening at Lake Tahoe, where the Magic Mountain staff were gathered near the crackling fireplace in the vacation home of one of the school's Board members. Now beginning a second year of operation, the school staff were on a weekend retreat, hoping to foster working relationships and the formation of a cohesive school program. At the moment, each person sat or sprawled on cushions or rug, brooding, scribbling, musing over a white sheet of paper; the task: to clarify the priorities of program goals. After several minutes spent scrawling and doodling, Judy sighed, lay pen and paper aside, rubbed her eyes beneath wire-rimmed glasses, stretched, and looked up to catch Sara's eye. Joe sat cross-legged, staring into the flames, his sheet of paper (Judy observed) still pristine. Sara got up and disappeared into the kitchen. Waiting, Judy gazed at the shapes of the flickering flames until others began to stir and Sara returned with mugs of hot cocoa on a tray. Thus nourished and warmed, members then shared the results of their private reflections. Each person in turn spoke of dreams and basic beliefs. Each presented a sheet filled with words, thoughtfully chosen and arranged.

Sara, the director/founder, spoke of the importance of
a sense of community, of personal well-being, of individual
competence, and "a holy attitude to self and other and all."
At the bottom of her sheet, she had added, "My personal
priority: working with/for staff; student; family" (Harvey,
1974, p. 64). Ed, a volunteer, stressed the need for the
school to place its own physical/financial survival at the
top of the list. Others spoke of children's self-esteem,
competence, creativity, wholeness, and of community.
Speaking last of all, Joe, one of the two core teachers,
displayed the page on which he had finally drawn a jagged
line above a star with rays of light, but had written
nothing. He agreed, he said, with everyone else, but he
just couldn't put anything into words.

Most descriptions of school purposes contain fairly global

statements. Like Joe, members may readily agree with what everybody

else espouses without a clear idea (much less consensus) as to what

this means in practice. Nonetheless, let us examine what schools have

said about their beliefs, as background to seeing what this has meant

for them in practice.

As mentioned previously, some alternative school people know more

about what they <u>don't</u> want than what they <u>do</u>. However at least one

study (Duke, 1978b) found independent alternative schools to be rather

well able to describe their basic purposes. In his study of forty

alternative schools, Duke identified seven distinct types of

alternative school goals, with many schools subscribing to more than

one of them. They are as follows (Duke, 1978b, pp. 26-29):

<u>Exploratory goals</u>. These goals call for giving students choices

of activity and scheduling, leaving ample freedom for individual

initiative, and stressing "creativity, natural growth, the development

of individual interests, and respect for individual differences" (p. 26).

Preparatory goals. The aim here is to prepare students for specific next steps, such as college, or for vocations.

Revolutionary goals. In schools embracing revolutionary goals, radical social activism is encouraged among students in preparation for a later role in helping to change society.

Participatory goals. A "firm belief in democratic processes" is embodied in participatory goals, with a preference for non-representative, "direct" democracy and a strong emphasis on the importance of a "sense of community" (p. 28).

Theraputic goals. Schools holding to theraputic goals do not necessarily enroll "troubled" youngsters, but are interested in enhancing the "inner experience" of every individual. In contrast to participatory goals, "theraputic goals center on the individual student" (p. 29).

Academic goals. While theraputic goals are concerned with affective growth, "academic goals are cognitive in emphasis." Adult intervention in the student learning process is considered necessary to insure a "broad variety of learning experiences," in contrast to the laissez faire approach that accompanies exploratory goals. (p. 29)

Demonstrative goals. Schools with demonstrative goals see themselves as "demonstration projects," models for others to follow in implementing a particular approach to education.

TABLE 2

THE GOALS OF 29 INDEPENDENT ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS

Goals	number of schools	%(n=29)
Exploratory	14	48
Preparatory	9	31
Revolutionary	7	24
Academic	7	24
Participatory	4	14
Theraputic	2	7
Demonstrative	1	3
No clear-cut goals	5	17

Note. Though 29 non-public schools were sampled, some schools were entered under several categories of goals. Thus there are more than 29 tallies, and percentages total more than 100. (Adapted from Duke, 1978b, p. 32.)

Duke's findings on the goals of the 29 non-public schools in his sample may be seen in Table 2. (It should be noted that many schools espouse a combination of goal types.) The author concludes that "contemporary alternative schools cannot be characterized by any particular type of goal," although some tendencies are apparent (Duke, 1978b, p. 33). He notes, for example, the prevalence of exploratory goals, and the fairly strong presence of academic goals, as evidence

of disenchantment with traditional pedagogy and curriculum. At the
same time, he points out, the high number of schools with preparatory
goals shows that "not all alternative schools reject the typical view
of schools as preparation for the future." He notes that, contrary
to what the rhetoric of the popular press might lead one to expect,
few schools had no clear-cut goals at all.

> Contrary to the skepticism of many observers, most contemporary
> alternative schools possess a reasoned philosophy or set of
> objectives. . . . One of the serendipitous by-products of the
> growth of alternative schools may be an increased tendency for
> those involved in educational innovation to articulate their
> goals. (Duke, 1978b, p. 33)

Ideologies

Deal and Nolan (1978) offer a four-way typology of educational
ideologies, which serves to describe the ways in which the goals and
objectives discussed above may typically combine in school settings.
(See Figure 3.) Their schema presents three alternative types, as
against the one "classical," or traditional type. While none of these
ideal types is likely to be found in pure form, we might consider them
as the extreme ends of three different pathways.

(1) The "romanticists," with their laissez-faire stance, are
perhaps best exemplified in the Summerhillian schools, from whose
vantage point "students are viewed as 'flowers' who, if left alone,
will blossom forth" (p. 10). Here, "personal freedom" is valued above
all.

(2) The "revolutionists," on the other hand, see schools as

FIGURE 3

FOUR EDUCATIONAL IDEOLOGIES

	School as a Filling Station	School as a Garden	School as a Tool	School as a Market Place
Sources	The "classicists." Traditional academics	The "romanticists." Rousseau; Neill	The "revolutionists."	The "progressives." Dewey
Metaphor	Kids as empty vessels	Kids as plants	Kids as agents of social change	Kids as philosophers, bargaining agents, and problem solvers
Source of Knowledge	Outside	Inside	The new regime	Interaction between inside and outside
Main task of schools	Transmit to present generation bodies of information, rules, and values of the past	Create a permissive environment in which innate qualities can unfold	Change the society. Create individuals for a new social order	Create an environment that will nourish a natural conflict or negotiation between students and society
Emphasis	Traditional; established	Unique, novel, and personal	Using the school as a lever for effecting social change	Resolvable but genuine problems or conflicts between the established and the emerging

*This figure is based, in part, on the conceptualization of Kohlberg and Mayer (1972).

Note. From Deal & Nolan, 1978, p. 9.

instruments for social change and students as change agents. The "social good" is most highly prized in this paradigm.

(3) The "progressives," basing their ideology on the work of Dewey (1938) and others, see schools "as a market place in which students engage in a continual transaction with social beliefs, values, and information" (p. 10). A complementary amalgam of "personal fulfilment" and "social responsibility" is valued in this third paradigm.

Revolutionary schools

The "revolutionary" path is exemplified most clearly in the "freedom schools" that were founded in order to compensate for the ill effects on education for blacks wrought by de facto segregation in the southern U.S. These schools aimed to provide better quality education than was available to blacks in segregated schools in the South, and to combat racism and the oppression of blacks, by stimulating a sense of black identity and a consciousness of civil rights. The schools were felt to be but a part of a broader social mission, and social change was seen as the ultimate goal. Such schools do not necessarily embody organizational innovations, it should be noted, nor do they necessarily consider the organizational forms of traditional schools to be part of the social evil they hope to eliminate.

Also belonging to this genre are community schools whose purpose is to return control of the schools to participants (i.e. parents), and often to address the needs of particular ethnic groups or local communities. Countering the move toward centralization and the formation of monolithic school systems, groups of parents have sometimes banded together to create schools over which they could maintain direct control, and which would therefore be responsive to local and/or ethnic needs. Again, here is an example from Chicago:

> In Uptown's Native American community, many young children of early elementary age are out of school. . . . Partly this stems from the insensitivity they have found in the schools to their needs and culture, partly because they are poor. Sometimes they do not have adequate clothes in which to go to school. Sometimes they need to stay home to babysit even younger children. Generally their parents have not found that sending them to school was worth the effort. The Native American

Committee, a community organization, had been working to increase
the flexibility and autonomy of a Board of Education high school
serving Indian children. In time they decided it was impossible
to change the public school and decided to start a school for
younger children, outside the system. The Native American
Committee School now has 16 children and focuses on basic skills
and Indian culture, as well as giving each child a full, good
meal every day (often the only one they get). (Bennet et al.,
1978, p. 12-13)

And, in a final example from Chicago, at the Rafael Cancel Miranda

Puerto Rican High School,

students learn from current community issues of employment,
housing and justice. They study the history of Puerto Rico,
group dynamics, and comunity organizing, as well as a regular
high school curriculum. (Bennet et al., 1978, p. 14)

Innovative organizatonal structure does not necessarily typify

revolutionary schools. Often the structure and methodology of

teaching children, as well as of administering the school, are fairly

traditional, though the content is radically different.

Romantic schools

The "romantic" or "personal freedom" genre is well exemplified

by Pacific High School, whose former director, Peter Marin, writes of

"the unmanipulated lives of the young," and "a willingness to allow

the young their own existence." He adds,

The natural experiences of adolescence are far more sustaining
and enlightening than anything we teach them, when they are
allowed to occur without interference. In that limited sense,
Pacific was a 'loving' place; not in the sentimental meaning of
the word, but simply because the young were free enough there to
be themselves. Traditional notions about education were cast
overboard. But what took their place was certainly not a set of
'innovative' ideas. It was instead a tolerance and respect for
the real experience of adolescence in all its troubled intensity.
At its heart there seems to lie the need for adventure, motion,
sexuality, drugs, introspective solitude, and the mastery of a

few practical skills--and, beneath all that, the discovery of the
limit and strengths of the self. But for the most part those
experiences take care of themselves and come naturally, if one
gives them enough room; and that, of course, has always been
Pacific's real gift to the young: one of room. (Marin, 1972, p.
vii)

These "free schools" usually embody radically experimental
organizational structures. Individual difference is prized, thus
representative governmental forms are eschewed, since no one can truly
represent the uniqueness that is someone else, and everyone,
individually, is seen as important. Certainly, authority ought not be
invested in a single person or small group. Direct democracy, with
each community member given an equal vote, is a common decision-making
process in free schools, and often consensus, rather than majority
vote, is deemed necessary.

While "freedom" schools aim to change an imperfect world, "free"
schools, it might be said, aim to escape the imperfect one and create
a more perfect microcosm. Says Graubard (1978b),

> One trend that I have noted is for participants to think of their
> free schools as self-sufficient communities, for both the adults
> and the students, . . . [and] to move as far as possible from the
> larger world, psychically, culturally, and, where possible,
> physically. (p. 179)

Progressive schools

Magic Mountain, along with many other alternative schools, opts
for neither the "personal liberty" nor the "social revolution"
pathway. Such "third way" schools adhere to a "progressive" approach,
based largely in the work of Dewey (1938). These schools do not
usually project strident calls for social action, and their goals

statements may not reflect far-reaching aims for the relief of social

ills. Neither do they tout "freedom" as the highest value, and

students are not usually viewed as the "equals" of adults in decision

making. Progressive type schools often do see themselves as model

programs, upon which others may base larger-scale attempts to change

educational practice. They may see themselves, too, as important

social experiments in microcosm, particularly when (as is often the

case) they involve innovative organizational models as well as

"humanistic" or "holistic" approaches to pedagogy. A strong sense of

community, and concern for others, are highly prized here. Members of

this type of school are trying to foster independence and individual

"wholeness" and "fulfilment" (as distinct from "freedom"), while

stressing also the importance of community and of the individual's

social responsibility. Magic Mountain goals statements offer good

examples of the "progressive" type:

> We began with a general goal, that of creating an
> environment devoted to working with the wholeness of the student,
> stated in our curriculum guide as a "wholly integrated person."
> (Harvey, 1974, p. 171)

> Since the inception of the school, we had visualized magic
> mountain as a place where the professional and the personal were
> more closely interwoven, where whole people shared whole lives,
> reducing as greatly as possible the compartmentalization and
> fragmentation of the dominant culture. (Harvey, 1974, p. 18)

> We want for the children what we want for ourselves--for me,
> that means to be in sympathetic touch with the kernel inside that
> is me, to help that kernel grow and reach out to the people
> around me, to the world around me. That means thinking about
> each child's inner private world, his individual needs and
> contributions. It means cultivating a community, an ability to
> listen and respond to others. It means encouraging an open,
> excited, concerned inquisitiveness, an awareness and a
> self-confidence about life in the world. (Judy, core teacher,
> writing for the Magic Mountain school flyer, as quoted in Harvey,
> 1974, p. 137)

Goal Combinations

None of the three ideological stances depicted above is entirely distinct from or unrelated to the other two. The differences are in the priority given various goals, for in truth all three types share several of the specific goals that Duke (1978b) isolated, but hold them dear in different proportion.

Revolutionary schools obviously embody revolutionary goals, but depending on the form of the hoped-for revolution, they might embrace other goals as well. The Southern freedom schools for black children usually held to preparatory and academic goals, and often decidedly eschewed exploratory and theraputic goals. Kozol's (1972) rhetoric, on the other hand, tends to refer to a kind of revolutionary school that holds exploratory and participatory goals above preparatory and academic ones.

Romantic schools are based on exploratory and participatory goals, and some, like Summerhill, also hold theraputic goals. Some, but not all, actively reject academic goals. At Summerhill, children are never required to engage in academics, but for those who choose to so do the academic subjects are taught in a fairly traditional fashion.

Progressive schools often incorporate preparatory and academic goals as well as participatory ones. Though all independent alternative schools probably see themselves as "demonstrations" or

models of good educational practice, of those few whose main purpose is demonstrative, most are probably of the progressive ideology.

It is not always easy to hold simultaneously to certain combinations of different goals, but conflicts among goals are not unresolvable--nor is it impossible to operate successfully while holding to goals that conflict with one another in some measure. The potential for such conflict, however, is an important factor in understanding the tasks and the special challenges that alternative school organizations need to be able to handle.

Conclusion

Typically, independent alternative schools were born out of their founding members' dissatisfaction with existing conditions in traditional schools. Beyond rejecting the status quo, their goals were sometimes unclear, but often enough they espoused a range of fairly definite purposes. Duke (1978b) identified seven distinct types of alternative school goals: exploratory, preparatory, revolutionary, theraputic, academic and demonstrative.

Certain of these goals often appear in constellation with one another. Deal & Nolan (1978) identify three main genres that serve to categorize most independent alternative schools, each of which is typified by a certain cluster of the goals mentioned above. The revolutionary genre includes fewer schools with alternative organizational structures, while romantic and progressive schools more

commonly experiment with non-traditional forms. The pages that follow, therefore, will be more concerned with so-called "free schools" and with progressive schools such as Magic Mountain, than with revolutionary type schools.

This chapter has examined some of the major beliefs espoused by alternative school people. The next chapter depicts more fully those people who, for whatever multitudinous reasons and beliefs, helped to create and populate independent alternative schools.

C H A P T E R   I V

PEOPLE

Who are the people who involve themselves in alternative schools, and why ever do they do so? Staff, students and parents are the main players in a school's cast of characters. In this chapter we focus on these participants, the better to understand their roles and their reasons for undertaking to play those often demanding roles.

<u>Staff</u>

> It was as if in creating magic mountain, I began to "institutionalize" my personal concerns; my emphasis on "wholeness" has been an outgrowth of my life history and an extension of my personal orientation to the world. (Harvey, 1974, p. 159)

> Won't someone love the children?
> Won't someone help me love the children?
> I cannot give them all the love they need.
> They need so much,
> Yet so do I.
> 　　　　　-Joe, Magic Mountain teacher, quoted in
> 　　　Harvey, 1974, p. 72.

> We want for the children what we want for ourselves.
> 　　　　　-Judy, Magic Mountain teacher, quoted in
> 　　　Harvey, 1974, p. 77.

Teachers and administrators in alternative schools spend time and energy far beyond the minimum expectations for comparable positions in public schools, and are paid a pittance in return. Support staff in alternative schools are minimal, if any. Teachers' jobs include everything from publicity and recruitment to janitorial work. Many regular meetings and conferences, augmented by the ever-impending crisis, the frequent internal strife, and the daily frustrations of operating within ill-defined structures and with unclear roles often drain the little energy left to a teacher, after working all day with demanding students. Yet, while staff turnover is high in some cases, many staff hang in for several years. In addition, many alternative schools rely heavily on the work of dedicated but unpaid volunteers. Clearly many of thses people must be seeking some non-material rewards potentially available in alternative school settings.

Who are these people? Graubard's (1972a) study found alternative school staff to be predominantly white (85%), and young (69% were under thirty). (See Table 3.) Further, the black teachers were "concentrated almost completely in the relatively small number of black community schools and street academies" (Graubard, 1972a, p. 359). "A rough estimate [of staff-student ratio] which included all volunteers and part-time staff would be about 1:3, while a figure which involved only full-time staff would be 1:7" (Graubard, 1972a, p. 358).

In discussing his data on the 2,600 people staffing independent

TABLE 3

NON-VOLUNTEER STAFF CHARACTERISTICS IN ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS

Age distribution		Ethnic distribution	
Under 20 years old	6%	White	85%
20-29	63%	Black	11%
30-39	20%	Other	4%
Over 40	10%		

Note. Adapted from Graubard, 1972a, p. 359.

alternative schools, Graubard (1972a) makes the following

observations:

> First, a significant part of the free school movement is related
> to the youth and student movement of the 1960's, both political
> and cultural. Second, many schools are started by young parents
> of very young children, and some of them become the teachers.
> Finally, the financial situation of most free schools makes it
> difficult for older people with families to participate, given
> their need for job security and dependable income. Young people,
> mobile and without encumbering family responsibilities,
> constitute the most obvious pool for very low paid and volunteer
> staff. (p. 359)

Duke (1978b) conducted one of the few cross-sectional studies of

alternative schools. He chose a random sample of forty "contemporary

alternative schools," all of them nonsectarian, noncompensatory,

nonconventional schools available to students and parents by choice.

His sample includes 29 non-public (or independent) schools, and 11

public alternatives. (See Table 4.) He spent one or two days at each

TABLE 4

CONTEMPORARY ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS SAMPLE[a]

	Elementary	Secondary	Combined
Nonpublic Alternatives	15 (93)	6 (46)	8 (53)
Public Alternatives	5 (29)	6 (38)	

[a] Numbers in parentheses indicate the total population of schools in each category, from which approximately one-sixth were randomly selected for the sample.

Note. From Duke (1978b), p. 15.

school, observing and conducting interviews, using a tested interview schedule and following up by mail when necessary. The data he collected provide an important source of quantitative information on these schools.

Duke's findings on characteristics of teachers in the 29 nonpublic alternative schools in his sample are presented in Table 5. According to Duke, teachers in independent alternatives are "inclined to radical social, political, and educational ideas" (1978b, p. 83). However, while many teachers in independent alternative schools reflect "discontent with conventional life-styles," Duke found that alternative school teachers generally do care a great deal about

TABLE 5

TEACHERS IN 29 INDEPENDENT ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS

At least one teacher in school having:	number of schools	%(n=29)
3 years' experience or more	16	55
1 to 3 years' experience	18	62
No teaching experience	22	76
Teacher training	26	90
College degree but no training	16	55
Children in same school	6	21
Alternative lifestyle	19	66

Note. Adapted from Duke, 1978b, p. 83.

children:

> The only characteristic, in fact, that is common to almost all people seeking employment in nonpublic alternative schools is a vaguely articulated belief that learning can be relevant, exciting, informal, and child-centered. (1978b, p.85)

Even these people come to alternative schools in search of something for themselves, as well as out of a dedication to "relevant, exciting, informal, and child-centered" education. Many seek greater autonomy for themselves in their work, and more control over the school as a whole (Duke, 1978b, p. 143). The "Great Society" programs

of the sixties, such as the Peace Corps and Vista, attracted many

idealistic young adults and gave them experience and training valuable

in establishing alternative schools. After leaving these programs,

many sought other arenas in which to express their ideals and in which

they might cultivate a sense of belonging.

> In fact, the young workers from these programs could be
> considered a cadre of seasoned activists ready to become involved
> in establishing various kinds of innovative organizations.
>
> . . . When grants and federal moneys were exhausted or tours
> of duty completed, other employment had to be found. . . .
> Radicalized to their own upbringing but unable to blend into a
> different socioeconomic situation, the young workers typically
> manifested uncertainty about their future roles in society.
> Alternative schools served as "half-way houses" assisting many of
> them in their readjustment to middle-class society. From their
> alternative school experiences, they either moved on to graduate
> school and conventional employment or rejected mainstream America
> and sought new lifestyles. (Duke, 1978b, p. 145)

Still another group of teachers eschew active political

radicalism, but are interested in experimenting with alternative

lifestyles.

> For them, the alternative school constituted as much a new style
> of community interaction as an experiment in learning. A portion
> of this group are teachers in their thirties and forties
> searching for alternative lifestyles as well as schools. As with
> the ex-Great Society workers, these teachers often utilized the
> alternative school as a halfway station between their former
> lives in conventional schools and a radical career change,
> communal venture, or other shift in living pattern. (Duke,
> 1978b, p. 146-147)

As indicated earlier, alternative schools often depend upon

volunteer help. Duke (1978b) explains the willingness of young adults

to volunteer their time in alternative schools as resulting from a

wish to find "employment that was rewarding psychologically as well

as, or instead of, financially" (p. 148). Also, the increase in

number of college-educated young adults, together with "a general

decline in the attractiveness of traditional careers such as business

and industry," has crated a "pool of educated labor" (p. 148).

> Many now choose to spend their twenties in a state of voluntary
> poverty sampling various occupations, pursuing graduate degrees,
> or working out personal problems. Volunteering to work in an
> alternative school has served as an important experience for many
> of these unsettled and uncertain young adults. (Duke, 1978b, p.
> 148)

Families

> The reasons for a student coming to Magic Mountain were
> many. A large percentage were eager, curious, open young
> people in need of greater stimulation and a broader spectrum
> of activity than was being offered in the average public
> school classroom. Some needed to recover from school
> experiences which had somehow debilitated them. A small
> number came to us during a time of family stress or change,
> a time in which they needed to be in a supportive and
> responsive setting. . . .

> Included in the above number of students was a small
> number who came to us, not out of belief and commitmant to
> the philosophy of magic mountain, but to get away from the
> public school system. (Harvey, 1974, pp. 78-79)

> The families out of which our students came spanned a
> broad spectrum, not racially, but philosophically and
> economically. Families which were upper middle class,
> interested in the future development, especially academic,
> of their children, presented one end of the spectrum.
> Families living on welfare, concerned in the present
> well-being of their children, made up the other end. In
> common, these families shared concern for their children;
> how this concern was manifested differed, from a mother who
> continually pressured a child to performance, to a father
> who believed he should stand back and watch the child emerge
> into fullness.

Looking at the families as a group, the norm was divorce and frequently some form of alternative life style. The mothers, in the majority, shared a concern for women's liberation, although only one was "active" in the movement. We did not have parents who wanted to be intimately involved in the program; they seemed busy with living full lives. As a result they relegated to us the responsibility for care and concern of their offspring during the day.

Many of our families, because they were in periods of exploration of life styles, were unclear in their expectations of our program. It appeared that essentially they needed a supportive educational climate for their children while they explored possibilities for their lives. (Harvey, 1974, pp. 115-116)

The alternative school route does not seem to be a simple course to follow for anyone. Parents must pay money, even if they are not involved in the daily grind of operating the school. Those who choose to join parent cooperatives spend considerable energy, as well as money. Surely, sending a child each day to public school, where neither extra time nor money are required, would be a blessing to a busy parent. Yet, alternative schools include many single-parent families, families in which both adults hold jobs, and families with very little money.

Graubard (1972a) estimates that in 1971 11,500 to 13,000 students, most of whom were white, were enrolled in alternative schools in the U.S. (See Table 6.) Parents send their children to alternative schools for a variety of reasons. As Harvey's observations above indicate, children may come with a wide range of needs. Aside from the educational needs of their children, parents have their own sets of motives in joining alternative school communities.

TABLE 6

STUDENT CHARACTERISTICS IN ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS

Male	53%	White	77%
Female	47%	Spanish surname	4%
		Black	16%
		Other	3%

Note. Adapted from Graubard, 1972a, p. 357.

Duke's (1978b) findings on the characteristics of parents in independent alternative schools are presented in Table 7. `Like the teachers, parents in nonpublic alternative schools "tend to share a pattern of living marked by social experimentation, transience, and liberal-to-radical political beliefs" (p. 81). Duke points out that parents may seek in these settings certain personal rewards or satisfactions, beyond educational benefits for their children. Many parents (and particularly those involved in parent cooperatives) seek a "sense of community," a need they feel is not met in mainstream modern society. Duke quotes from one school's pamphlet as follows:

> As parents we feel isolated, often with few people to turn to in times of trouble or in times of joy. We hoped that in developing the school a community would arise. (From "A Realistic Alternative: Thurana School." Quoted in Duke, 1978b, p. 128.)

TABLE 7

CHARACTERISTICS OF FAMILIES AND PARENTS
IN 29 INDEPENDENT ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS

Of the families/parents in the school, at least:	number of schools	%(n=29)
50% are "intact"	14	48
50% are middle class[a]	27	93
25% are working class[a]	6	21
25% are upper-middle or upper class[a]	5	17
50% are white	26	90
25% are non-white	6	21
25% are working mothers	11	38
25% are new residents	16	55
25% are experiemnting with new lifestyles	16	55
50% are politically liberal-to-radical	17	59
25% are professionals	10	34

[a]Middle class status is based on one or both parents having college education and being employed in a skilled position. Working class is based on a lesser degree of education (high school or lower) and employment in a blue collar, semi-skilled or menial position. Upper-middle and upper class status is based on relatively higher levels of education and income than characterize middle-class parents. Often one or both parents are professionals.

Note. Adapted from Duke, 1978b, p. 79.

And, from the description of another school's development comes the following:

> It was a complex and painful and joyous process that we went through as we worked out our vision of a school, as we shared our ideas and dreams, and struggled to build a community. Did we want to live communally--shared income--or cooperatively--shared expenses? The subject of communal living kept interfering, then augmenting, then disrupting our conversation about a school. (From Larry Olds, "Notes on the Community School," in Education Explorer: A Look at New Learning Spaces. Quoted in Duke, 1978b, p. 125.)

Duke (1978b) describes some ways in which parents may benefit from alternative school settings, particularly women. For educated women who are mothers in search of a "non-domestic identity," the alternative school provides an arena for professional development, adult companionship, support for a non-traditional family lifestyle, as well as a compatible place for their own children to grow and learn, all at once. Duke suggests that the alternative school may be well able to meet the emotional and professional needs of such women, as well as the learning needs of their children.

The importance of the alternative school as a source of support and community for parents is reflected in Duke's (1978a) conclusions regarding the Albany Area Open School, a parent-run cooperative.

> The school seemed to be designed to satisfy parent needs as much as student needs. When the enterprise ceased to be a source of affiliation, satisfying volunteer work, and radical brotherhood, many parents left or lost interest. Whether or not their children were benefiting did not appear to be of critical importance to more than a few who withdrew. (Duke, 1978a, p. 190)

Novak (1975) studied the Alternative for Student Participation in Education (ASPE)[1], a parent-initiated public alternative in the suburbs of a large Eastern Canadian city. Novak notes that at ASPE parent participation in the operation of the school was not only essential to the school's survival, but that providing parents a place in which to participate was one of its prime functions.

> As one parent stated, she worked in the school in order to gratify her need for companionship and creative activity. "The school," she said, "provides a setting for my involvement with like-minded individuals." (Novak, 1975, p. 106)

Duke (1973) suggests that perhaps independent alternative schools should best be viewed as "temporary organizations" that are needed only for a short time, insofar as they often serve the needs of their original creators better than the needs of those who follow.

> The fact that alternative schools close . . . may not indicate failure so much as fulfillment. . . .
>
> Conceivably the need for community or for influence in decision making is not continuous. . . .
>
> Whatever the effect of the alternative school experience on those involved, it is certainly more meaningful and intensive for the individuals responsible for the actual creation of the school. Families joining late often feel like outsiders. The establishment of an alternative school may well be a more significant learning experience than anything that occurs subsequently. (Duke, 1973, p. 84)

Furthermore, Duke (1973) points out, children do grow up, and it is difficult for parents to conceive a lasting commitment to a community they will eventually outgrow. Thus, a permanent sense of

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[1]This is Novak's pseudonym for the school, whose actual name he changed in order to protect the privacy of school members.

community will inevitably be difficult to build. These remarks perhaps have strong relevance only in regard to parent cooperatives, though the inevitable transience of students and their families in a school community is a factor to be noted in considering the characteristics of these organizations.

Conclusion

The literature indicates two prevalent reasons for the participation of adults in independent alternative schools: reasons of values and philosophy and reasons of personal need.

Clearly, people willing to expend themselves in an endeavor such as this must believe it to be of surpassing value. As noted earlier, the founders of alternative schools, be they parents, students, teachers, or administrators, are often operating largely in reaction against the offerings, the mode of operation, and the values expressed in the public system. The sorts of basic values and concommitant beliefs about education to which various alternative school people subscribe were discussed earlier in the section on alternative school goals. Beyond implementing a philosophy that is compatible with the values and beliefs of participants, however, in what ways does an alternative school serve the personal needs of those individuals who so willingly offer themselves up in the service of its cause?

This is a question whose answer depends very much upon the orientation of the analyst. However, many authors make reference to the hopes of many adults that the school will address their personal

needs, and to the ways in which such schools may, indeed, meet the
needs of the adult participants. In other words, commitment to ideals
about education, about human development, about young people's needs
for growth and fulfillment, and about social change and social
responsibility may be strong but not sufficient reason for adults to
endure the difficulties encountered in alternative school settings.

We have seen that the participation of adults and students in
independent alternative schools is based upon complex factors in their
lives and in the culture. These are the people who have worked to
create and support alternative schools, and their personal reasons for
doing so are combined with the larger goals identified in the previous
chapter to create the climate in which these schools were begun.

Having seen this initial sketch of alternative school settings
and cast of characters, we shift now to a very different discussion.
Part Two will provide the lens through which I propose we view the
organizational structures of these schools. Through this lens we hope
to gain a new perspective on change in a system such as an alternative
school. The ultimate intent is to develop a heuristic for intentional
change in independent alternative schools.

With that in mind, we turn now to an investigation of the
theoretical bases for a systemic understanding of human organizations.

P A R T   T W O

TOWARD A SYSTEMIC CONCEPT OF STRUCTURE

SECTION A: SYSTEMIC THEORY

C H A P T E R   V

SYSTEMS

Introduction

Part Two of this dissertation presents the theoretical basis for creating a systemic approach to organizational problem solving in independent alternative schools. Solving problems essentially means making changes, and the aim here is to provide the basis for a systemic theory of change in human systems.

The ideas that are brought together in the following pages comprise a particular understanding of the nature of human systems, such as families, tribes, and schools. One assumption here is that all human groups, given a certain degree of continuity, both in their duration over time and in the consistency of their membership, can profitably be approached through a common set of theoretical constructs. This is a fairly safe assumption, surely, given the precedent set by numerous theorists who have labored toward developing a general theory of systems with universal applicability.

Tribute must be paid to that large body of general system theory that today forms a tradition and a heritage for works such as this

dissertation. The work of authors such as von Bertalanffy (1968) and Miller (1973) has provided a basis for a proliferation of system theories applied in a wide variety of disciplines. The ideas that are developed in the following pages find an ancestry in the work of von Bertelanffy and his colleagues. Theories, somewhat like genotypes, may change greatly over the generations, through cross-fertilization with new ideas, through mutation in the minds of creative thinkers, and through natural selection, as they either fail or succeed to fit with the wilderness that is the universe. The particular set of concepts drawn together in the following pages represent a relatively new branch on the system theory family tree. The progenitors of these ideas are theorists in fields such as sociology, family therapy, and communication theory. Aside from some of the concepts themselves, the theory developed here represents a departure (and hopefully a step forward) from its "general system" ancestry.

In this systemic view, human systems are hierarchically organized together into structures that endure over time, and "the functioning of one structure cannot be accounted for without reference to another coexisting, interacting structure" (Cronen & Harris, 1979, p. 7). Or, in the words of John Donne, "No man is an island entire of itself." Three concepts pivotal in systemic theory may be summarized here:

First, the treatment of wholes, parts and relationships is crucial. To a systemic consultant the unit to be defined as the "whole" that is chosen for study may vary, and this unit will not be

chosen from any predetermined level in the hierarchy of complexity, but will depend upon the purposes of the study. In the systemic model, furthermore, qualities of the whole are not necessarily present in the parts, nor even predictable from knowledge of the parts. No single sub-unit will be considered adequate to supply an understanding of the whole, and the researcher will actively avoid choosing to study the smallest possible unit. Further, the systemic thinker treats the human system as though relationships among its parts were aspects of reality, and as though components do not "really" exist without relationship linking them together. The way in which the systemic thinker gets to know about reality, then, must be designed so as to get to know about relationships. This means a heavy emphasis on the interactive behavior that is expressive of such relationships in human systems.

Second, causality in the systemic model is a "real" connection among mutually interrelated events, rather than a cautious "correlation" between temporally discrete events (Cronen & Harris, 1979). In systemic theory, furthermore, causal connections may be reflexive and cyclical, such as that expressed in Escher's "Drawing Hands," in which two hands, each holding a pencil, are seen drawing each other, and co-emerging in three dimensions from a sheet of artist's paper. (See Figure 4.)

Third, the systemic view sees reality as a construct of the human mind, such that in each human system members "co-create" what stands for "reality" within that system (Pearce & Cronen, 1980). The

FIGURE 4

"DRAWING HANDS"
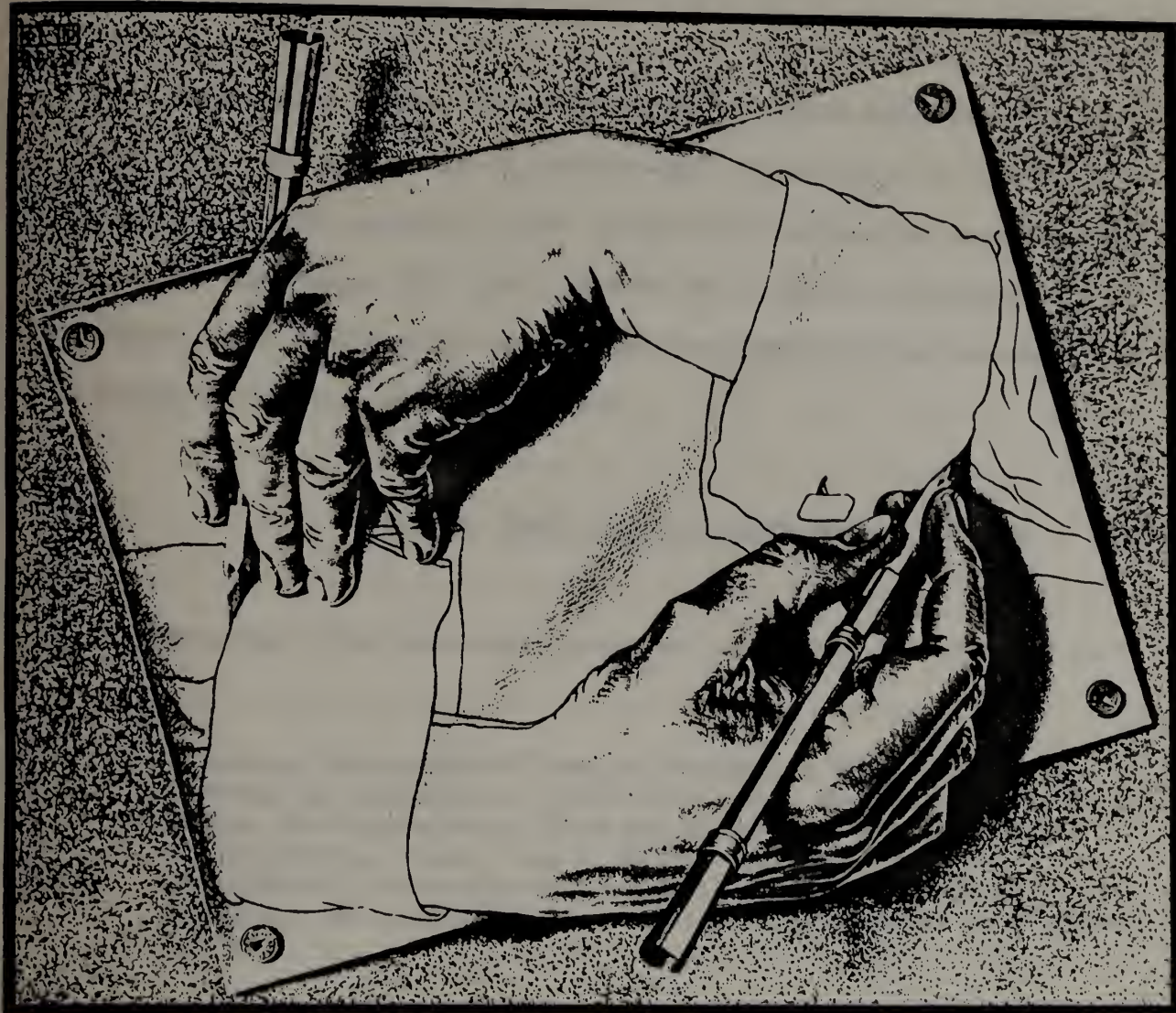
By M.C. Escher, 1948.

systemic thinker's own version of "reality" is itself seen as such a co-creation. This position has interesting implications for the very process of theory building.

These three areas--the relationship of wholes and parts, causality, and the nature of reality--are the subjects of closer scrutiny in this chapter. While each of the three is given a separate section, the reader will find, true to the precepts of systemic theory, that each section necessarily includes all three concepts, though focussed differently in each.

Wholes, Parts and Relationships

Maturana (1980) advances the notion of a whole or a "unity" as follows:

> An entity distinguished from its background by an observer
> (through an operation of distinction) who, by specifying it as a
> whole, also specifies it from the background from which it is
> distinguished, constitutes a unity. The operation of
> distinction, by specifying the conditions of distinction,
> specifies the properties of the entity distinguished as a unity.
> (p. 47)

This is not an ontological definition, but rather a tool for understanding. The observer defines figure and ground in every case.

If the observer does not distinguish components within the unity, it is a "simple unity." If components are identified, it is a "composite unity." The same unity could be treated as either simple or composite with different results. Also, the same unity could be

considered as one of several possible composite unities. Maturana's example is of a person, who could be treated (1) as a whole, without reference to any components such as cells or organs (i.e. a simple unity); (2) as a multicellular system (i.e. a composite unity); or (3) as an organism made up of various organs (i.e. a different composite unity).

A simple unity is characterized only by the properties that an observer assigns to it in distinguishing it from a background. A composite unity is characterized by the relationship among its components, which Maturana calls its "organization." The components, through organizational relationships, integrate the composite unity into the kind of whole that it is, and no other. In other words, it is certain relationships among the components that define the class to which the system is being assigned by the observer. The organizational relationships that define a multicellular system are different from those that define an organism, though the physical material may be identical in both cases.

Maturana brings to systemic theory the idea of relationship among component parts as system definer, rather than boundaries around component parts. The traditional image of Venn diagrams with overlapping and subsuming circles defining various groups of parts as "systems" is supplanted by a model that sees the relationships among the parts as definitially crucial. The same physical boundary may mark off two very different systems, even though the physical material comprising each of them is the same. Maturana's example is of a

table, whose components alone are not sufficient to define the thing as a table. It is the relationship of legs to top that make it a table system and not a firewood system.

Some of the relationships are definitionally crucial in this way, and others are not. Those that are not crucial to the system's definition as the _kind_ of system that it is (e.g. "table," "organism," or "family"), together with the component parts, may change without the system's losing its class status. Thus, the legs of the table can wobble or be longer or of oak instead of pine; the organism can have an artificial heart; family members can move out and new members can be born. In each case, the crucial definitional relationships remain, and the entity retains its identity as belonging to its class of system.

Koestler (1967) suggests that the systemic thinker must be able to conceptualize any component in a system as being, simultaneously and equally, both whole and part.

> A 'part', as we generally use the word, means something
> fragmentary and incomplete, which by itself would have no
> legitimate existence. On the other hand, a 'whole' is considered
> as something complete in itself which needs no further
> explanation. But 'wholes' and 'parts' in this absolute sense
> just do not exist anywhere, either in the domain of living
> organisms or of social organizations. What we find are
> intermediary structures on a series of levels in an ascending
> order of complexity: sub-wholes which display, according to the
> way you look at them, some of the characteristics commonly
> attributed to wholes and some of the characteristics commonly
> attributed to parts. (Koestler, 1967, p. 48)

A "component" has simultaneous identity as a whole in its own right. In order to designate these entities in a system that "behave partly as wholes or wholly as parts, according to the way you look at

them," Koestler coins a new word: <u>holon</u>, formed from the Greek word <u>holos</u> (meaning whole), plus the suffix <u>on</u> (suggesting a particle or part, as in electr<u>on</u> or prot<u>on</u>) (1967, p. 48).

In human systems, members are holons: both wholes and parts; neither one more than the other. The same may be said of subgroups within human social organizations. Each subgroup is a holon, having simultaneously the full properties both of whole and of part.

Bringing Maturana's (1980) emphasis on relationship to the idea of holons, one may say that it is the interactional relations among members that define subgroups in the system as the particular holons that they are. The sibling holon in a Western family, for example, is the holon that it is by virtue of certain relationships among members, different from other possible human relationships. The relationships may be viewed as "real" features of the system. However, there is not "really" a <u>boundary</u> around those particular members who comprise the sibling holon. References in systems literature to holon "boundaries" may be read as a metaphor for the definitional interrelations that identify a subgroup as a system component. This is particularly important since the individual members may "belong" to more than one holonic component, as when an older child also engages in parenting roles with the younger children. The emphasis on relationship instead of material "boundaries" eases the mental strain incumbent in this fact.

Summary

The introduction to this chapter discussed the systemic treatment of relationship as "real." Indeed, it is relationships that integrate components and hence define wholes. In this way, the notion of relationship in human systems supplants the notion of boundary in physical or biological systems. Attention is shifted from looking at "parts" to looking at "relationships." Again and again in exploring systemic concepts, the author will return to the centrality of relationship. In the next section a cousin of this concept is considered in a discussion of how systemic theory views the notion of causality in human interaction.

Causality

In Jean Genet's play, The Balcony, the judge tells the whore, "You have to be a delinquent. If you are not a delinquent, I cannot be a judge." Members of human systems interact with complementarity and mutuality. Human interaction does not conform to a linear action-response model. Rather, the model is of action-action, or perhaps more properly response-response. One member's behavior is not seen as causing another's, but both together are integral and essential to one another and to the total operation of the system. The shift from linear to cyclical causality in viewing member behavior is a major contribution of this theory of human systems.

Repeated patterns of interaction among holons in a group clearly

display this cyclic causality, and the actions of the members may easily be seen to be both complementary to one another and mutually necessary to one another's stance or position in the whole. A simple example commonly cited is the married couple in which one member, say the wife, is a so-called "distancer," and tends to pull away when her husband makes emotional demands on her. The husband, for his part, seeks closeness, and tends to become even more jealous and demanding as his wife retreats. If this mutual and complementary pattern spirals to the limits of tolerance, the husband, upset and angry, perhaps even threatening to leave, may give up his pursuit, and the wife desists her distancing behavior to pay attention to his distress and to keep him from actually leaving. Relieved, the husband now returns to the pursuit and the cycle begins once more.

As a school-related example, consider the free high school in which a weekly meeting of staff and students is held to decide on school matters affecting policy and program. As student participation begins to decline, staff announce their disappointment that the young people are not fulfilling their responsibility. Students feel brow-beaten by a too authoritarian staff, and tell them, "This is supposed to be a 'free' school; if we don't want to come to your boring meetings, we shouldn't have to. Nothing bad has happened without us there." Staff reply, "If you don't come, we might decide something you don't like, but you'd have to live with it." These two complementary stances play on one another, spiraling to the limits of tolerance, until staff, in frustration, wield their authority to enact

rules that they hope will change the situation (e.g. "All Students Must Attend Meeting or Risk Suspension"). Students now rally in protest, staff and students finally do meet together in full force, they retract the offensive rule, and in so doing they have actually operated for a time according to the original governance design. Staff, with their great investment in making the meetings function, now work hard at them, thinking about issues beforehand, and bringing to the meetings much expertise and thought; student interest tends to wane when the crisis is over, and seeing all's well without them (thanks to staff energies), they begin to stay away. The cycle repeats.

Punctuation of the causal cycle

In order to talk about a causal sequence, even a cyclical one, a person has to begin somewhere. People who are involved in a patterned interactive cycle are similarly constrained to see that cycle from their own singular vantage points. From the perspective of an individual member, the sequence usually appears linear, rather than cyclical.

The husband, in the previous example of distancer-pursuer, might put it thus: "My wife is away a lot, because of her job as a realtor, and when she does come home, all she wants to do is weed her flower garden or watch TV. She's willing to make time to go visit our daughter and grandson, but we never go out anymore, just the two of us. Sometimes it gets to the point where I start to wonder if it's

even worth while our staying married. When it gets bad enough, it leads to a fight, but we always seem to make up, and then things are better for a while. It doesn't last, though, because she starts going off to conferences, meeting clients at all hours, and it seems like it starts all over again."

A staff member at the free high school might say, "When we first started, all the staff and students had equal vote in the meetings, and we made all the important decisions together. But then students stopped coming. I don't see how they can have equal rights if they don't come and take part in decisions that affect them. I've ranted and raved in the meetings, and even talked to the students in my classes about how they owe it to themselves to come to the all-school meetings. Eventually, the staff decided that if this system was going to work at all, we'd have to require their attendance. Maybe it was a poor move on our part, since it's really the opposite of what we're trying to do here. But it seemed we had no choice--they really forced us to do it. And it did get them excited enough to come to a meeting and reverse that decision. Attendance was pretty good for a while after that, but now it's slacking off again. I guess eventually they'll force us to do something drastic again."

In each case, one person has punctuated the cycle in one of the many possible ways to do so. Such punctuation is arbitrary, but not incorrect. It is a linear view of a cyclical phenomenon. Another linear view of the same cycle, as seen by a member in a very different position, will look quite different, maybe even contrary.

For example, the "distancer" wife might punctuate the cycle thus:
"I work hard, talk to people all day, I'm on call at all hours--it's
the only way to make money in this business, and goodness knows we can
use the money, with a kid still in college, and grandchildren to buy
presents for, and so on. He's retired now, and not used to all that
free time, I guess. Anyhow, I need a rest when I get home, and I
still have to make dinner, since he never learned to cook. When he
gets after me to go out dancing, and all I want is a cup of tea and to
watch a movie on TV, it makes me wish I'd gone out for a drink with
the girls instead of rushing home like I did. Sometimes I don't get
home till late, and then he's mad, but like he says, when we really
have a fight we always make up, and things are better for a while.
Eventually he'll start in again, though; I can guarantee it."

A student at the free high school might punctuate that situation
in a similarly contrasting way: "The good thing about this school is
that they give you a lot of freedom here. The one thing that bothers
me, though, is the way the teachers keep harping on how it's so
important to go to the all-school meetings. Well, if you ever went to
one of those meetings you'd know why students don't go much.
Bor-ring! They go on and on, and it takes ages to make one little
decision, which they could have made the same way without me there. I
know, because when I had too much else to do and couldn't go, nothing
bad happened at all. In fact, even after almost none of the students
went any more, everything was fine. If I have an idea, or something I
want changed, I just talk to my advisor, and she brings it up in the

meeting. They did do one thing, though--they passed this rule that you <u>have</u> to go to all-school meeting. So we students got together and got rid of that rule. So you see, we really <u>can</u> 'protect our rights,' like they say, at this place. <u>Those</u> meetings were pretty interesting and everyone got involved; but I can tell you for sure it's going to get boring again, and no one will go, and the teachers will start carping at us again. I hate that, and I can tell you right now I'm not going to go just because the teachers say so. That's what freedom's about, after all."

The systemic, cyclical view can unite those contrary punctuations as being different linear perspectives of a single interactive pattern.

In the first example, the couple is seen as a complementary whole. The position of each person depends upon the position of the other. The wife cannot distance if the husband does not pursue. The husband cannot pursue if the wife does not distance herself. They help one another to maintain their accustomed positions. There is a third important element: the spiral of distancer/pursuer has a sort of governor such that the marriage will not fly apart at the seams. A fight, and then a reconciliation, will inevitably bring the couple back to their distancer-pursuer positions.

In the school, the staff are the authorities who give freedom and rights to the students, and the students are the subordinates who take their freedom and their rights. Each needs the other, in order to

maintain this balance. As staff assiduously endeavor to involve students in decision making, so as to insure student rights and freedom, students assert their freedom _not_ to "protect their rights" in all-school meetings. This complementary set of behaviors, seen as a whole, produces a perfect mesh in which staff stay both authoritative and freedom-giving, and students stay both submissive and freedom-accepting. This system, too, has a governor, such that it never spirals beyond recall, and the cycle will reach an apex, followed by the denouement and a restabilization of the members' positions in the relationship.

Whatever the nature of the cyclical sequence, who (or what) "started it" is indeterminable, a meaningless question here. No one, or everyone, started it. More important, everyone continues it.

Reflexivity

The etiology described above implies a self-reflexive process foreign to the linear logic that is traditional to analytic training in Western societies. Pearce & Cronen (1980), however, advance "the use of a logic that includes autonomous or self-reflexive operators as a normal function" (p. 90). They develop the thesis that all human communication (which includes all social behavior) is reflexive, in that communication acts build the context of their own meaning.

In order to communicate, we have to act, to do something, and our action must be correctly understood. Social conventions, for example, are a set of agreed-upon rules that provide a context such that our

specific actions can communicate meaningfully to other human beings.

For example, every Westerner knows that if I nod my head up and down I am indicating assent, agreement, or the like. This abstract rule is the context in which, when I nod my head in answer to a question, the other person gets my meaning. The context is on a higher level than are the specific acts, which gain their meaning from the abstract "social convention," or context. So far, so good. But how is it built, that context of "social convention," that edifice that Pearce & Cronen term "social reality"? Why, of course, conventions are created when people engage in doing things in regular ways. People have to nod their heads when they mean "yes" if the act is to have that meaning. And here we are once more in the midst of a reflexive loop. "Social reality" provides the context in which specific human behavior conveys meaning, while human behavior collectively "cocreates" the common social reality. Communication, say Pearce & Cronen, is

> a form of action by which persons collectively create and manage social reality. . . .
>
> Human actions are inherently recursive as they create the context that contextualizes them. . . . The episodes and relationships that comprise social reality are created by the actor and then comprise the reality in which the actor and his/her acts are contexted. (Pearce & Cronen, 1980, p. 305-306)

In short, a new reflexive logic is here accepted, whereby the context that gives meaning to actions may be created or modified by those very actions. "Once they are performed, [communication] acts become the causes of the social reality that defines and causes them" (Pearce & Cronen, 1980, p. 110).

Summary

Causal connections in human systems are seen to be (a) <u>cyclical</u>, and (b) <u>reflexive</u>. Causal forces that regulate patterns of interaction have a circular shape. People mutually influence one another's actions, and a cycle of interactive behavior has no intrinsic punctuation, either initial or terminal. Such punctuation is, however, often provided by participants, and each member's punctuation of the cycle is likely to be unique, depending upon his or her place in the entire pattern.

The term "social reality" has been used to refer to the body of convention without which human communication cannot exist. Equally, social reality itself cannot exist without acts of human communication. A systemic understanding of the process of creating social reality admits of reflexive causality, such that human actions may cocreate the context for their own meanings. The next section examines more closely the broader notion of "reality" as viewed by the systemic thinker.

Reality

"Reality" here means the model for what we take to be real. Bateson, (1977, 1979) proposes an epistemology based on his observation that all sensing organisms appear to structure their knowledge of the world in hierarchical form. That is, as organisms,

we seek hierarchical pattern and order in our understanding and explanation of the world around us. This gives us a model or map of reality, which is different from the "terrain" itself, but is what we have to work with.

Further, says Bateson, the epistemological process involves getting "news of difference." Transmission of a constant signal of any sort along nerves does not add to or change our knowledge of the world in which the signal is presumably originating. When the signal changes, we know we need to change our map of reality.

> It seems to me very clear and even expectable that end organs can receive only news of difference. Each receives difference and creates news of difference; and, of course, this proposes the possibility of differences between differences that are differently effective or differently meaningful according to the network in which they exist. . . .
>
> Mind operates with hierarchies and networks of difference to create gestalten. (Bateson, 1977, p. 243)

Thus "news of difference" is for Bateson an epistemological requirement for new knowledge, which is to say for a new view of reality. Networks or hierarchies of such knowledge are mentally constructed to map the "wholes" which we take the world to be made of.

Another concept basic to understanding notions of reality in human systems is that all interactive behavior in human systems has communicational value. Interactive behavior has meaning to other members of the system, and that meaning may be unique to that system. The process of creating and managing the communicative value of social acts, say Pearce & Cronen (1980), is a reflexive process. It involves the creation of a "context" in which a single act can have a certain

meaning. Such a context is co-created by the members of the system as they engage in meaning-laden interactions. The context that is so formed may be thought of as the "reality" in which the interactive behavior, as a communication, is "true" or "logical." This "reality" that is the context of behavior in and of human groups is referred to by Pearce & Cronen (1980) as "social reality."

"Social reality," say Pearce & Cronen, "is created and managed through social acts" (1980, p. 81). "Social reality" is collectively created through conjoint action. It is not a given. Any group with sufficient continuity will evolve its own body of convention, its particular worldview, its own version or map of reality, generally related to the social reality of the encompassing culture, but unique within it. Thus, not only is our experience of reality encumbent upon the meanings and the worldview we share with others around us; we, and those others who share that world order and those meanings, collectively we cocreate that order, that structure of the world, on the strength of which we base our actions in the world.

Systemic family theorists refer similarly to the set of "family myths" that includes the ways in which individual members are defined and characterized, and the schema whereby they explain events in the family world, and whereby they formulate solutions to problems and responses to events. The rules of the family, the way in which they agree to punctuate the interactions in the system, the roles and qualities they agree to attribute to one another, all stem from and are part of the family "worldview," the set of "myths" or "cognitive

schemas that legitimate or validate the family organization" (Minuchin & Fishman, 1981, p. 207). By the term "myth," family theorists do not imply "untruth." On the contrary, they mean "a truth." Family interactions are seen to be logical and meaningful communications in the context of the family mythos, the family reality. Family myths serve to frame the world and organize facts so that the family can deal with them in an orderly and effective manner. Myths bring shared meaning to facts and events, such that we may respond to the world in accord with one another.

Changing a human system (given this concept of a shared social reality, cocreated unceasingly by our social acts, and, too, on which we base our social acts) means dabbling in the cocreation process. Systemic change will entail changes not only in the patterns or rules that govern transactions, but simultaneously in the set of beliefs about the world, and about the system itself, that frame the members' experience of reality.

In summary, all social acts have a communicative capacity; social acts receive impetus and have meaning only in context of a particular social reality; and social acts cocreate the social reality that gives rise to them, and in which they gain meaning. Our theoretical frame has to be able to accomodate a social reality that is created by people's interactions, while that social reality itself shapes those interactions.

An axiom that underlies this epistemology is this: There is no

<u>transcendent</u>, <u>preordained</u> <u>order</u> <u>for</u> <u>human</u> <u>systems</u>. Order is created reflexively by the system itself.

> In Western culture, some propositions have been assumed as true descriptions of the natural or divine order, and scientists, ethicists, and ordinary persons could orient themselves to those propositions through faith or knowledge. The function of theory was to free persons from the illusion of affirming false propositions and living at variance with reality. But this program fails if there is no transcendent order, and the order that actually exists is created by the actions of the person. (Pearce & Cronen, 1980, p. 306)

There is no prime mover here, and no grand plan. The plan forms as the structure arises. The organization, however complex and highly organized, is self-organized. The order is governed by endogenous rules, rules that arise in the course of their application, not prior to it.

Theory building

Some of the foregoing epistemological remarks have additional implications for the very process of doing social theory. The very process of building theory in the social sciences is a reflexive one. Giddens (1977) makes the point that in the social sciences the objects of research and of theory are literally changed by the knowledge and conceptualizations that emerge from research and theory. The principle that a thing or event is changed by the very observation of the thing, which aplies to all studies of worldly phenomena, is amplified a thousandfold in the social sciences, through the reflexive operator. While events in the so-called "natural" world might be viewed as happening regardless of whether we understand them, and

regardless of whether we are able to predict them, theory and
knowledge of human social behavior has implications for how events in
the social world actually shape up. Our own knowledge of society is a
fundamental factor in how we behave and interact. In the social
sciences, more so than in the natural sciences, says Giddens, there is
a

> degree of 'permeability' of the boundary between the knowledge
> claimed by professional investigators as the product of esoteric
> expertise and that applied by lay actors in their day to day
> lives. . . . This is because 'expertise' in the world of social
> relations is not incidental to social life, but is the very
> medium of its orderliness. The necessary intersubjectivity of
> the social world makes it 'our world' in a way that has no
> parallel in the relation of human beings to nature. (1977, p.
> 27)

Giddens further connects

> the permeability of the divisions betwen expert and lay knowledge
> with the mutability of causal generalizations or laws in the
> social sciences. Laws in the social sciences are inherently
> unstable in respect of the 'environment' to which they refer,
> i.e. human social conduct and its institutional forms. . . .
> They are unstable in respect of new knowledge that comes to be
> embodied in the rationalization of action of those to whose
> conduct they refer, including knowledge of such laws themselves.
> (1977, pp. 27-28)

In short, the patterns, or "laws," of human social behavior are
influenced directly by the conceptualizations that human beings employ
to understand and rationalize their behavior.

> The predictability of human social conduct, unlike the
> predictability of events in nature, does not happen independently
> of human knowledge of the social world. Predictability in social
> life is brought about through the reflexive rationalization of
> action. (1977, p. 26) (Emphasis added.)

The moral bases for human social conduct are informed by
knowledge about social norms, for example.

> Knowledge produced by the social sciences, especially in so far
> as it is of a generalizing character, can be reflexively
> incorporated into the rationalization of action. . . .
> Descriptions of social activity are normatively as well as
> conceptually related to those employed by lay actors; there is no
> morally separate or transcendentally 'neutral' metalanguage in
> which to couch the vocabulary of the social sciences. (1977, p.
> 28)

All of this means that social science theorists change the very

social world they theorize about. Since human knowledge and

understanding is a force in human systems, new theory and new

knowledge about the system is introduced into the system, and thus

changes it. In the social sciences, a theory is often an inevitable

contributor in the human system that is the "subject" of the theory.

Freudian psychology is a good example.

"Theory" and "reality" are interdependent notions when applied to

human systems, and are not conceptually separable as in the statement

"good theory can accurately predict reality," for social theory is a

part of the reality it purports to explain.

The philosophy of American Pragmatism as developed by Peirce

(1931-1958), James (1907) and Dewey (1929) also posits that theory is

built through an interactive relationship between thought and action,

between theory and reality. Theory emerges from continually checking

ideas about how things happen against things that happen, and vice

versa. A person may with equal validity try some things out and then

reflect upon events in order to form a theory about them, as form a

theory and then try some things to see if it's right. Neither is

preferable, and both are usually going on at once. Theorists must be

practitioners and practitioners must theorize in order to build useful

theory.

The body of theory presented here, furthermore, has been developed not only through praxis, but for praxis. It is, at heart, a mode of understanding human systems so as to better help them to change. Much of the work of von Bertalanffy's successors concerning application of general system theory to specific types of systems is intended to help the analyst better understand the system of interest. Presumably, this will indicate to some extent what practices might work best, but the theory itself contributes mainly to understanding, not to practice. "The test of its usefulness will be whether or not it provides helpful and new ways of thinking about educational problems and issues, not whether it contributes to their solution," writes Greenebaum (1972, p. 116) of his application of general system theory to schools and students.

The systemic theory propounded here, on the other hand, is in agreement with American Pragmatism, which holds that good theory by definition provides a useful guide for taking action in the world. The systemic model regards theory as producing action, not just guiding action. Praxis and theory in the social sciences are reflexively looped together, such that we see ourselves building

> theory that leads to
> action that has ramifications for
> [da capo ad infinitum]

Neither theory nor praxis is prior in the rondo above, and neither has the final word. Theory-building involves one in a continual "tension between conceptualization and patterns of action" (Cronen, 1982).

A major contribution of the theory under study here (particularly that portion developed in conjunction with family therapy practice) is that it provides directives for and explanations of successful intervention in troubled human systems.

Summary

The preceding chapter has attempted to establish the premises for a theory of human systems. Among these premises is the concept of an entity as being simultaneously whole and part. The relationships among components, rather than their characteristics, are crucial in defining and identifying wholes. Causality is seen as cyclical and mutual rather than linear. The logic of this view allows of a reflexive operator, such that actions may influence their own context. Reality as we can know it is not considered absolute, but is a social construct, ever developing through human interactions. The process of building theory about social reality, which is to say all social science theory, is acknowledged to affect the nature of social reality, or the set of shared beliefs that we call "knowledge."

Next begins a theoretical discussion of the concept of "structure" as applied to human systems, where, as will be seen, the term takes on a new and different significance from that attendant on its use in the physical realm.

C H A P T E R V I

STRUCTURE

Introduction

This chapter presents various approaches to the problem of
defining structure in a human system, a task that proves harder than
one might expect. Most systems in the biological and physical
sciences may be viewed as purely things of matter and energy. There,
the physical arrangements of subsystems transferring quantifiable
matter and energy across clearly defined boundaries may adequately
describe the structure of the system. Social theorists, including
some of the family system theorists, have drawn analogies between
biological systems and human ones in discussing structure. The thesis
is advanced here, however, that such analogies are insufficient to an
understanding of human systems, for a human system is not a purely
physical presence.

This chapter first presents Minuchin's (1974) treatment of family
system structure, which emerges from the analogue to
physical/biological systems. Following that is an alternative view of
social structure provided by Giddens (1977, 1982), and a discussion of

how Giddens' thinking enhances Minuchin's. The chapter concludes with a set of propositions to guide the systemic consultant in understanding an organization's structure.

Family Structure as Rule-Governed Patterns
of Interaction and Relationship

Traditional general system theory regards the structure of a system as "the arrangement of its subsystems and components in three-dimensional space at a given moment of time. This always changes over time" (Miller, 1973, p. 38). Such a definition derives from the physical and biological sciences, in which systems generally do appear in three-dimensional space, changing over time in a fairly linear fashion.

Minuchin (1974) draws heavily on this tradition in his discussion of family structure. Based as it is in the process of "restructuring" the family, Minuchin's theraputic method depends heavily on his understanding of family "structure." Not surprisingly, his work is outstanding among that of all the family system theorists in its thorough treatment of the notion of "family structure." At the same time, Minuchin does not offer a rigorous definition of "structure," and one must perforce glean his operating definition from his many references to the term amd his use of it.

While the broad parameters of a family's structure are drawn by the forces of culture and tradition, every family evolves a unique set

of patterns that defines that family's particular rule-governed

structure, according to Minuchin.

> Family structure is the invisible set of functional demands
> that organizes the ways in which the family members interact. A
> family is a system that operates through transactional patterns.
> Repeated transactions establish patterns of how, when, and to
> whom to relate, and these patterns underpin the system. . . .
>
> Transactional patterns regulate family members' behavior.
> They are maintained by two systems of constraint. The first is
> generic, involving the universal rules governing family
> organizaiton. For instance, there must be a power hierarchy, in
> which parents and children have different levels of authority.
> There must also be a complementarity of functions, with the
> husband and wife accepting interdependency and operating as a
> team.
>
> The second system of constraint is idiosyncratic, involving
> the mutual expectations of particular family members. The origin
> of these expectations is buried in years of explicit and implicit
> negotiations among family members, often around small daily
> events. Frequently the nature of the original contracts has been
> forgotten, and they may never have been explicit. But the
> patterns remain--on automatic pilot, as it were--as a matter of
> mutual accomodation and functional effectiveness. (Minuchin,
> 1974, pp. 51-52.)

Thus it appears that Minuchin sees family structure as comprised

of (1) the _rules_ governing behavior and interaction; and (2) the

patterns of behavior and interaction that establish the rules and that

follow them, defining the _relationships_ among members (as for example

in the family hierarchy).

Minuchin sees these features of structure as combining through

the continual flow of interactions among family members. Members of

families will be seen to interact with one another in predictable,

rule-governed ways, according to established patterns, expressive of

their relationships to one another. Most important, there is no

single instigator in any of these transactions; nobody merely reacts

or is merely acted upon. All contribute--whether through action or inaction--to the total pattern. Through watching a family interact, a person may discern and map out the structure of the family.

Minuchin describes in detail the range of qualities that a familiy's structure may embody. His characterizations of various family structures are the result of years of work with a multitude of individual families. No such work using a similar theoretic frame has been practiced on human systems of other sorts, to my knowledge. While his theoretical premises are in some ways at odds with those being put forward here, many of his observations on the phenomena of human systems are illuminating, even when understood in a somewhat different theoretical frame. Thus, as a heuristic guide in understanding an organizational system such as an alternative school, a synopsis is offered here of Minuchin's work regarding family boundaries, relationships, and rules.

Boundaries

Minuchin uses the notion of boundaries as it is conceived in traditional general system theory. To perhaps oversimplify, a boundary demarcates the inside of the system or holonic subsystem from the outside. The "permeability" of the boundary, or the degree to which energy, material, and information may cross the boundary in either direction, varies widely from system to system. With an organism, for example, this notion clearly has to do with things like sensations, food, and excretions that pass into or out of the

organism. Minuchin uses the concept of boundary in reference to the family system mainly to enable discussion of the family's cohesiveness, of subsystem cohesion, and of communication within the family and between family and outside world. Minuchin's intervention theory emphasizes the importance of family boundaries that are clear, yet permeable enough to allow the family to negotiate effectively in the world. He focusses particularly on boundaries around holons within the family, and has a fairly definite notion as to just how well defined, and yet permeable, these boundaries need to be for effective family functioning.

> For proper family functioning, the boundaries of subsystems must be clear. They must be defined well enough to allow subsystem members to carry out their functions without undue interference, but they must allow contact between the members of the subsystem and others. . . .
>
> The clarity of boundaries within a family is a useful parameter for the evaluation of family functioning. Some families turn upon themselves to develop their own microcosm, with a consequent increase of communication and concern among family members. As a result, distance decreases and boundaries are blurred. The differentiation of the family diffuses. Such a system may become overloaded and lack the resources necessary to adapt and change under stressful circumstances. Other families develop overly rigid boundaries. Communication across subsystems becomes difficult, and the protective functions of the family are handicapped. These two extremes of family functioning are called enmeshment and disengagement. (Minuchin, 1974, p. 54)

A family system may be characterized as more or less _enmeshed_ or _disengaged_. Minuchin sees a continuum between the two, with most families falling somewhere in between. Families who operate at either extreme, or whose subsystems operate in the extreme, may become dysfunctional.

In an _enmeshed_ system, members are highly reactive to one

another, and strongly influenced by each other's affect. Members tend to talk for one another, even to think and feel for one another. Subsystem boundaries are poorly defined, and "the heightened sense of belonging requires a major yielding of autonomy" (Minuchin, 1974, p.55).

In a disengaged system, boundaries are overly rigid, and members are unresponsive to one another, may not physically get together very frequently, and do not actively seek or offer support.

> In other words, a system toward the extreme disengaged end of the continuum tolerates a wide range of individual variations in its members. But stresses in one family member do not cross over its inappropriately rigid boundaries. Only a high level of individual stress can reverberate strongly enough to activate the family's supportive systems. At the enmeshed end of the continuum, the opposite is true. The behavior of one member immediately affects others, and stress in an individual member reverberates strongly across the boundaries and is swiftly echoed in other subsystems.

> Both types of relating cause family problems when adaptive mechanisms are evoked. The enmeshed family responds to any variation from the accustomed with excessive speed and intensity. The disengaged family tends not to respond when a response is necessary. (Minuchin, 1974, p. 55)

It may be appropriate for some members of a system to be more enmeshed with each other, and to be more disengaged from other members. Again, it is when the pattern operates in the extreme that it may be problematic. For example, it is appropriate for a parent and a very young child to be closer and more reactive to one another than the parent and adolescent child. Too, relationships between different members of the system may well carry differing degrees of enmeshment or disengagement. Thus, a main caretaker may appropriately tend toward enmeshment with an infant, while his or her spouse might

in turn be closer to the older children.

Relationships

Relationships in the family are seen as <u>complementary</u>. In them, people fit with one another in their various respective roles.

> Each individual belongs to different sybsystems, in which he has different levels of power and where he learns differentiated skills. A man can be a son, nephew, older brother, husband, father, and so on. In different subsystems, he enters into different complementary relationships. People accomodate kaleidoscopically to attain the mutuality that makes human intercourse possible. The child has to act like a son as his father acts like a father; and when the child does so, he may have to cede the kind of power that he enjoys when interacting with his younger brother. (Minuchin, 1974, p. 52)

Several concepts are used in structural family therapy theory to analyze relationships among individual members of the system. Two or more people joining around a common interest or task are in an <u>alliance</u>. Alliances are not necessarily a problem, and are often quite appropriate. However, a <u>secret</u> <u>alliance</u>, in which the alliance is not openly acknowledged, can be more problematic. An alliance formed <u>against</u> another member is a <u>coalition</u>. Two allied people may be <u>overinvolved</u> with one another such that they are intensely reactive to one another. Generally such a relationship involves intense feelings of both affection and exasperation, and is often marked by recurring conflict.

A relationship in which two people reciprocate one another's behavior in like fashion is a <u>symmetrical</u> one, and may be subject to episodes of escalating conflict, or <u>symmetrical</u> <u>escalation</u>. For example, a critical remark is countered with a criticism from the

second person, and the spiral of exchanges that ensues is as familiar as it is painful, yet seemingly inescapable, for both. In a rigidly complementary relationship, on the other hand, the members predictably exchange different but matching responsive behavior. Here, one member might always critisize, while the other always accepts criticism. It should be emphasized that it is the rigidity of the pattern that can render it dysfunctional. Both complementarity and symmetry are present in many a (non-rigid) relationship, often entailing benefit to all parties.

Triangulation is another pervasive pattern in all kinds of groups. Bowen (1966, 1971) built an entire family therapy approach on the concept of triadic relationships as an illuminating construct for understanding human systems. In its classic form, triangulation is the use of a third person to diffuse or redirect conflict between two others. The third party in such a tringulation is in the difficult position of maintaining a covert alliance with each of the other two. Minuchin offers the following example of triangulation involving a couple and their child:

> Each parent demands that the child side with him against the
> other parent. Whenever the child sides with one, he is
> automatically defined as attacking the other. In this highly
> dysfunctional structure, the child is paralyzed. Every movement
> he makes is defined by one parent or the other as an attack.
> (Minuchin, 1974, p. 102)

The avoidance of conflict between two people, by detouring it through a third, is another form of triangulation with its own characteristic difficulties.

In detouring, another form of the rigid triad, the negotiation of spouse stresses through the child serves to maintain the spouse subsystem in an illusory harmony. The spouses reinforce any deviant behavior in the child because dealing with him allows them to detour or submerge their own spouse subsystem problems in problems of parenting. The parents' detouring may take the form of attacking the child, defining him as the source of family problems because he is bad. In other families, the parents may define the child as sick and weak, then unite to protect him. (Minuchin, 1974, p. 102)

Hierarchy. In the structure of the family, for Minuchin, the power relationships among members figure as highly important. There is always some sort of power hierarchy in families, and Minuchin holds that certain hierarchical arrangements are more effective than others. Minuchin is a strong advocate of an arrangement where the parental holon is clearly at the head of the family hierarchy. He would see as less functional the system in which it is unclear who is in charge of certain family functions, or where an inappropriate member makes certain of the rules and decisions. For example, a very young child may effectively be in charge of the entire family, all of whose lives and energies are organized around her "unmanagable" behavior. It is important to remember, however, that such a state of affairs is never seen to be the doing of any one family member, but is effected by the combined forces of the entire system. "The hierarchy is maintained by all participants" (Haley, 1976, p. 102).

Rules

Families evolve rules that govern those redundant patterns unique to any one family. Family rules constrain and limit members' behavior so as to provide predictability, organization, and stability to the

system.   These rules are apparent from the behaviour of family members, but usually they are implicit and are not discussed or explicitly evoked in the family. Frequently, family rules provide the comfort of predictability, and freedom from constant negotiation among members, still leaving room for individual choice among various behaviors that fall within the rules. Some theorists also point out the existence of meta-rules, or rules governing the rules, so that the family agrees on how the rules may be broken or changed.

Further, transactions in the family obey the same rules through a variety of contexts and content. Rules governing a large general class of family interactions can be discovered in a single segment of family experience explored in depth. For example, if there is a rule about balancing and neutralizing one another's expressions of discontent or distress, any content area will do to uncover the pattern. In discussing a new dent in the family car, the father's statements of upset would be minimized by the mother's saying, "Oh, it's okay. Insurance will cover it." The very same pattern would characterize the interaction where mother's anxiety over teenage son's late hours was countered by father's saying, "Don't worry; he's all right." Each instance has different content, but they portray equivalent, or _iso_, structures, or _morphs_. Interactions in one area of family functioning are frequently _isomorphic_ to other areas and to an overall rule-governed structure.

Summary

The types of relationships that Minuchin identifies in families may also be found in other human groups such as organizations. There, too, one may see examples of alliances, both secret and open, of coalitions among some members against other members, of symmetrical and complementary relationships, and of triangulation.

Rules, too, are seen in organizations to govern these patterns of interaction. All the members of the organization may be seen to collaborate in maintaining the existing relationships by following the rules governing their interactive behavior.

Minuchin's view of rules and relationships will pose no problems to the systemic view of structure to be presented in the following pages. Indeed, Minuchin's discussions will be useful to organizational consultants in identifying and categorizing important phenomena observable in an organizational system. Minuchin's notion of boundary is, however, more problematic. An earlier chapter discussed Maturana's (1980) use of relationships as definitional in identifying a holon as the entity that it is, rather than a physical metaphor such as "boundary around" the entity. The next section reviews an approach to the problem of defining structure in human systems that obviates the need for a notion of "boundary" and that reflexively interconnects elements of system structure such as rules and relationship.

"Structuration": A Reflexive View of Structure

"Structure" as rules and resources

Giddens (1977) contends that analogies drawn between physical structures and human social structures do not well serve the purposes of social science theory. Traditionally, such analogies have led social scientists to look for permanence in structure, defining it as the consistent patterns of interaction, or the regularities in relationships, among the members of the system. This notion of static, pre-set pattern they have opposed to and separated from that of "function" or "process," meaning the dynamics of system operation and maintenance. Giddens (1977) proposes that "structure" in a social system be defined as the rules that guide social interaction and give it meaning, and the resources that are used, rendering such interaction effective. These rules and resources are also themselves continually produced and reproduced by those interactions.

> 'Structure' is conceptualized as generative rules and resources drawn upon by actors in the production and reproduction of systems of interaction. The key idea linking production and reproduction is that of the duality of structure, by which I mean that structure is both the medium of generating interaction and at the same time the reproduced outcome of it. (Giddens, 1977, p. 14)

Note the reflexive operator brought into play in Giddens' concept of structure. In his particular use of the term "structure," Giddens refers not to patterns of social relationship, but only to the rules and resources that are used to continually create and recreate such patterns. Of course, the interactions produce and reproduce the

structure, thus neither pattern (or relationship) nor process (or interactive behavior) have etiological priority in this view of the "duality of structure."

> Once we finally drop, once and for all, misleading analogies with the visually easily represented 'anatomical structure' of organisms, we are able to realize the full import of the fact that social systems only exist in so far as they are continually created and recreated in every encounter, as the active accomplishment of subjects. . . . Let us at this juncture reconceptualize 'structure' as referring to generative rules and resources that are both applied in and constituted out of action. (Giddens, 1977, pp. 117-118)

What is meant here by "rules and resources"? Rules may be either "semantic" or "moral." Semantic rules include "the totality of largely implicit, taken-for-granted rules that structure everyday discourse and mutual understandings of action as 'meaningful'" (1977, p. 118). Moral rules are evaluative, including "any sort of rule (or formalized legal statute) generating evaluation of acts as 'right' or 'wrong'" (1977, p. 118). Resources refer to everything that members may use in achieving their ends in their interactions with one another, anything that lends power to a member in successfully operating within the system. Giddens' use of the term "ends" remains vague, and this author suggests that "getting one's business done," or "going about one's business" in the system approximates the sense of the term "ends." Giddens employs the term "power" in a similarly broadened manner to explain the idea of "resources."

> By 'resources' I mean whatever possessions (material or otherwise) actors are able to bring to bear to facilitate the achievement of their purposes in the course of social interaction: that therefore serve as a medium for the use of power. (1977, p. 118)

"Power" as Giddens uses the term refers not solely to coercive ability, but to the broader capacity of an actor to accomplish his or her ends in the system. He distinguishes his concept of power from the "subjectivist" view that defines power "as the capacity of an acting subject to intervene in the course of events in the world so as to influence or alter those events," if need be "against the will of others" (1982, p. 38). Giddens' use of the term "power" is also not intended in the sense of "collective power." As I read Giddens, both these aspects of power are potentially available as actors employ their resources in social interaction. Available also is the power to enable or empower others, which may reflexively enable the original actor whose "ends" depend upon the other's power to respond. Giddens refers to "the dialectic of control," by which he means

> the capability of the weak, in the regularised relations of autonomy and dependence that constitute social systems, to turn their weakness back against the powerful. . . . An agent who does not participate in the dialectic of control, in a minimal fashion, ceases to be an agent. All relations of autonomy are reciprocal: however wide the asymetrical distribution of resources involved, all power relations express autonomy and dependence 'in both directions'. Only a person who is kept totally confined and controlled does not participate in the dialectic of control. But such a person is then no longer an agent. (1982, p. 39)

A slavemaster cannot act as such without someone acting the slave, to take the extreme example. Lest this sound like blaming the victim, let me hasten to acknowledge how very limited are the "resources" available to the slave. His choices of action include (1) high risk of much more painful oppression or even death if he rebels or attemps to escape, and (2) compliance in role of slave, through

which he may be able to win a certain degree of relative comfort. Until the master becomes so oppressive that oppression cannot be worsened without inflicting death (thus ending the master's role as well as the slave's), or until life becomes no more valuable to the slave than the condition of slavery itself, the slave's choices, such as they are, remain thus circumscribed. Even so, the slave "partcipates in the dialectic of control." One possible punctuation of the situation is to say that to be a master, the master depends on the slave's being a slave.

Rules and resources may be seen as closely interlinked. Giddens, in fact, repeatedly speaks of "rules and resources" almost in the same breath (rules-and-resources), an indication of the intimacy of their companionship with one another. On the one hand, it is through using their resources to effect interactions that members participate in rule development. Without resources with which to act effectively, there would be no rule-generating behavior and no reason to engage in such behavior, since other members would not have the wherewithall to respond. In short, there would be no system. On the other hand, members normally use their knowledge of the rules--and thus of the constraints placed upon others by a given act of one's own--to achieve their ends. Knowing what to expect of the other, we can better plan our own acts. Success in the game of chess is predicated on forseeing the opponent's responses to any move of one's own. This is of course only possible if there are rules and the opponent can be counted on to follow them.

Thus members use resources to create and recreate and reform the rules of the system, while they draw on rules as resources in their interactions. I am indebted to Vernon Cronen for an example of rules used as resources. He described the vacuum cleaner company whose sales policy counsels salespersons to speak always with a wife and husband together. The salesperson explains to the husband, in his wife's presence, how much time his wife will save by owning the vacuum cleaner, and how much better her life will be. Then he names the price, and says, "Now isn't that a small price to pay to save your wife so much time and effort?" The salesperson knows full well that it would be against the rules in most American family systems for a husband to indicate to his wife in front of an outsider that her time is not valuable (even if it may be all right to do so privately). The salesperson uses this rule as a resource in gaining his or her purpose.

Such coersive examples tend to stand out, but members' power in interaction with other members is used all the time toward ends that are perfectly benevolent for all, usually without conscious thought. For example, take the following interchange, which I witnessed recently between two teachers who had long been colleagues and friends.

It was after five p.m., but Rose was still working in her classroom. Mandy had gone home at 3:30, but was to meet some of the other teachers at 4:30 for a drink at Friday's, a nearby pub. The other teachers were delayed, and Mandy had waited a while at Friday's,

then left and came back to school. Meanwhile, the other teachers had left school at 5:00 and, no doubt crossing paths with Mandy on the way, were probably by now enjoying their drinks at Friday's. As I came out of the school Rose and Mandy stood talking about the situation.

"I'm on my way to Friday's now," I told Mandy. "Why not just come on back with me? They'll be there by now."

"No, I'm too upset. I waited so long I even met this nice man and we had a long talk," said Mandy. "I'm just so mad I'd do nothing but complain if I went back and it would be no fun for anyone. I'm just going to go home."

"You met a nice man--what's wrong with that?" asked Rose. "That wouldn't have happened if they'd been there. Go on back with Judy. They'll be there now."

But Mandy was adamant and stalked off toward her car. "I'm just too upset," she insisted. "I'm going to go home."

I was inclined to take Mandy at her word and let her go, but not so Rose, her old friend and coworker. Rose went after Mandy, took her determinedly by the waist and steered her back toward the building.

"I'm not letting you go home like that," she proclaimed. "You're coming back inside with me. I can't let you go off like that."

To my surprise, a now compliant Mandy allowed herself to be taken in hand, and the two of them disappeared inside the building. Later, Rose told me that she'd known Mandy was troubled by difficulties at home, and that Mandy had indeed talked with Rose about her problems

for a long time that evening before they both finally left school.

Both Mandy and Rose were empowered in the interaction by (1) the fact that the system they were part of had some clear rules for responding to others; (2) their own knowledge and intimate understanding of those rules; and (3) their knowledge that the other understood the rules and would respond accordingly. Their intimate knowledge of the rules allowed them to read the subtle and intricate meanings in one another's actions, thus to respond more appropriately, which means more effectively or more "powerfully." The term "knowledge" is used here in its broadest sense, as in "knowing" a language. No way can I explain all the phonetic, graphic, grammatic, and semantic rules and practices of the English language. But as a native speaker I "know" them very well. In the same way, an actor "knows" the social situation in which she acts, though she cannot spell out all the rules and thus all the "reasons" for her actions.

According the the rules in play, Mandy couldn't say she had problems at home that were upsetting her; Rose knew Mandy couldn't say she was upset about problems at home. But Rose did know about Mandy's problems, and more important, Mandy knew Rose knew about them. Mandy also knew that Rose knew Mandy couldn't say that the home problems were upsetting her. In this context, Rose could interpret Mandy's behavior and respond appropriately, as I could not.

Now, knowing that Mandy had a problem at home, Rose was unable to let her "go off like that;" and Mandy knew that Rose (knowing Mandy to be upset) could not let her go home like that. Living inside systems

makes good strategists of us all. Mandy's words and behavior were entirely congruent with all the rules of this system, and her resourcefulness resulted in Mandy's getting a chance to talk to her friend about her problems. Rose, for her part, was obviously empowered as I was not, for she succeeded in marching a willing Mandy right back into the building. Rose's knowledge of the rules and of Mandy's situation helped give her the power to get Mandy to stay. But if Mandy had not acted her part correctly, Rose could not have performed hers. Mandy's skill in playing by the rules actually empowered Rose to make the response Mandy wanted, at the same time that it obliged her to do so.

All of which is intended to illustrate that rules and resources are indeed intimately interconnected in human systems. Further, both obligation (connected to rules) and power (connected to resources) are seen to evolve from this seemingly minor interaction between two friends. The interaction itself insures the continuance of the rules and resources because it reproduces them; at the same time the interaction was made possible because of the prior existence of those rules and resources. Giddens speaks of this reflexive relationship of rules and resources with patterns of interaction as the "duality of structure."

> Rules and resources must be regarded as both the media whereby social life is produced and reproduced as ongoing activity, yet at the same [time] as [being] produced and reproduced by such activity: this is the crucial sense of the 'duality of structure.' Structure is the generative source of social interaction but is reconstituted only in such interaction: in the same way as a spoken sentence is both generated by syntactical rules and yet by virtue of this serves to participate in the reproduction of those rules. (1977, p. 118)

Giddens makes a clear distinction between what he calls the structure of the system and the patterns that characterize the interactions of its members. The "structure" (meaning rules-and-resources) is defined and built up through the repeated, patterned interactions of the members. The patterns that the interactions follow are in turn governed by the rules and shaped by the resources. But Giddens excludes the patterns of interaction themselves from his definition of "structure," preferring to define the term more narrowly to include only the rules-and-resources side of that transaction. Using this terminology, we can say that the interactions of human members in social systems both generate and are generated by the structure of the system. Structure, in turn, may only continue to exist insofar as it is continually reproduced by those interactions.

Treating structure as "generative rules and resources" then in no way implies that these are fixed. "Rules and resources are the media of the accomplishment of social interaction, and as such are constantly embroiled in the flux of social life" (Giddens, 1977, p. 132). Nor can structure be seen as a property of individuals, but only of communities and collectives. Further, structure, seen as the generative rules and resources in a human collective, can only be conceptualized in conjunction with the coordinated social interactions of the collective.

> Rules and resources are not distributed in a random form in society, but are coordinated with one another, in and through the coordination of the systems of interaction in whose production and reproduction they are implicated. (1977, p. 132)

"System" as patterns of interaction

Giddens uses the term "system" in a narrowly defined way to mean the patterns of interaction or relationship, the "reproduced relations between actors or collectivities, organized as regular practices" (1982, p. 35). Note that in Giddens' very particular use the "system" does not include members, or indeed any material whatever. The system is only the patterns of relationship that members produce and reproduce through their interactions. The family hierarchy, for example, is included in the "system" but not in the "structure" in this terminology. The hierarchy is produced and maintained and changed through the rules and resources (the structure) but is comprised of patterns of interaction or relationship.

"Structuration"

In this way, Giddens has created terminology with which to discuss the relationship of rules-and-resources (or "structure") to patterns of interaction (or "system"). This relationship is (the reader might have guessed) reflexive, and Giddens calls it "structuration." In this reflexive relationship actors create and recreate patterns of interaction (or the "system") through recourse to the rules and resources (or the "structure"); and they define and redefine the rules, produce and reproduce the resources, through their patterned interactions. "Structuration" refers to this reflexive process linking "system" and "structure."

I have included this examination of Giddens' ideas not to embrace his terminology (since to do so would needlessly confuse us as we synthesize Giddens' work with the family system literature), but to draw on his conceptual framework. I will use "rules and resources" and "patterns of interaction" (or "relationship") in place of Giddens' "structure" and "system," respectively. The term "structure" in this dissertation takes on the meaning that Giddens gives to "structuration," with all the active connotations of that verbal noun form. The word "system" I use (as does the main body of relevant literature) to include both the structure (in my sense of the term) and the members and their activities which are organized according to the structure. Giddens' term "structuration" has the advantage of reminding its user of the constantly changing, reflexive nature of both rules-and-resources and patterns of interaction. However, for our purposes, especially since the main body of pertinent literature does not adhere to these rarified meanings for "structure" and "system" and certainly does not incorporate the term "structuration," the reader must try to remember to refrain from attributing to the term "structure" the sense of adamantine, inflexible physical presence that the word unfortuantely connotes in our language.

Discussion

I believe Giddens' work fruitfully informs Minuchin's (1974) understanding of family structure, and I suggest a concept of

structure that parallels Giddens' "structuration." Minuchin's description of the rules, the power relations, and the patterns of interaction in families provides a useful heuristic for identifying and isolating structural components in other kinds of human systems. Giddens' work provides a theory for how these various elements (rules, resources, interactive patterns, and relationships) involve one another.

Rules and resources

Family rules are much discussed in the work of all family theorists, and those discussions appear consonant with Giddens' ideas about rules. Family rules are built up through the mutual interactions of all members. They belong to the family, and not to any one member. Rules are repeatedly enacted, not in exactly identical situations, but isomorphically throughout the family system. Thus is their force continually recreated, and only thus do the rules actually exist. While Giddens discriminates between "semantic" and "moral" rules, I believe the family systems work indicates that both "moral" and "semantic" features are commonly present in any rule-governed interaction. The difference may be purely one of punctuation. For example, say you tell me something important and I nod my head understandingly. I followed a rule ("moral") that constrains me to let you know I'm listening when you tell me something important. You followed a rule ("semantic") that says if I nod my head it verifies that I'm listening. Together, we enacted a rule that

says I should let you know I'm listening when you tell me something important, by doing something you know _means_ I'm listening. The moral constraint is useless without the semantic component, since you have to _know_ that I've followed the rule in order for me to have followed it. The rule only works if _you_ are constrained to interpret _and_ _respond_ _to_ my head nod as though I were listening to you. Differently punctuated, we could say that I followed a rule ("semantic") that says when I nod my head it means I'm listening; you followed a rule ("moral") that says when I nod my head you should behave as though I were listening. You can't turn around and walk off in a huff, for example.

Moral rules that are created and recreated through action are also semantic, since those actions are, perforce, interpreted and reacted to. Semantic rules only convey their intended meaning when they are acted upon and interpreted and responded to according to convention, and thus they are also moral.

"Resources" are less clearly discussed in family system theory, though "power" is definitely a component in Minuchin's discussion of hierarchy. Other family system theorists agree that power and hierarchy are highly significant ingredients in family structure, though they do not agree on the "best" hierarchical form, or on whether there is any "best" form.

The resources, or capabilities and knowledge through which members achieve their ends, are not discussed in family system theory _as_ _such_, and here is another contrubution that I think Giddens can

make to that theory. Family therapists do sometimes make reference to a member's capacities, say "sensitivity" or "generosity," in commenting on an interaction. ("You are sensitive and generous, and you have the idea that Mother would be lonely without you at home, so you sacrifice your education and your own growth to keep her company at home," might be the message to the school-phobic child.) They are also cognizant of the extremely sophistocated knowledge of the system and of its rules that enable members to operate powerfully within the system. (This "knowledge," again, is similar to my knowledge of my native language: I cannot tell you what the rules are, but I "know" them and use them very well.) We may profit from viewing the genre "resources" as including such things as knowledge of the system's rules and a capacity for understanding one another's meaning (and perhaps even such "punctuated" attributes as "generosity" and "sensitivity"). Seeing these "resources" as the media whereby members achieve outcomes, thus the tools of their "power" in the system, is similarly useful. "Power" thus attaches not just to status in the hierarchy (though a member's status is one of his or her resources), but to all other resources, including one's knowledge of the system's rules and one's consequent ability to act in full knowledge of how others are constrained to follow the rules. Reflexively, one's knowledge similarly constrains oneself. In this way, as Minuchin points out, very small children may be seen as sharing (or, differently punctuated, wielding) power in the family. They are (quite properly) able to achieve their ends, to get what they "need"

(or "want"); though they are reflexively constrained as they do so to follow the very rules the knowledge of which provides them with that capacity to get what they want.

In this way, I think, Giddens' ideas applied to Minuchin's observations of family structure provide for a more fully reflexive interpretation of the power of individual members, thus a less prescriptive one.

Patterns of interaction

Patterns of interaction and relationship, as we have seen, are the agency through which rules are built, both in Minuchin's discussion of family structure and in Giddens' explanation of "structuration." While Giddens does not employ a notion of "hierarchy" (and I suspect would eschew the term as dangerously static in connotation), he speaks of "reproduced relations between actors or collectivities, organized as regular social practices," a construct that I see no difficulty in equating with "patterns of interaction" in Minuchin's sense. I would especially caution against a linear notion of hierarchy such as Minuchin employs, with a proper "top" that has "more power" over a proper "bottom," when he writes as follows:

> Children and parents, and sometimes therapists, frequently describe the ideal family as a democracy. But they mistakenly assume that a democratic society is leaderless, or that a family is a society of peers. Effective functioning requires that parents and children accept the fact that the differentiated use of authority is a necessary ingredient for the parental subsystem. This becomes a social training lab for the children, who need to know how to negotiate in situations of unequal power. (Minuchin, 1974, p. 58.) (Emphasis added.)

I would further suggest that hierarchical relationships are a subset of complementary relationships. They may be treated similarly to other kinds of relationship characterized by patterns of interaction in which the behavior of the holons complement rather than mirror one another.

I am not the first to note a degree of rigidity and linearity in Minuchin's model. Many other family theorists will, I expect, agree with me in accepting Giddens' notion of power as the capacity for a member to achieve his or her ends. Because knowing the rules is a principal component of such power, we need not dwell on the equality or inequality of its distribution, in the present context of understanding how a system creates and recreates its structure. The production and reproduction of the structure depends upon the capacity of _all_ members to act and respond effectively with one another. They need to continually empower one another through their interactions, for effective action in a system depends on the other's capacity to respond appropriately, which is to say to follow (or use) the rules.

Summary

This chapter has explored the development of a systemic view of structure in human systems. Early theorists adopted for use with human social systems concepts and terminology of physical and biological systems. More recently, theorists such as Giddens (1977, 1982) have suggested ways to understand both the dynamism and the

self-production of structure in human systems. Their ideas have not

negated general system theory, but have helped the continued evolution

of a branch of system theory in becoming a means to understanding the

world of human groups. The following distillation of the concepts

relevant to understanding the structure of human systems is offered as

a guide to the systemic consultant.

1: <u>Definition</u> <u>of</u> <u>Structure</u>

1.1 "Structure" as a term applied to human systems refers to (1) the

    rules and resources of the system, together with and reflexively

    interdependent with (2) the patterns of interaction of the

    members.

1.2 Every human group that persists as an identifiable group over

    time evolves such a structure.

2: <u>Rules</u> <u>of</u> <u>the</u> <u>System</u>

2.1 Rules of the system guide, proscribe, and prescribe members'

    interactive behavior.

2.2 Rules of the system give message value to interactive behavior

    and guide members' interpretations of others' interactive

    behavior.

2.3 Rules provide system members with the means to predict others'

    responses to their own interactive behavior.

2.4 Meta-rules guide the ways in which rules may be created and

    changed in the system.

2.5 Rules in human systems are largely implicit and usually not
discussed among members, or even in their conscious awareness.

3: <u>Resources</u> <u>of</u> <u>the</u> <u>System</u>

3.1 Resources are the social tools whereby members go about their
business in the system.

3.2 "Power" is the capacity of members to achieve their ends or do
their business in the course of social interaction.

    3.21 Resources lend power to members in their social
       interactions.

4: <u>Rules</u> <u>and</u> <u>Resources</u>

4.1 Rules and resources of human systems are reflexively
interdependent.

    4.11 Members must employ resources in order to take part in the
       social interactions through which the rules are enacted and
       reenactted.

    4.12 Members' knowledge of the interpretive and regulative rules
       of the system are a major resource for their participation
       in social interactions.

5: <u>Patterns</u> <u>of</u> <u>Interaction</u>

5.1 Patterns of interaction are the rule-governed regular practices
observable among members of the system as they interact.

    5.11 "Relationship" in a human system may be defined through

reference to the observable patterns of interaction that involve the related holons.

5.2 Some kinds of interactive patterns appear to recur in a great many human systems and hence can be classified by type.

5.21 Alliances between two holons consist in their joining together, often around a common interest or task.

5.211 A covert alliance is kept secret from other system holons.

5.212 A coalition is an alliance that actively excludes and counters one or more other holons in the system.

5.22 A symmetrical relationship involves two holons who tend to mirror each other's interactive behavior, while in a complementary relationship two holons tend to interact with different but matching behavior.

5.221 A relationship may include both types of interactions, or it may be characterized by only one type to the the rigid exclusion of the other.

5.222 Hierarchical or power relationships are a form of complementary relationship, created and maintained, as are all relationships in human systems, by the interaction of all holons involved in the hierarchy.

5.23 A triangualted relationship involves a third holon in a pivotal position between two others.

5.231 The triangualted holon is often involved in covert alliances with both of the other holons.

5.232 Detouring refers to the defusing of a pattern of
conflict between two holons by the triangulation of a
third.

6: <u>Reflexive</u> <u>Relationship</u> <u>of</u> <u>Rules</u> <u>and</u> <u>Resources</u> <u>with</u> <u>Patterns</u> <u>of</u>
<u>Interaction</u>

6.1 Members' patterned interactions follow rules and stand as
communications to others that are interpreted according to rules;
and

6.2 Members employ social resources in the system to go about their
patterned interactive business there; and

6.3 Moral and semantic rules are created and continually recreated
through the patterned interactions of members; and

6.4 Social resources are created and recreated through the patterned
interactions of members.

The chapter that follows returns to a discussion of independent
alternative schools. There the reader will find the above principles
illustrated in a systemic description of three schools. The
discussion in that chapter will also provide groundwork for a later
discussion of systemic consultation and problem solving in such
settings.

P A R T   T W O

TOWARD A SYSTEMIC CONCEPT OF STRUCTURE

SECTION B: ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS

C H A P T E R   V I I

ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

Introduction

This chapter examines the anecdotal and analytic writings of
those who have studied the organizational structures of independent
alternative schools. The systemic concepts of structure developed in
the foregoing chapter will be brought to bear on this literature in
order to develop a systemic picture of alternative school structure.

The information about the particulars of the structures found in
the schools will be drawn from a variety of sources, most of them
written from eclectic theoretical frames. Most of the authors who
have written about organizational structures of alternative schools
have done so as a part of exploring and analyzing the organizational
problems of the schools. A rigorous definition of structure has not
been necessary to their purposes. Therefore, the authors' theoretical
understanding of "structure" as an aspect of a human group is not made
explicit, though certainly a conceptual frame of some sort shapes the
information they present and the conclusions they draw about the
schools. Each, however, has a different theoretical frame and few

have fully developed an explicit account of that frame.

Acknowledgement is made that a field study of such a school by a systemic consultant might make note of data not included by these authors with their perspectives which necessarily (as does the systemic too) sift the data and attribute greater or lesser emphasis and detail in the telling, according to that theoretical perspective. The presentation that follows therefore takes a small liberty in framing other people's data with a different theory, a practice not without its inherent risks. Since theory pre-sifts data, there may not be access to the information a systemic consultant would gather and require. In other cases, where theory has already shaped data, one may be unwittingly reshaping (or mis-shaping) an already formed product, rather than the original lump of clay. It will fall to others to apply these ideas to "raw data" (that is, data that this theory has pre-sifted). Here we can at least hope to build a helpful approximation of what a systemic consultant might see in understanding these schools. At the same time, the reader will be offered a demonstration of systemic concepts of structure in application. Think of this as a "thought experiment," then. It falls one important step short of true application in the field, but may be a useful precursor to the actual field work that must proceed if conclusions drawn here are to assume a measure of import.

The chapter begins with introductory remarks on the systemic concept of structure in human systems, followed by brief discussions

of the place of educational program and of organizational goals,

respectively, in the systemic framework of structure. It then takes a

broad look at a typology for the kinds of organizational designs that

alternative schools have tried, selecting three main types for closer

study: those with high student participation in governance, those with

high parent participation in governance, and staff-run schools. For

each of the three types, one school is chosen for an in-depth view of

systemic structure. The three schools selected are fairly

representative, and they are schools about which a fair amount of data

have been reported. Fairly detailed information about interactions

among all the populations involved in the school, as well as a certain

amount of longitudinal data, are important in applying systemic

concepts of structure. The availablity of such information and the

richness of detail offered were major factors in selecting schools to

investigate closely in this chapter. The chapter concludes with a

contrast between the systemic view and the views of two other authors

who have written about one of the schools.

Structure as non-quanitfiable

The popular literature on alternative schools sometimes refers to

those with "more structure," "less structure," or "no structure,"

implying that structure is a quantifiable attribute that may be

possessed to a greater or lesser degree, much like "cleanliness" or

"effectiveness." In this thesis, "structure" is viewed as connoting

the organization of the rules, the distribution of power and

resources, and the patterns of interaction that define human relationships and roles, all of which govern and are produced by behavior within the group. With this perspective, one sees structure as inevitable, a definitional aspect of the concept of "human group." While a group or organization may have a <u>simple</u> structure of relationships, of rules for decision making and the like, it cannot conceivably be <u>un</u>structured. <u>Degree of complexity</u>, <u>flexibility</u>, or <u>formality</u> of structure are more useful terms for comparing different structures; "amount" of structure is meaningless here. In most cases, those settings that consider themselves relatively "unstructured" are probably laying claim to a <u>flexible</u> structure rather than a <u>rigid</u> one, maybe largely tacit or <u>informal</u>, and not formally spelled out in an organizational flow-chart.

Hence, while structure may take myriad forms in human systems, there is no system if there is no structure. "Structure" (as the term is used here) is a <u>definitional</u> aspect of "system."

<u>Organizational structure and educational program</u>

Many contemporary authors writing about alternative schools stress the importance of the schools' non-traditional organizational forms. Some see the organizational form as itself an important factor--maybe even the most important one--in the school's educational impact on students.

Bremer and Moschzisker (1971), in writing about Philadelphia's Parkway Program, a public "school without walls," claim that such is

always the case, not only in alternative schools, but in any
educational organization. The organization itself _is_ the deeper
curriculum of the school, through which students learn important
lessons.

> If you ask a school or college administrator to describe the
> curriculum of his institution, he will probably give you a list
> of subjects offered together with the administrative department
> responsible for each one. . . . There is no intent to deceive
> when the curriculum is stated to be English, Mathematics, and so
> on, but the motive is quite beside the point and it may well be
> that educational administrators do not know what they are doing.
> The fact is that every educational organization has one
> fundamental curriculum, which is never stated explicitly but
> which is the essential precondition of everything else. The
> fundamental curriculum is the social and administrative
> organization of the institution and the student's role in it. If
> the student does not learn this, then he learns nothing else that
> the school claims to offer. (Bremer & Moschzisker, 1971, pp.
> 11-12)

Riordan (1972) echoes these thoughts when he speaks of the
"so-called hidden curriculum" with which alternative schools are
frequently concerned: that is, "the effect of the structure and
process of schooling independent of curriculum context." In some
cases, he notes, the school's "struggle for survival is in fact the
basic curriculum" (p. 10).

Particularly in secondary schools with a high degree of student
involvement in governance, such is the case. Duke (1978b), in
developing his instrument for studying alternative schools, found that

> some of the items presumed an arbitrary distinction between
> subjects like curriculum content and decision-making structure.
> Several times, for instance, the author found that the school's
> organization _was_ the curriculum. (p. 16)

Though in the introductory chapter the author spoke of
organizational structure as distinct from educational curriculum or

pedagogy, this is not always an easy distinction to make. Through organizational and social structures powerful learning is transmitted to students living within those structures and interrelating according to the rules and patterns tacitly in force there. Further, if we are to understand structure as involving the relationships between members we cannot disallow, say, the relationship between teacher and student in a classroom from the realm of structure, though that relationship is also both a means of carrying out the educational program and an artifact of the educational program. It is with this caveat that I write about organizational structure as something distinguished from educational program: the two are, in fact, interdependent on very basic levels. Indeed, the reader will find fairly lengthy passages in this chapter describing teachers' work with children, and the regularities and discrete events in the school's educational program.

Organizational design and organizational goals

Some authors impute responsibility for the failure of alternative schools to poor organizational design. Deal (1975), for example, contends that if many contemporary alternative schools have failed, it has been not because of poor educational programs, nor primarily because of wider societal factors such as the economy or the changing political climate, as much as because their organizational forms were inadequate to their purposes. "Alternative schools," says Deal, "tried to accomplish highly sophisticated educational tasks with an underdeveloped and nearly anarchic structure for decision making and

problem solving" (p. 2). Thus, for Deal, organizational form is the critical factor in the success of an alternative school.

Duke (1978b) claims that few of those educators and thinkers who have studied and criticized education in past decades have particularly concerned themselves with what he calls "administrative organizations" of schools. Instead, according to Duke, "most of the experimental alternative schools of previous years limited their innovations to new approaches to child rearing, instructional techniques, and curricula" (1978b, p. 63).

> The majority of those who have scrutinized the educational process in this century seem more concerned with teaching techniques, testing, and curriculum content than with the administrative organizations of schools. (Duke, 1978b, p 68).

Whether or not Duke is correct in this assertion, organizational experimentation is integral to the entire gestalt of many of the schools that have sprung up in the second half of this century. A consensus has apparently emerged among alternative school people that radical change in educational practices may require new organizational forms for schools.

> Basic changes in education cannot occur without transforming the process by which educational decisions are made and increasing the types of people involved directly in making decisions. (Duke, 1978b, p. 71)

In other words, many alternative school people believe that new organizational designs are needed in their schools, if new pedagogical methods and ideas are to be successfully implemented there. Organizational form dictates what can and cannot happen, says Duke:

> The assumption is that the goals dictate the appropriate form of administrative organization, not the reverse. This assumption,

however, is not always valid. Structure can dictate function.
(1978b, p. 68)

Duke feels that bureaucracy in particular adversely affects what
can happen in schools.

> Bureaucratic structure presumably designed to provide for the
> efficient coordination of services, winds up exerting a pervasive
> influence over the very nature of the services themselves. . . .
>
> Bureaucracies especially are noted for. the phenomenon of
> "goal displacement," whereby the original goals or functions of
> the organization are subordinated to the internal goals of
> perpetuating the existing organization and maintaining stability.
> (1978b, pp. 67-68)

The bureaucracy takes on as its main goal the maintenance of its
particular structure, says Duke, instead of achieving the
organization's goals. Somehow this is an intrinsic feature of
bureaucracy, though neither Duke nor any of the many other alternative
school people who accept this view explain how this is so.   It would
appear that the notion of "organizational goals" bears closer
examination.

Organizational goals, in the systemic view, may best be treated
in light of the earlier discussion of <u>rules</u>. In Giddens' terminology,
goals that are being acted upon are in effect moral rules, in that
they embody values and guide members' behavior. For example, if one
of the goals is for students to participate in decision making,
members will endeavor to behave and interact such that students take
part in decision making. Their behavior will be guided by a set of
rules that prescribe <u>and</u> <u>produce</u> student participation. In the
systemic view members are observed to interact according to patterns,

and their interactions produce and/or influence observable outcomes. Goals, desires, wishes, motives or rationale are not of such interest here as are the rules that guide interactive behavior and produced outcomes in the system.

Unrealized goals are literally <u>not</u> <u>real</u> in the system. The systemic consultant would observe that in the bureaucratic system described so disparagingly by Duke, members are behaving and interacting such that ultimately students do not participate in decision making. If the school espouses student participation as a "goal," it is of great interest to the consultant that the "goal" is not embodied in the structure. If the overall guiding rules embodied in the living structure do not lead to the fulfillment of the espoused goals, this is because the structure does not include resources whereby the goals may be achieved, nor rules that guide behavior accordingly. The goals are not "displaced;" they are simply not "real" in that they have not actually influenced the rules that are actuated by, and that guide, members' interactions. The "goals" are not really goals of the system as it exists, though they may be some people's idea of how it ought to be, and though the <u>espousal</u> of the goals may be a communicative act that indeed plays some important role in the system.

Be that as it may, in his sentiments toward the bureaucratization and centralization of the public schools Duke is not alone; they are echoed throughout the popular "free school" literature, with comments

ranging from the disenchanted to the outright vitriolic. It is important, therefore, to examine closely those organizational forms that independent schools have explored as alternatives to the centralized bureaucracies of the public system.

Alternative School Organizational Designs

Duke (1978b) studied the types of overall "administrative organizations" and the more specific "decision-making procedures" in use in alternative schools. Administrative organization refers to the organization of members involved in running the school and the division of responsibility and control among those people. Decision-making procedures refers to the specific sorts of meetings and bodies that convene regularly in order to make decisions on policy and/or the daily operation of the school.

Duke identified eight different types of administrative organizations to describe the range he found among the non-public alternative schools he studied. They are as follows (1978b, pp. 55-56):

Parent Cooperative type. In this model, parents and teachers make decisions collaboratively in all areas. Much as in a New England town meeting, every person has an equal vote on all important decisions.

Parent-Teacher type. Decision-making responsibilities are divided between parents (who decide on hiring, finances, and physical

plant) and teachers (who handle day-to-day decisions such as discipline, evaluation, and academic program).

Parent-Teacher-Administrator type. This type functions in the same manner as the previous one, but there is in addition an elected or appointed coordinator who makes decisions in specific areas.

Teacher-Administrator type. Teachers and coordinator divide decision-making responsibility. "This type resembles the conventional public school model, but for the fact that teachers generally exercise more decision-making power in the alternative school setting" (p. 56).

Teacher type. Here, teachers "exercise virtually complete control over decision-making processes" (p. 56).

Student type. In this model (found only in secondary schools) students "rely on adults as resource persons," but they make most of the important decisions, such as those pertaining to policy, academic program, and evaluation.

Student-Teacher Cooperative type. Similar in form to the Parent Cooperative type, in this model students and teachers collaborate in making decisions, with little division of responsibility. Again, only secondary schools used this form.

Student-Teacher-Administrator type. A three-way division of decision-making responsibility characterizes this model. Students and teachers together decide upon day-to-day matters. Teachers make decisions concerning the academic program and evaluation. The administrator or coordinator handles finances and decides overall policy.

TABLE 8

TYPES OF ADMINISTRATIVE ORGANIZATION
IN 29 INDEPENDENT ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS

Type	number of schools	%(n=29)
Parent Cooperative	9	31
Parent-Teacher	5	17
Student-Teacher Cooperative	5	17
Parent-Teacher-Administrator	3	10
Teacher	3	10
Teacher-Administrator	1	3
Student	1	3
Student-Teacher-Administrator	1	3
No stable administrative organization	1	3

Note. Adapted from Duke, 1978b, p. 57.

Duke surveyed 29 independent alternative schools (as well as 11
public alternatives). His findings on types of administrative
organization in the nonpublic alternatives in his survey are presented
in Table 8. Duke explains that the schools were categorized according
to the administrative organization employed when they first started.
Many later underwent changes in administrative organization, and
according to Duke,

> these changes tended to be in the direction of more divisional
> responsibility and generally decreasing parental involvement.
> The influence of teachers on decision-making processes increased
> over time. (p. 57)

Even so, Duke notes the strong tendency in these schools to involve in decision making those populations that are normally excluded in the traditional model (that is, parents and students), and to involve teachers much more fully than is traditional.

Decision-making procedures. Within these overall administrative organizations, Duke found eight different decision-making processes and provisions in use in the independent alternative schools in the study. They are as follows (1978b, pp. 58-59):

1. Meeting of the school community at large

2. Elected or appointed committees

3. Faculty meeting

4. Elected Board of Trustees

5. Appointed Board of Trustees

6. Elected or appointed Coordinator

7. Head or Director with broad discretionary powers

8. Cluster or team planning among teachers

These processes and provisions for decision making are not mutually exclusive, and most schools would use a combination of decision-making mechanisms.

Data on the manner in which decisions were characteristically taken in the 29 independent alternative schools are presented in Table 9. Duke again notes that the data report the procedures and processes used to make decisions at the time when the school was established. "Virtually every school in the sample," he adds, "underwent changes in

TABLE 9

DECISION MAKING PROCESSES USED IN
29 INDEPENDENT ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS

Decision process	number of schools	%(n=29)
School Meeting	24	83
Faculty Meetings	15	52
Coordinator	11	38
Elected Board of Trustees	7	24
Committees	6	21
Appointed Board of Trustees	4	14
Headmaster or Director	2	7
Teacher Teams	1	3

Note. Though 29 nonpublic schools
were sampled, many schools used more than
one decision process. Thus there are
more than 29 tallies, and percentages
total more than 100. (Adapted from Duke,
1978b, p. 60.)

these processes during its first year or two of operation" (1978b, p.

59).

Reviewing and interpreting his data, Duke posits a significant

shift away from the traditional format for educational organization.

Contemporary alternatives generally minimize or reject entirely
many of the trappings of bureaucracies: centralization of
authority, specialization of function, and standardization of
procedures. (1978b, p. 61)

Contemporary alternatives constitute a direct challenge to the way schools have been organized and administered. (1978b, p. 62)

As Duke's data suggest, the new forms that are in use are characterized by a marked emphasis on increased participation of a wide range of school members. That the all-school meeting emerges as a format for decision making in over four-fifths of the independent alternative schools in the study is strong evidence of this preference for wide involvement in decision making.

Duke's approach to analyzing school administrative organizations is forthrightly oriented towards design, rather than evolution. His typology shows the originally designed forms, and other than to report the trend toward increased participation, he does not report on the forms that administrative organizations later took in schools, or the process whereby such evolution took place.

The picture provided by Duke is in the form of a typology into which, presumably, one may fit any school according to its initial design concept. This is very different from the systemic result, which provides a method of drawing a picture of a unique school structure producing and reproducing and modifying itself over time. Because of the dynamics of the creation and recreation of structure through members' interactive behavior over time (and thus the constant evolution of the structure), the systemic view must necessarily include a discussion of evolution and of other factors besides conscious planning or design. Duke gives us a way to typify a

school's structure captured at one point in time. The systemic view offers a way to understand the evolution and dynamic continuation of the structure.

Although the theoretical frame for Duke's work is not systemic, some of his data may be useful to a systemic consultant, who could shape it to her own needs. Duke's work has the advantage of showing a trend. He shows how, nationwide, alternative schools tried to organize their hierarchies and design their decision-making procedures. That the trend has been to include a wider population in decision making and administration, and that subsequent changes have been in the direction of increased participation rather than a retraction of that original stance, is significant as we try to understand these schools. They were clearly emerging with a particular set of ideas (or a "myth") about member control in organizations. They were also evidently trying to implement governance designs reflecting such a worldview or myth. This is important for the alternative school consultant to understand, even though it may say little about what to expect of the actual structure of a particular school, as displayed in rules and resources and patterns of interaction.

A Systemic View of School Structure

The following pages contain a discussion from a systemic viewpoint of the organizational structures of three schools, each of

which assumes a different place in Duke's schema. The first school,
Metro High, is illustrative of an attempt to include students in
school governance. The second, called ASPE, exemplifies a parent
cooperative type of school where one aim was to assure high parent
participation in governance. The third is Magic Mountain, a staff-run
school trying to operate through conjoint governance by the staff.

Guiding questions

The principles outlined in the previous chapter will be brought
to bear on these three cases. In order to apply these principles, the
systemic consultant watches the interactions of members (or in the
present case assays the anecdotal accounts) to identify rules,
resources and patterns of interaction characterizing the unique
structure of the system. To this end, the following questions may
fruitfully be asked:

Rules. What rules does members' interactive behavior appear to
follow? What rules do members appear to use in interpreting others'
interactive behavior in its communicative capacity? What evidence is
there of a rule's use in many different content areas? (Such a rule
is particularly important to note.) What are the meta-rules, the
rules about making and changing rules?

Resources. How do members go about their business in the system?
What is it they want to do there, and how do they get it done? What
things are they trying to do but evidently cannot?

Rules and resources. How do the rules enable members to do their

business in the system? How do the members' use of resources in doing their business continue to recreate the rules?

Patterns of interaction. What patterns appear in the various interactions observed among members? How are different patterns accross the system complementarily linked to each other? Do some patterns appear repeatedly across the system in different content areas? (Such isomorphic patterns are especially important to note.)

What alliances are observed? Are there covert alliances or coalitions in evidence? Are relationships among holons either rigidly symmetrical or rigidly complementary, or are they generally flexible, with evidence of both aspects? Is there evidence of triangulation or detouring?

Interconnections. How might all of the above factors be seen to interconnect? How do the patterns of interaction create and recreate the rules and resources? How do the rules and resources continue to influence the observed patterns? How, in this constant interaction, are the structural aspects of the system changing?

Asking about rules and resources and patterns of interaction with regard to the following specific areas may also be helpful:

Communication. What are the rules about communication among various holons? What are the main means for various kinds of communication, and the main "communication channels"? How do the patterns of interaction and the rules and resources allow and direct members' interactions such that they continue to "cut" these channels?

Holons. What are the rules for holon identity? What are the
patterns of relationship within and among various holons? How do the
patterns of behavior of various holons fit together and keep each
others' position viable?

Decision making. What contributions do various holons make in
the decision-making processes of the school? How do members of all
various holons go about influencing decisions? How are various holons
affected by decisions made in the system and by the decision-making
patterns?

Roles. What are the rules by which responsibilities are shared
and divided? How do various roles or positions fit together and keep
one another viable?

Hierarchy. What hierarchical relationships are evident from the
patterns of interaction observed? How do all members contribute to
the creation and continual recreation of the hierarchy?

A systemic consultant would endeavor to gather the data needed to
answer these questions. The most important body of data consists of
members' interactive behavior. To the extent that the body of data in
the present case is limited to that provided by other authors, and is
presented by them in context of other theoretical views, the following
explication is limited. However, the author hopes it may demonstrate
a few of the principles summarized at the end of the previous chapter
and underlying the above questions.

Students in School Governance: Metro High

A great many alternative high schools, in particular, have been founded on the belief that all participants, learners and teachers alike, should take part equally in decision making in school. This concept extends beyond the individual learner's control over his or her particular course of study, use of time, and the like, and includes the full and equal participation of learners in decisions affecting school policy and administration.

Chicago's Metro High School, a "school without walls" (though supported by public funds and thus "borderline independent" by our definition here), provides an excellent example. The Center for New Schools (1972), in a case study of student involvement in decision making at Metro, note the high value placed on individual freedom of choice in matters ranging from dress to friendships, school attendance, and coursework. The founders of the school felt that student participation in decision making was an essential ingredient in maintaining an atmosphere of free choice.

> We felt that the lack of student involvement in shaping decisions
> that affected their lives was a major cause of alienation and
> disruption within conventional high schools. We believed that
> students should be prepared to take a strong role in
> decision-making in their later lives. We felt that a good
> beginning for an effective learning program with these goals
> would be to eliminate restrictive rules that generally govern
> students' daily behavior such as dress codes and hall passes; to
> allow students to select their own courses within broad
> distributional requirements; to involve students in the
> evaluation and planning of individual courses; and to involve
> students in making and implementing policies that would affect
> the entire community. (Center for New Schools, 1972, p. 315)

To the school's adult founders, individual freedom of choice means eliminating rules affecting a student's daily life and personal direction. Also, students must be involved in making decisions affecting the school as a whole in order to protect their personal rights and freedoms as individuals, as well as to prepare for a similarly full involvement in governance later in life.

> Staff (including parents and teachers) assumed that students would come forward eagerly to participate in institutional decision-making, given the opportunity. Further, we didn't want to prescribe the form that such involvement would take, but hoped that the students themselves could develop an appropriate form. (Center for New Schools, 1972, p. 315)

Students, however, felt that "no government at all was best, but that if some form of government were necessary, the only valid form would be one based on direct representation" (1972, p. 316). A weekly all-school meeting was therefore established, but within a few weeks student attendance had dropped considerably, and to their own consternation, staff found themselves making most decisions among themselves, often informally.

Throughout the two-year organizational history documented in the study, and presumably beyond, staff at Metro were continually frustrated in their repeated efforts to involve students in decision making. Some factors related to the failure are found in four major areas, according to the authors (1972, pp. 316-324):

1. The students' initial attitudes toward governance. They viewed governance as being (a) generally untrustworthy and "uncool"; and (b) not necessary to the achievement of their personal concerns, which were already taken care of (e.g. freedom to dress as they

wished, express their opinions, socialize, etc.).

2. _Staff_ characteristics and concerns. These included (a) high one-on-one personal responsiveness to student complaints and needs, such that students' needs were being met through personal interactions with staff; (b) competence and experience coupled with creativity, such that students' ideas "paled by comparison"; (c) past life experience casting teacher as dominant and student as submissive; (d) skill in formal brueaucratic decision-making processes, but little skill in non-bureaucratic decision making; (e) intimate knowledge of Metro's institutional history; (f) high commitment to the survival of the institution, over and above their commitment to student participation.

3. Characteristics of the _Metro program_. These included (a) the fact that Metro was a "school without walls" and students were dispersed daily throughout the city; (b) the diversity of the student population and the existence of subgroups with conflicting interests and issues; (c) the many other school activities vying for student time and attention; (d) a poor system of communication in the school, such that students were uninformed about school meetings.

4. Characteristics of the _city public school system_. These factors included (a) being part of a large city bureaucracy; (b) operating in close contact with a wider society where the students had few rights and freedoms; (c) the compulsory nature of students' attendance at school.

A systemic view seeks out ways in which such factors might be

inherently interconnected such that they produce and reinforce one another. This is not to say that all of them necessarily are interconnected, but that the structure of the school is made up of patterns that interlink and of rules that are isomorphic across the system. To understand how those patterns interlink and how the rules appear through different content areas is to understand the structure. Hence the consultant searches for interconnections among factors that initially may appear disconnected. What follows is an attempt to identify such interconnections, as well as to characterize the structural factors thus interconnected and the manner in which they were dynamically produced and reproduced through members' interactions.

Rules. Metro was started within the public school system by a group of adults. In establishing the school, the staff began with the resources of the initial adult group. Prime among these resources was their knowledge of the rules of the culture for their interactions with one another, or their common "understandings" for how to behave with one another. There was also consensus as to an essential "rule of rules," actually in this case a rule against rules: Making rules affecting other people not involved in the rule making was considered inimical to personal freedom, and as such was against the "rule of rules." As members acted with one another in accordance with commonly held understandings about personal interactions, as well as with such meta-rules, both the meta-rules and the specific rules for daily interaction were produced and continually reproduced in the evolving

structure of the school.

Students agreed that no one should be allowed to make rules for anyone else to follow, and concluded that the best formal government was _no_ formal government, and the only acceptable alternative was a form in which decisions were made by consensus of the entire membership.

In order for any formal regulations to be made students _had_ to be participants in the formal governance structure. However, the rule of rules forbade their being formally _required_ to do so. They had to _want_ to.

The well-meaning adults who started Metro expected that students _would_ want to participate in school governance, but they also felt that students _ought_ to participate, and ought to _want_ to participate. At the very outset, the rules were already heading for double-bind territory. When, after an initial period of enthusiasm, students didn't attend school meetings, staff was in a real quandry. If students didn't participate in decison making, the students wouldn't be exercising their individual powers, and staff would be "running" the students' lives, just as was done in conventional schools. But _by the same token_ staff should not _force_ students to participate in decision making. Students were free to come and go, to choose for themselves, after all! If the meeting went ahead and passed resolutions, these had little chance of becoming an actual part of "social reality" at the school, since they were unenforcable. The rule of rules said that no one could make anyone else obey a

regulation, especially not a regulation to which the person had not

consented. The Center for New Schools (1972) describe the following

scenario:

> The school is started in an atmosphere of high energy and
> good will. The general commitment to a more humane way of
> operating, the high level of personal dedication, and the good
> feeling that permeates any new enterprise carry it through a
> honeymoon period of six months to a year. . . .
>
> As the honeymoon draws to a close, small bits of evidence
> begin to accumulate that people really haven't changed as much as
> was hoped. The all-school meeting fails. The school's tape
> recorders, which people used to be able to leave out, begin to
> disappear. The first inter-racial fight occurs. People begin to
> notice that although whites and Blacks are outwardly polite to
> each other, there is little communication, and friendship cliques
> are mostly all-white or all-Black. Severe interpersonal
> conflicts between strong-willed staff memebers surface, and their
> conflicts spill over into just about any issue debated in the
> school. Someone stuffs a roll of toilet paper into the toilet to
> make it overflow, and a window is broken. Some kids consistently
> fail to follow through on any of their commitments in classes and
> other learning experiences; and since these kids have had a year
> to get themselves together, some people wonder whether the
> alternative school is doing any more for them than the old
> schools. Community or staff meetings are held, and strongly felt
> resolutions are passed. But in practice, <u>both</u> <u>staff</u> <u>and</u> <u>students</u>
> <u>find</u> <u>it</u> <u>extremely</u> <u>difficult</u> <u>to</u> <u>confront</u> <u>individuals</u> <u>who</u> <u>don't</u>
> <u>abide</u> <u>by</u> <u>these</u> <u>resolutions</u>, <u>who</u> <u>persist</u> <u>in</u> "<u>doing</u> <u>their</u> <u>own</u>
> <u>thing</u>." (Center for New Schools, 1972, p. 336-337) (Emphasis
> added.)

<u>Resources</u>. Staff and students, as holons in the system,

naturally held differing priorities, had different business to

transact, thus called upon different resources in the system. The

concerns that were particular to the staff included developing a new

and better educational program for students, and ensuring the

successful establishment, and thereafter the survival, of the school.

In part, they drew upon the wider city school system for

resources--both relational and material--to use in pursuing these

ends. (In that this was to be a "school without walls," they were even drawing on resources from the broader system of the entire city in order to develop a program in which students would learn in a variety of sites throughout the city.)

As the structure of the school developed, the resources within the school available to staff for establishing the school and ensuring its survival included staff meetings and small committees.

> The staff had been meeting almost daily since the school opened, anyway, trying to cope with the many problems of the new institution, and had established committees to make decisions about evaluation and curriculum. (Center for New Schools, 1972, p. 316)

In order to establish the school and keep it going, the staff could use the communication channels, which reliably included them, and the staff meetings and committees that they were instrumental in forming. These forums were effective for creating regulations that required only a limited number of people for their production and reproduction in the social reality of the system, such as ways of handling student registration. However, if a large number of members were necessary to implement a resolution, for example establishing a no-smoking area, there would be far less chance of its becoming an actual part of social reality, as it would not be produced and reproduced through members' behavior.

Thus neither staff nor students had resources to use in imposing limits on behavior. The Center for New Schools describe this phenomenon and cite incidents of "misbehavior," but the problem they were concerned about in the school was not student misbehavior; rather

it was lack of student participation in governing the school. In other words, the authors, and presumably many members as well, did not view misbehavior as a major problem, even though they all agreed there was misbehavior.

The staff, at least, clearly did view as a problem students' lack of participation in formal decision-making bodies, and to the extent that one of their aims was to develop a school with such participation, the structure did not make available the resources for this end. This fact is not here seen as a "deficiency" that necessarily should be "made up," but an integral aspect of the whole to be noted.

Meanwhile, students' primary concerns lay in the realm of "personal freedom." If they could express themselves freely—that is, dress as they pleased, socialize with whom they wished, come and go at will, and speak their minds—then their most pressing business was done (Center for New Schools, 1972, p. 113). This was ensured by the rule of rules. Students thus had a powerful resource, in the very foundation of the school's structure, for the achievement of their highest goals.

Students also had resources for achieving other ends. Staff showed themselves as very caring, responsive individuals. Students formed relationships with staff members in which they freely voiced concerns and criticisms of the school, knowing staff would follow the rule requiring a sensitive response, and would make a serious attempt to see that a student's issues were addressed at the next opportunity.

This might well take place in an "all-school" meeting that the student would choose not to attend, or a committee meeting composed (by default) mainly of staff, or an informal after-school meeting of staff members. As the school structure evolved, all these forums became available as resources. They were direct resources to staff, who mainly populated them; they were indirect resources to students, through their ability to utilize their relationships with staff.

Comments as to student attitudes toward the formal decision-making structure at Metro bear repeating here.

> [Students] generally preferred a decision-making role in which they could bring problems to the attention of the staff, who would then have the responsibility to develop solutions, rather than one in which they developed and implemented detailed programs themselves. (Center for New Schools, 1972, p. 317)

> With their major objectives largely achieved, Metro students saw little reason to become actively involved in a formal decision-making process. Staff members argued that students should carve out some formal decision-making role for themselves, since the staff might not always act in the students' best interest. This argument, however, was highly abstract, and most students were influenced much more by present reality. They saw little need to expend energy in a decision-making process when things were already going their way. (Center for New Schools, 1972, p. 318)

> Many staff meetings were long, marked by extended rhetorical exchanges, and conducted using procedures unfamiliar to most students. Time was spent discussing details of implementation that students felt were trivial. Attendance at a few staff meetings confirmed the belief that the best way to influence decisions was to talk informally with teachers and let them fight it out. (Center for New Schools, 1972, p. 320)

> Despite the lack of a formal faculty-student-body to govern the school, Metro students felt they had a great deal of personal power in the school. They also felt tremendous trust in the faculty to make decisions in their behalf. Personal influence and the humanistic values were seen by students as better guarantors of shared power than a formal internal governance structure. (Chesler, 1978, pp. 284-285)

In sum, it appears that students were not terribly unhappy with the level of their participation in these decision-making bodies. They had other ways.

Communication. The staff, for their part, had been meeting informally, regularly spending long hours at school after most students had left. They demonstrated devoted, energetic behavior and a show of initiative that included the early establishment of "committees to make decisions about evaluation and curriculum" (Center for New Schools, 1972, p. 316). Students were encouraged to attend such committee meetings, but agendas were not set ahead of time and often the meetings were not formally announced (Chesler, 1978, p. 285; Center for New Schools, 1972, p. 323). Both teachers and students contributed to an institutional "emphasis on informality," say the Center for New Schools.

> This informality had the unintended effect of excluding students from many important discussions relevant to various decisions. Even though teachers and students had close relationships, teachers tended to eat and relax together. Key meetings were often called quickly in response to a crisis or impending deadline, and informal channels of communication shaped the group that turned out. (Center for New Schools, 1972, p. 323)

Channels of communication are important resources for getting things done in the structure of a system. The above comment indicates that communication channels at Metro evolved in such a way as to "shape" decision-making bodies in which staff involvement was high and student involvement was low. This is not an unrelated happenstance in a systemic view. Communication channels, like other aspects of structure, are themselves produced and shaped through many repeated

interactions of members, and as they evolve, they also help to shape the evolving pattern of those interactions.

Self-reproduction of the structure. As students absented themselves from decision-making opportunities, staff, meanwhile concerned for the survivial of the school, did enact decisions affecting the community, without benefit of broad student participation. Students were reinforced by this in viewing close relationships with staff as a major resource, since staff did make the decisions. Also,

> as decision-making became centered in the staff meeting/committee system, students increasingly viewed decisions as externally imposed rules. (Center for New Schools, 1972, p. 328)

As long as staff continued to make decisions, the students' view of rules as externally imposed would be reinforced, as would the students' use of staff "connections" to achieve their ends, including influencing decisions affecting them. The structure in this way continued to produce and reproduce itself.

Parents in School Governance: ASPE

Not surprisingly, organizational forms involving high student particpation in governance are mainly to be found in secondary schools, where students are older. More common among elementary schools are parent cooperatives, founded by cohesive groups of parents who maintain control of the purse strings, of broad policy decisions, and of hiring and firing of staff. Not unusual, though, is a tendancy

for parent involvement to flag eventually, while teachers in such
schools gradually take on more responsibility for maintaining the
school and ensuring its survival, and ultimately for decision making
and control of its direction. The changes over time at the New School
in Plainfield, Vermont, whose self-description is quoted in Graubard
(1972b), exhibit this trend:

> Parent participation in the decision-making and policy
> setting processes has varied over the years. During the first
> three years, the parents met together constantly (at least
> weekly) and tried to decide everything--not just broad policy,
> but also its application. There was a great deal of anxiety, a
> lot of yelling at teachers, hostility between parents, and lots
> of genuine involvement with the daily lives of the children. The
> strain of that level of involvement got to be too wearing for
> most parents and was a great burden on the teachers. After the
> third year, the parents backed off a bit and left the day-to-day
> running of the school to a parent director and the teachers and
> children. After a year and a half of relative uninvolvement, the
> parents started again participating more actively, this time with
> less anxiety and less hostility. (pp. 114-115)

The formation of the Alternative for Student Participation in
Education (ASPE) as described by Novak (1975) was in some regards
parallel, though the final rapprochement was lacking. The school was
initiated by a group of parents who convinced their local school board
to approve the establishment of a public alternative school of their
design. These parents did the initial work of hiring teachers,
finding a site, and hammering out general philosophical guidelines.

Evolution of rules. The parents who started ASPE came together
as much out of a "quest for community" as a desire to be directly
involved in providing an alternative education for their children,
according to Novak. The school was to offer children, ages 5 to 12,
"total personal freedom; with the only limitations being that the

child does not infringe upon the rights of others, or endanger his health or safety" (Novak, 1975, p. 41). Parents were to participate actively "in all phases of the creation and operation of the school. . . . ASPE is a learning community of children and adults," according to the parents' original brief to the school board (Novak, 1975, p. 64). The council in charge of the school was to be made up of fifty percent parents and fifty percent staff, and was to have full responsibility and control of the school's budget, with autonomy from the public system. Any parents could voluntarily place their children in the school as long as they agreed with the school's "basic principles" and indicated a willingness to participate actively in school life.

Such were the ground rules explicitly outlined by the group of parents who founded the school. Interesting for its omission from the parents' brief is a statement about teachers.[1] They were given fifty percent representation on the council, but qualifications for teachers were apparently not specified, nor was the educational program they were to implement, beyond general statements such as the one about children's "personal freedom," quoted above. The original group of parents hired a staff of three teachers, who "agreed with the principles outlined in the brief and . . . shared the parents' desire to participate in an educational alternative" (Novak, 1975, p. 42). Together with Alexis, one of the three teachers (the other two being

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[1]Novak does not furnish the full text of the brief. The omission of such a statement is surmised.

away for the summer), the parents met through the summer months,
mainly "working on the school's philosophical underpinnings" (Novak,
1975, p. 43).

Our next view of the school is in October, when Novak first
visited. He observed the 90 students moving freely between the
school's three rooms, which were equipped with "a profusion of live
animals (including chickens), an indoor sandbox, a plethora of art
supplies, a lounge with a T.V. and stereo, a woodwork bench complete
with tools and wood" (Novak, 1975, p. 44). His field notes record the
following impressions:

> On first entering the school, I suddenly felt as if in the midst
> of a carnival. Children were running here and there, toys and
> art supplies were strewn around a large room, a group of children
> were watching T.V. in one corner, while other children ran in and
> out shouting and laughing. (Novak, 1975, p. 44)

The children, he says, "roamed in hordes and small groups, in and out
of rooms with little or no adult supervision" (Novak, 1975, p. 44).
During the first few months, says Novak, "many children banded
together in small cliques" (Novak, 1975, p. 45).

Novak's impressions of the teachers are scantly recorded, but he
describes one of them as follows:

> Peter, bearded, about 25 years old, clipboard in hand and peace
> sign dangling from a leather string around his neck, seems to be
> in charge here. . . . Peter doesn't participate in the
> children's activities. (Novak, 1975, p. 46)

Peter evidently enacted the "laissez-faire" free school
philosophy to the fullest, believing that "no adult should interfere
with children, nor should adults even try to encourage children to do
academic work" (Novak, 1975, p. 46). In January, Peter "was relieved

of his position by the parent council" (Novak, 1975, p. 46). (It is not clear where this parent council body originated, as the parents' original brief stipulated a "school council" made up of parents and school professionals.) The parents evidently disapproved of the early educational results of their endeavor. When Peter was fired, parents charged that "nothing is going on in that crazy place" (Novak, 1975, p. 53), and "we need a savior to pull us out of this mess" (Novak, 1975, p. 46). The new teacher, Paul, did some rearranging of the classrooms and wrote a "curriculum," which Novak says did not actually change the activities of students, but described what these activities were in a manner that legitimized them. The curriculum set down the "theoretical roots" (or the rules) of the school program, thus refuted the charge that it was "crazy."

Holons. The body of data suggests a system with three fairly distinct holons: the parents, the teachers, and the children. Parents apparently had control over the hiring and firing of teachers, but teachers seemed to be in charge of the daily operation of the school, such that when parents felt the daily operation was unacceptable they had to fire a teacher in order to bring about change. At the same time, the goings-on in the teachers' baliwick was by no means private unto that holon. Teachers' activity in the school was very public, since parents were actively involved. (A picture of this in-school interaction between parents and teachers would be fascinating, but it is unfortunately not available.) The children apparently turned to one another, forming smaller holons among themselves.

During the beginning of the first year, students and staff met together each morning to inform the children of the day's activities. These meetings also provided a forum for social problem solving among the children. At about the same time that Paul's "curriculum" appeared, these daily meetings ceased. And at about the same time, staff began meeting twice daily, before and after school, a possible indication of a tightening of their holon relationships.

The parent holon, it seems, criticized the teachers for failing to enact a program that met their expectations. The "expectations" of the parents were quite vague in the beginning, including only general statements about philosophy. The teachers were enjoined to allow the children maximum personal freedom, but programmatic details were unspecified. We do not know how cohesive a group the parent holon was; it may have been that they did not agree among themselves on these specifics, for example.

The internal workings of the teacher holon are largely unknown. How, for example, did Peter get to be "leader"? What was the import of Alexis' summer meetings with parents--did she form alliances among the parent group? When Paul replaced Peter, did he take on Peter's leadership role, or did leadership shift? Novak credits Paul with the writing of the curriculum, perhaps an indication that he did assume leadership. As he in some way was brought on as "savior," this would not be surprising.

Rules and social reality. The new curriculum was evidently an important resource to the teacher holon. In its earliest state this

"curriculum" was nothing more than a weekly schedule of activities written on a large movable blackboard. This schedule did not change the practices in the school. Instead it was a communication to the parents. It said to them: "This program is not 'crazy'; it is purposefully and rationally organized into meaningful activity times."

According to Novak, the curriculum also enabled the teachers to define children's behavior as appropriate or inappropriate. Participation in scheduled activities could now be treated as appropriate behavior, while non-participation was inappropriate. Until now, the student holon, it seems, had operated with relatively little control from adults over the kinds of activities children engaged in (within broad limits) or the amount of time spent on various pursuits. Novak describes a group of boys (the "hall boys") who were considered troublesome in that they played together in the hall all day long. Under Peter's laissez-faire rules, this had been okay, though Novak indicates some adults had been uneasy about it from the beginning.

> To the casual observer, these boys seemed remarkably busy and involved in what they were doing. In fact, these boys appeared to be more eagerly engaged in their projects than were many other students in the school. They usually played floor hockey, traded hockey cards, and generally spent their time together; thus they obviously comprised a friendship group and appeared to thoroughly enjoy themselves. On the basis of this evidence, these boys clearly seemed involved. (Novak, 1975, p. 57)

However, with the coming of the curriculum they were not considered "really involved." They were not involved in scheduled activities taking place inside the classrooms, thus they were non-participants and as such were behaving inappropriately. Social

reality was shifting.

Novak noted, incidently, that scheduled activities did not occupy children for the strict time periods indicated. Activities were begun by adults as scheduled, but children joined whenever they arrived and left when they had finished. "The length of a project depended upon the individual's span of interest for that particular session" (Novak, 1975, p. 59).

In addition, it is significant that about one-third of the children could neither read nor tell time, being quite young. They found out about the activities that were available at any one time by wandering around. For them, the only difference that the "blackboard curriculum" made in the fabric of social reality was the legitimation of their attendance at activities as compared to the illegality of their possible non-attendance.

It appears that the only children who consistently engaged in non-compliance with the new "rules" were the hall boys. Novak describes these children:

> They were undoubtably gregarious children who had evolved a counter culture within the school, yet they exhibited their sociable behavior within a limited and restricted framework of relationships. Seldom, for example, did these boys interact with adults or with children outside their clique, and when they entered the rooms they often disrupted normal activities that were underway. They were, therefore, cast as outsiders. . . . The restricted social contact of the hall boys and their lack of involvement in normal activities represented a most stubborn difficulty for the ASPE parents and staff. (Novak, 1975, pp. 60-61)

The teachers tried (evidently vainly) to get this small holon to behave according to the new order by devising legitimate activities,

such as swimming or hiking, which they thought the hall boys would be interested in.

The evolution of a rule about participation is entirely in keeping with the theme of community and participation that underlay the entire system from its very inception. The idea that participation was the most important element in the rule, rather than the content of the activities to be participated in, is suggested by the teachers' willingness to change the content in order to gain the hall boys' participation.

The teacher holon. In describing the second year of the school, Novak provides a closer glimpse of the teacher holon. Jean, one of the original parent founders, began in this year as the teacher of the youngest children. Paul returned as teacher of 8-11 year olds. Alec was hired to teach the oldest children. There were also three part-time assistants, whose contributions are unclear.

Jean's classroom was arranged in an orderly manner, with well-defined areas devoted to various different kinds of activities. Parents saw in this order and "legibility" a "model classroom." Paul, for his part, balked at employing this "top down" organization of the room by a teacher, though he said he felt pressure to follow Jean's suit. Paul cited the original parents' brief, which stated, "The child should have the opportunity for growth by taking part in decision making, eventually helping to plan his own program" (Novak, 1975, p. 72). The teachers all agreed that the 11-13 year olds should definitely participate in organizing their own classroom, but these

students themselves "paradoxically persisted in orienting to interests outside the classroom" (Novak, 1975, p. 68).

> In several conversations with me [Alec] despaired at ever fully organizing his room for effective use; and the students themselves expressed only peripheral interest in that project. Like the rest of the teachers he, too, continually worried about his inability to "get things together" and "get students committed to caring about this place." (Novak, 1975, pp. 68-69)

Small wonder! To Alec fell the unenviable job of obtaining an effectively organized classroom through the participation of the children who were to use the classroom, but who did not want to spend much time in it, much less organize it.

Within the teacher holon, Jean appears to have been more closely allied with the parent holon than were the other two. As a holon in her own right she belonged to both the parent group and the teacher group. It was in keeping with this relational picture that Jean's approach to classroom organization reflected the dominant preference among the parents. She showed herself to be a "model" free school teacher; her behavior as an "organized" teacher could be seen as a communication from the parent holon to the teacher holon: "Here's how."

The other two teachers were maintaining the opposing side in a relational pattern that dates back to the early days when Peter refused to offer any direction whatsoever to the children. Though Paul and Alec presented a softer stance than Peter had, a very similar oppositional pattern was being maintained between parents and teachers.

Holon interactions. There were significant differences among the

students of various ages in the school. The youngest group, under Jean's supervision, and the middle group, with Paul, "generally acquiesced to the order of the curriculum and proceeded to organize their time and activities on this basis" (Novak, 1975, p. 71). In the second year of the school, the middle group actually began to demand conventional schoolwork. "For example, one group of students displayed a frenzied and insatiable appetite for math problems, while other students anxiously requested reading assignments from the teachers" (Novak, 1975, pp. 71-72). Adult responses to this behavior are telling.

Paul, in particular, punctuated it as indicative of adult "manipulation," evidence that children did not "have the opportunity or ability to say no to ASPE's pervasive program" (Novak, 1975, p. 72). Parents (and no doubt Jean as well) saw the children's demands as indicating their true need for adult guidance, their need to be given limits and expectations.

The second year also saw the addition of the older group of students, who in October organized a student meeting. "This meeting evolved from a prior students and teachers meeting, orginally designed to discuss the school's fundamental principles" (Novak, 1975, p. 70). The students voiced a complaint about "'parents' domination' of activities and the second-rate status of student initiated projects" (Novak, 1975, p. 70).

The teachers' responses to the students' separate meeting again illustrate the patterns of alliance within the teacher holon and

between members of that holon and the parent holon. Paul and "two other teachers" looked with favor on the children's initiative, seeing it as a "breakthrough, a move well beyond [their] passive acquiescence of the two previous months" (Novak, 1975, p. 70). The core parents, including Jean, felt the children's meeting was "both disruptive and destructive." The meetings were ultimately "discouraged" (by what means we are not told) and they "disappeared, never to surface again in this form" (Novak, 1975, p. 70).

Apparently at about this same time, Paul, after pressure from parents to involve the children in classroom activities of a more conventional nature, issued a "manifesto" that in essence restated the beliefs expressed in the parents' original brief. The parents, however, forcefully resisted this move on Paul's part by refusing to talk about "philosophy" in the weekly meetings of the Program and Evaluation Committee, which was composed of teachers and parents, and which presumably was the forum for Paul's manifesto. Paul, on his part, evidently allowed himself to be "silenced," at least in the Program and Evaluation Meetings.

The chronological relationship is unclear between this set of events and a threat to the school's existence from the outside world that occurred at the beginning of December.[1] It is certainly conceivable that in not pressing for discussion of his manifesto Paul

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[1] For reasons not germane to our purposes here, the public school board was seriously questioning the advisability of continuing to fund the school.

was taking part in the system's concerted response to this outside threat. Novak suggests that it was an implied threat by the parents, through Jean, to invoke their power to fire Paul, that was responsible for his subsequent quiescence.

Novak revisted the school in the spring of its fourth year, after a two-year absence. Paul had evidently departed by this time, but the "laissez faire" versus "adult guidance" issue was still strong. The staff was seriously factionalized, with the remaining original core of parents, including Jean and her husband, supporting those representing the adult guidance camp. A teacher who had worked closely with Paul during the school's second year led the laissez faire camp, supported by "a less outspoken group of parents" (Novak, 1975, p. 120).

The parent holon. At the same time, active parent participation in the school had dwindled. Parents, it will be remembered, procured the means for starting the school, and defined ASPE as an expression of the parents' right to educate their children as they saw fit. The founding group of parents hired the first three teachers, fired Peter, and in general appeared actively involved in the issues of school life during the school's beginnings. The three original teachers whom they hired, and who "presented themselves as competent pedagogues," says Novak, "received the brunt of parental criticism. So, perhaps, it is not surprising that the three original teachers all had quit or had been fired by the end of the first year" (Novak, 1975, pp. 45-46).

Nonetheless, by the end of the first year, ASPE teachers had managed to establish a stable educational program, including specifics

of curriculum and scheduling. The 60 families originally involved in
the school had shrunk to 30. These now comprised the "core" group of
experienced parents. New parents were invited to join them in
supporting a now established program, organized ultimately by the
teachers.

> New parents were asked to see where they felt they could best
> "fit into" the structure of the curriculum, and they were clearly
> relegated to the peripheral role of worker in an already
> established, ongoing concern. . . .
>
> With this "second generation" of parents, the "typification
> of members' roles," . . . where parents and teachers reached some
> tentative understanding about their respective responsibilities,
> now took on the quality of an institution. Parental powers were
> severely limited in the school by the very organization of the
> schedule, classrooms, and tasks to be performed. Perhaps ennui
> best describes the new parents' response to their ascribed
> a-political status. (Novak, 1975, p. 66)

The process of bringing new parents into a "going concern" in the
second year changed the rules significantly. No longer was it
necessary for parents to actively involve themselves in shaping and
directing a school. Rather, their task was to find a way to "fit in."
As the majority of parents were seeking a community for themselves as
well as an alternative enducation for their children, "fitting in"
could hardly have seemed like a hardship to many of them. "Fitting
in," after all, is a part of the comfort of "community." It could be
said to be complementarily "fitting" that during this second year a
"gradual shift of responsibility for school order onto teachers"
occurred.

> The division of labor between teachers and parents, sedimented in
> teachers' accounting practices and in the curriculum, had
> increased parental aloofness; for now the teacher . . . bore
> full responsibility for the school's organization. (Novak, 1975,
> p. 74)

By the beginning of the school's fourth year, the locus of
control of the educational program was firmly in the hands of the
teachers. In Novak's view,

> parents simply began to withdraw their interest from the school
> and teachers took up full responsibility for school life in light
> of this power vacuum. Instead of the constituency-demonstrator
> relationship that so significantly characterized ASPE's first two
> years, members now talked about "accountability," in particular
> professional teacher "accountability" to one another for their
> practices. (Novak, 1975, p. 114)

Some ASPE members were not, it seems, entirely comfortable with
this situation. Some teachers perceived parents as apathetic. Novak
cites one teacher as telling him in private,

> In a sense I've been saying for the past few months that we've
> created a monster. . . . The school is serving day care needs
> which people need and they use it in that way. . . . People have
> expressed at a general meeting that the school has served them so
> that they know that they can go to work, that they know they
> don't have to worry that their kids are cared for. (Novak, 1975,
> p. 115)

Some of the original core parents complained that few of the
newer parents volunteered to help out in the school, leaving the
burdon to just a few. Novak comments:

> These remarks certainly reflect [the] teachers' sense that
> parents have abandoned their children and the school. In
> addition, these comments cast doubt upon ASPE's status as a
> community, parent-run school. (Novak, 1975, p. 115)

Novak explains these developments as resulting in part from the
solidification of the school program and the waning of outside
threats, relieving the now exhausted parents of responsibility for the
very survival of the school.

> Since their presence no longer seemed absolutely necessary, and
> since the external threat to the school seemed almost
> non-existent, parents (primarily the women) took this occasion to

turn their attention toward work, toward political activity, or
toward the acquisition of new career skills. One new teacher now
openly told me that in his opinion parents could function best in
a purely advisory capacity as assistants, who could work on long
range planning, or perhaps serve as a board of governors. Most
parents, I believe, would only too gladly leave the care of the
school to the teachers at this time. (Novak, 1975, p. 117)

Interconnections. A systemic analysis of the evolution of the
school's structure sees the "fit" in the final form that parent
participation took in school life. Parents were concerned above all
with "participation" as an expression of community. The gradual
shifting of responsibility for school life onto teachers makes sense
in this light. Parents had what they most desired--a community of
like-minded individuals, united around their common parenting
concerns. The teachers, for their part, were ultimately the persons
who, together with the children, enacted the educational program of
the school. That teachers would take charge of those aspects of the
system is logical. Indeed, teachers are in a good position--and
perhaps the best position--to take charge of matters if the collective
parent (or student) body somehow fails to do so. Teachers also will
ultimately have to carry out whatever decisions are taken by the
parent group, and thus their assent and cooperation is, ipso facto,
essential to implementing any plans. All of this means that teachers,
in a sense, have a goodly amount of inherent control in the school,
whether the original design intended it or not.

The concept of a parent-run (or student-run) school suggests an
employer-employee relationship between the governing body of parents
(or students) and the teachers. This fairly traditional relationship

between populations may be difficult to maintain, given the unique position of the teachers, together with the non-traditional structures of the schools. Teachers are usually present at meetings where decisions are made affecting the operation and the direction of the school, for example, and teachers are needed there, for they have a great deal of first-hand information about what is happening daily in school. Decision makers such as parents who have other full-time jobs must rely on teachers for information on which to base their opinions and choices. Above all, teachers have special expertise in the task of educating children. In light of such circumstances, it would be surprising if teachers did not tend to assume an ever-increasing burden of responsibility for running the school.

Summary. Two significant points emerge regarding the evolution of ASPE's structure: (1) An issue persisted from the school's first months of operation onwards, concerning rules about children's "personal freedom." (2) Rules about parent participation in the school changed over the years. Both points involve the idea of participation.

The first involves student participation in teacher-planned school activities, as opposed to their exclusive involvement in small peer cliques. A division of the adult community into two camps regarding this issue was a persistent aspect of school structure from the opening of school onwards. This pattern carried forward, even in the face of member turnover.

The second involves a structural evolution in parent participation, an evolution that reflected the relationships among the three main holons in the system and the resources available to members of these respective holons. The teachers' direct responsibility for the school program and for daily interactions with the students gave them a central position in the structure. The parent holon, larger and looser than the teacher holon, by year four did not have the resources to heavily influence the direction taken by the program. Indeed, it was questionable how important it was to most of the parents that they do so, once the school was established.

Looking at the school in its fourth year, it is possible to see the arrangement between the parent and teacher holons as a comfortable and quite workable one. On the other hand, some members of both holons were apparently troubled by the seeming discrepancy between the school's original emphasis on parent participation and the structural forms that had evolved over the years.

These findings lead to further questions. One wishes to know more about the specific ways in which the structure persistently produced and was produced by the schism in the school; and specifically who is most uncomfortable with the parent-teacher division of responsibility and influence. How, more specifically, are these two features linked, other than through the general theme of "participation"? These are some of the questions that the systemic consultant would look to answer in a first-hand interaction with the system.

The structure of the school is of course much more complex than the preceding paragraphs might imply. The stress placed on participation is fairly arbitrary, in that other major themes might well appear, given access to fuller data. Systemic structure is generally not monothematic. However, the systemic view of structure makes possible the identification of significant themes such as this, and the import of being able to identify such unifying themes will become evident when toward the end of this work we turn to a consideration of problems and problem solving in human systems.

Not every parent cooperative ends up turning the reins over to the teachers, but it is clear that the format tends to drift in that direction in many cases. Parent cooperatives apparently often move toward a stronger inclusion of teachers in decison making. Next is an exploration of a school that started out with staff in charge.

A Staff-run School: Magic Mountain

The staff composition at Magic Mountain included a part-time director, a core teaching staff at first of one, later two teachers, and several part-time and volunteer staff. The school was small, holding for several years at an enrollment of 12 to 15 students, ages 9 to 14.

Magic Mountain, interestingly enough, in some ways reverses the pattern at ASPE. From the school's beginnings, the staff ran Magic Mountain. Unwilling to engage in push-me-pull-you struggles with a

diverse parent population, the staff soon clapped the lid on what they saw as a Pandora's box associated with heavy parent involvement in decision making. Staff quickly learned to eschew situations such as all-school discussions of policy that might have encouraged heated altercations among parents and staff over contentious issues. Parents, for their part, were content to leave their children in the hands of the school staff, seemed happy with the results, and were generally relieved to be asked to do no more than pay tuition (or in some cases barely even that).

Over the years, some parents took on regular roles in the school as volunteer teachers and occasionally as paid staff, and the school relaxed its stance. Today, Magic Mountain is still at heart a staff-run school ("Teacher" type shading into "Teacher-Administrator"), but monthly parent meetings inform staff decisions and help maximize parent involvement in various aspects of school life. All parents are asked to donate a few hours work each month to school affairs. The threat of divisiveness that loomed in earlier days is now absent. New families join a going concern with established direction, and may enjoy contributing to the sense of progress without feeling called upon to navigate.

Interestingly, this outcome is similar to the situation at ASPE in its fourth year. In contrast, however, the Magic Mountain community is comfortable with this state of affairs, as ASPE, which identified itself as a "parent-run community school," was not. ASPE began as a "Parent Cooperative" type, and evolved uneasily into a

"Parent-Teacher" type, and then something more closely resembling a "Teacher" type, without formally accepting a new organizational design. While operation as a staff-run school has not been trouble-free for Magic Mountain, the shift to including parents more fully has at least not conflicted with the school's basic governance design or its "self-image."

Patterns of interaction. Magic Mountain endured its own growing pains, however. The school's structure quickly evolved a shield protecting the school from divisive contention arising from the parent holon, but such contention, one might say, was thus preserved for enactment within the staff holon. Among the staff the question "Who's in charge here?" expressed Magic Mountain's pervasive and continuous controversy (Harvey, 1974).

By January of year one, the first core teacher had resigned after finding a volunteer's challenge to his authority intolerable. "It's me or her," he had declared, but Sara, the founder/director of the school, refused to fire the volunteer and the teacher left.

In the second year, charges of "adult chauvinism" were registered by students against Joe, the male teacher in the core team of two. In the eyes of Sara, the director, and Judy, the other core teacher, student behavior was growing disruptive to both the health of the young people and the success of the educational program. Significantly, on the day when the core team and director planned a major intervention to reassert adult authority, Joe was ill and therefore absent from school, crippling the adult effort to appear

cohesive and in charge.

In the fourth year, the spectre of the "control" issue again materialized in an outbreak between Sara, the director, and Judy, now a third-year core teacher. Sara voiced a concern that Judy was encroaching on the director's role, and Judy expressed despair over her sense of diminution in comparison with Sara. After a period of tension and considerable pain, this particular difficulty passed.

However, the fifth year saw the battle once again lodged most prominantly in the relationship between the male member of the core team and Sara. An extremely rare instance of overt allusion to the existence of such a battle occurred in a staff meeting that year. Sara told John, a core teacher, that she felt she could not operate in the role of director without the mandate of the rest of the staff, and she felt he withheld his stamp of approval. The ensuing discussion contained John's denial that he disapproved of Sara's leadership role, but also his expression of doubt about his ability to assertively support her leadership.

Another relevant event of that same year was the decision by the staff to involve the school in an intensive study of governance. (It was a regular practice to choose a major theme to bind and focus the educational program.). Various forms of governance were studied and actually tested by the students and staff together, using the school itself as a laboratory. All went quite smoothly, with the trying out of dictatorial, democratic and anarchic forms in a spirit of experimentation and discovery. Near the end of the thematic unit,

however, a major confrontation occurred in which a small group of students voiced their extreme discontent with the amount of adult control exerted in the school, including charges of sexism registered against John. In the ensuing brouhaha, one family, an erstwhile strong advocate of the school, actually withdrew their daughter (who was one of the main complainants and whose older sister had briefly dated John). The entire episode, which broke out in a class discussion of the various governance modes that had been studied, took the staff completely by surprise. A systemic perspective, however, sees it as another expression of a pattern in the underlying structure of rules and relationships in this school.

The preceding sampling of events at Magic Mountain shows only a few instances of the "who's in charge here?" theme at the school as it displayed itself through a variety of content areas. In no way does this describe the total body of rules and resources and patterns of interaction that made up the structure of the school. Space for such an exhaustive analysis is not available here. Instead, the author has tried to illustrate how a major relational pattern in the school pervaded the structure both across holonic groups and over time.

Contrasting Views: Metro Revisited

The foregoing discussion has presented, by way of illustration, a systemic view of the structures of three schools. These are examples of what a systemic view of structure _is_; but the reader's

understanding may be enhanced by a contrast with what it is <u>not</u>.
Below a comparison is offered between the systemic view presented
above and the interpretations provided by other authors in the case of
Chicago's Metro High School. The author's intent is not to imply
there is a "right" or "more accurate" view, but merely to demonstrate
the difference. The systemic view, as will be seen later, is
essential to systemic intervention. Since a demonstration of systemic
intervention as applied to independent alternative schools is the
purpose of this work, the systemic view of structure must first be
understood. It is a "better" view for the purposes of systemic
intervention.

The Center for New Schools (1972) presented a list, cited
earlier, of many factors which, taken together, they feel help to
explain the failure of student participation in governance at Metro.
The list is divided into four parts: characteristics of students, of
staff, of the Metro program, and of the city public school system of
which Metro was nominally and fiscally a part. The authors'
presentation indicates an approach that sees a confluence of
essentially disparate factors. For example, with regard to the staff
characteristics the authors make the following note:

> This discussion might give the misleading impression that
> the staff knowingly throttled student involvement. The case was
> quite the opposite. Most staff members spent considerable time
> listening to student complaints and trying to deal with them,
> agonizing over the lack of student involvement and trying to
> correct it. Had the students exhibited a strong desire for
> involvement, staff characteristics that worked against student
> involvement would probably have been a minor influence. <u>As it</u>

happens, however, they meshed with prevailing student attitudes
to minimize the chances of student involvement. (Center for New
Schools, 1972, p. 332) (Emphasis added.)

The implication is that student attitudes just "happened" to mesh
with staff characteristics. Thus in some ways the resulting situation
is merely a sad accident having to do with a confluence of chance
attributes. Many of those same factors would probably turn up in a
first-hand systemic view as well. The main difference would be that
in the systemic view they would be seen as interconnected rather than
a chance meshing of disparate attributes. The manner in which the
relationships among members continue to produce and reproduce such a
meshing of circumstances would be a focus of attention for the
systemic view.

Chesler (1978) focussed on "student power" in her study of six
alterntive high schools, including Metro. In her article, Chesler
differetiates between student autonomy and student power.
"Autonomy," she says, refers to the student's "freedom to determine
issues that affect him personally," e.g. choice of courses or of
dress; "power," on the other hand, she defines as "the students'
collective ability to influence not only curriculum decisions but also
school policy and management issues" (p. 291). In other words,
"power" here refers to the ability to collectively influence
institutional decisions, as opposed to the ability of an "autonomous"
individual to control matters of personal concern. Power, in other
words, is built through people working together, contributing to the

collective force. Autonomy (which, ironically, is easy to confuse
with power) is an aspect of individualism, of freedom from the
constraints of the collective.

For Chesler, increasing student power in schools means developing
forms that allow and encourage students' collective influence. She
notes that the means of collective influence and power may be either
formal or informal.

> Formal power involves known, testable channels for influence,
> such as votes and representatives. Informal influence relies
> heavily on subtle, fluid interpersonal understandings. In our
> view, the ideal governance structure offers formal and informal
> means for influence, with each supporting and enlivening the
> other. (Chesler, 1978, p. 291)

In highly participatory school settings, informal forms often
predominate, insofar as almost any sort of formal governance is
usually controversial. As mentioned earlier, students at Metro, for
example, felt the best government would be no government. Innovators
at Metro and other similar schools

> believed that people, not necessarily structures, direct an
> active democracy. Student power was expected to be an organic
> outgrowth of the informal and unstructured environment where, it
> was hoped, the open atmosphere of autonomy would generate active
> student participation in all phases of school decision making and
> planning. (Chesler, 1978, p. 272)

When these hopes were not realized, the school was left with few
formal procedures for student participation, though informal means
were quite well developed. Chesler cites three reasons for the
failure of student participation to develop "organically." First,
previous socialization experienced by students "fosters dependence on
adult authorities"; they have been taught not to expect power, not to

claim it, and not to trust adults (Chesler, 1978, p. 292). Second, students often come with previous experience in "student councils" or the like, and they distrust such forms, having experienced them as powerless and not influential; carrying this further, "some students distrust any formal regulations of government at all" (Chesler, 1978, p. 292). Third, students are simply unskilled in the processes of making decisions and solving problems in a formal governance body.

Chesler recommends that, to counteract the forces that oppose the effective exercising of student power, schools design formal procedures that involve students in decision making, "with clearly delineated roles, responsibilities, and channels" (Chesler, 1978, p. 292). While many alternative school people seem to be wary of formal procedures, Chesler warns that informal mechanisms may be even more chancy.

> Power in informal settings is a delicate matter, depending on face-to-face interaction and access to information. If interaction and communication can be controlled by any one group, that group will obtain and retain the power in their school. (Chesler, 1978, p. 292)

Chesler suggests that, especially considering that students are less skilled in controlling power, in political maneuvering and the like, it might be expected that they would use informal channels of influence less effectively than formal ones.

Chesler concludes that, while students had plenty of autonomy, "student power was fairly low at Metro" because a formal means for their participation was lacking (Chesler, 1978, p. 294). She cites the fact that few students attended meetings where important decisions

were made, and that, instead, students "made their interests known to teachers, who then used their own power to respond to them--a benevolent form of paternalism" (Chesler, 1978, p. 295). Chesler maintains that in the governance of a school students

> will have significant control of the curriculum only when student power extends to the managerial and instructional processes. (Chesler, 1978, p. 295)

In sum, Chesler sees the governmental structure of any school as comprising the means whereby power may be exercised. This includes formal decision-making procedures and bodies, the roles and relationships among people, and the communication channels. In order, then, to empower members the structure needs to be designed such that they have access to the formal channels and means of exercising power in that organization, and they must gain the capability as individiuals to use the channels skillfully.

Chesler finds students at Metro unskilled in using resources necessary, in her view, to acquiring or wielding power. In the systemic view, the members of the system are seen as being proficient at going about their business within the system. They have been instrumental through their relationships in forming that structure, after all. However, Chesler rated Metro students as low on power. In her view, the fact that students took a minor role in formal governance amounted to having very little power. The systemic view, on the other hand, sees students as being able to effectively go about their business through skillful use of informal channels, particularly personal relationships with teachers. Even more empowering for them

was the rule of rules at Metro, through the use of which they achieved their most desired ends: personal freedoms (Chesler's "autonomy"). The systemic view would suggest that students at Metro had a share of power sufficient to render them able to effectively achieve their primary business in the school. Whether this was their proper business is not the job of the systemic consultant to decide.

It must be noted that a major aspect of this variance in findings has to do with a question of semantics. Chesler, the reader may remember, distinguishes between autonomy and power. The first is personal and individual, the second is collective. The systemic view makes no such distinction. Individual autonomy is seen as a function of co-created rules for interaction, not an isolated attribute. To the extent that any of us behave autonomously, we do so within the definition of autonomy provided in our social reality; and we do so in conjunction with some other aspect of social reality that is considered the "other" of which we act autonomously. If there is nothing to be dependent on, I cannot be autonomous from something. As to the notion of collective power, the systemic view sees the entire notion of power as an essentially "collective" concept. All members actively collaborate to support the existing structure of rules-and-resources and patterns of interaction, from which all members draw their power.

Chesler does not believe the existing structure at Metro to be a good thing, because it did not demand student participation in formal governance bodies. The systemic view is non-evaluative and does not

venture to pass judgement. It notes the manner in which the members

behave so as to co-create the structure, and how the evolving

structure guides their subsequent behavior, which influences the

further development of the structure. Beyond the observation that

both students and staff at Metro were able to use the resources of the

system to achieve their ends, for example, an estimation of the

"proper" balance of power is not addressed. The systemic view is

descriptive rather than prescriptive.

A word about <u>organizational design</u>. Chesler categorizes

structures as either "formal" or "informal," and her reasoning leads

her to the conclusion that formal structures designed to include

students will better assure their participation and thereby their

power. The systemic view sees both "formal" and "informal" structures

as equally "designed" by human members in their repeated interactions.

Even a resolution passed by a legal body is only a part of social

reality insofar as it affects subsequent behavior patterns. All rules

in human groups, in this view, are <u>by definition</u> enacted and

reenacted. Many states, for example, have old statutes on their books

that few people know about, and most people would find them ridiculous

if they heard of them. Such laws are historical curios, but are not

an aspect of the living structure that guides behavior or that members

use in going about their business. A plan or design for governance is

one factor--at times a relatively minor one--in the actual evolution

of social structure. Metro's initial design specified that there be

no decision process, except one created by all participants. Though

student participation in formal decision making bodies was in fact
low, the governance structure that developed did include committees,
meetings, communication channels, and probably a fairly regular adult
membership at the more formal functions, such as staff meetings and
committees. More important, the structure as a whole included the
means for students to achieve their ends, which is to say to be
empowered.

Summary

An interesting variety of administrative organizational designs
are to be found among alternative schools. No particular arrangement
predominates, but as Duke (1978b) points out, the design usually calls
for the involvement of many individuals and often several different
populations in running the organization. Also common is a relatively
"flat" sort of hierarchy, with an emphasis on collaboration and shared
responsibility for making and enacting decisions.

At the same time, the systemic understanding of structure in a
human system gives us a means to view the "organic" development of (1)
rules about behavior and the interpretation of behavior, (2) the
resources of the system, and (3) patterns of interaction in the
system. The administrative design is but one element in the complex
picture that evolves. The systemic consultant looks at patterns in
members' communication, in holon relations, in decision making, roles
and hierarchy. Most of all, the systemic consultant seeks out

<u>interconnections</u>. Systemic themes emerge and resound throughout the entire structure over extended periods of time. These themes are played over and through a constantly changing background of persons and events, always with intricate variations and embellishments.

The themes of each setting are unique, and are not seen to be consistently tied to particular organizational designs. The interactive rules and patterns at Metro, for example, are not necessarily found repeated in all schools orginally designed to include students in decision making.

The descriptions of the structures of schools in the foregoing pages are probably not exactly what a systemic consultant who visited these schools would present. Because the literature has focussed on governance issues, the available data have been relevant to those issues, and hence the view has been of those aspects of the schools' structures. It may be that other overriding meta-themes prevailed in these schools, not evidenced in the available documentation. (Even in the case of Magic Mountain, where the author was a staff member for some years, data are highly pre-sifted. In this case, the view presented is likely to be skewed not only by the documentation provided by Harvey (1974) and by the author's imperfect memory, but by the author's personal punctuation of events.) The author cautions the reader who may be familiar with one of the schools that the depiction here is not necessarily "accurate," systemically speaking. The attempt has been made to show how a systemic view of structure might pertain in a hypothetical example. Always, such an assessment is

viewed by the systemic consultant as itself hypothetical, subject to continued revision through evidence obtained through interaction of consultant with system.

We turn next to a discussion of the concept of _change_ in human systems. We have already seen that "structure" in this context is never static. Heraclitus tells us that such is the nature of the world. In the context of human systems, to be sure, change plays a major role. Alternative schools, with their untried forms and complex aims, may enjoy (or endure) the continuous generation of change at a particularly high amplitude.

P A R T   T H R E E

TOWARD A SYSTEMIC CONCEPT OF DEVELOPMENT

SECTION A: SYSTEMIC THEORY

CHAPTER VIII

DEVELOPMENT

Introduction

An organizational consultant needs to hold in mind a conceptual model for what <u>change</u> "really is." The systemic consultant's understanding of how change happens in a system has implications for how to tell when change is needed, how to help it to happen, and how to help steer its course.

This chapter is devoted to a study of "natural" or spontaneous change in human systems. It begins with an acknowledgement that change, on one level, is so continuous as to render its definition a difficult theoretical problem. Family systems theory has attempted to use the early general system theory concept of homeostasis to understand stability and change in human systems, but this author finds that construct lacking in its capacity to handle the dynamism of reflexive process already included in the systemic view of structure. A view of systemic change as a constant changing of structural rules, resources and patterns of interaction, together with co-created social reality, is advanced instead. Human systems are thus seen to be

constantly evolving, or developing. The chapter concludes with an examination of the idea of systemic development as involving a sequence of high-order changes in structure and social reality. The question of whether or not similar human systems may exhibit similar developmental patterns over their "life cycles" is addressed in this context.

Stability

Early system theorists postulated a tendency for systems to move toward a state of balance, of rest, of ease with their environments. Water seeks its own level; living systems seek "homeostasis," or stability, they said. In the final analysis, however, stability means little more than survival, since systems that are as open to their environments as are living systems surely never stay the _same_ from one moment to the next, even in periods of relative "stability." Change and development are part and parcel of achieving long-term stability for such a system. The system's very impingements upon its environment, as well as its internal responses to the environment, represent the process of actively bringing about change so as to help keep the system "alive."

While it is surely useful to view a human system as endeavoring to gain and retain a certain level of balance and immutability, it would seem in many instances more profitable to focus on the constant dynamism of human systems. An open system changes constantly in order

to stay itself. Human systems include self-reflexive operators that, when admitted to the theoretical model, bring into focus a picture that is noteworthy more for its complex activity than its quietude.

Much early systemic family theory has, however, clung fairly closely to the concept of homeostasis as traditionally put forth in cybernetics and general system theory. The idea that all the bustle of family interaction is ultimately aimed at maintaining the status quo is basic to much family systems thought. Accordingly, "family homeostasis" has been seen as the foe of the family with problems, the nemesis of the family that needs to change. A problem in a family has been seen as an essential element in a recurring cycle that the family must retain in order to maintain homeostasis. The family is seen as clinging to its present organization, fearful of changing the inner patterns that define its present state, despite pain and dysfunction experienced by individual members. Thus is homeostasis seen as the final cause of family problems: In its overbearing "urge" toward homeostasis, the system holds tenaciously to the symptom.

The author suggests the abandonment of this almost mystical notion of an innate drive toward homeostasis as the compelling motive of human systems. Jantsch (1980) in his description of "dissipative self-organization" speaks of

> a new ordering principle, called "order through fluctuations" . . . which comes into play under far from equilibrium conditions. It implies that dissipative structures may be driven by fluctuations which are reinforced by the system itself, over instability thresholds to a new structure. The system is capable of evolution through an indefinite sequence of structures. (pp. 84-85)

Maturana (1980) and Maturana and Varela (1980) present a theory of "autopoiesis" to account for the self-production and reproduction of living systems. In Maturana's terminology, the "organization" of the system consists of those relations among its components that must remain the same if the system is not to lose its class identity and become either no system or a member of a different class of system. The components themselves and the relations among them he defines as the "structure." Those structural relations or components without which an observer would no longer classify the system as itself do not change. The rest of the structure changes continually in a living system.

> The structure of a living system is necessarily under a continuous change. Furthermore, the fact that all that must remain invarient in an autopoietic system (in order to retain its class identity) is its autopoietic organization, implies that the structural changes of a living system are necessarily open-ended, and in principle can take place endlessly with recurrent and/or nonrecurrent configuations.

> In any particular autopoietic unity, it is its structure which determines at every instant the way in which it realizes its autopoiesis through the path of structural changes. It also determines which path of structural changes to follow as a result of its internal transformations or the structure-selective effects of its external interactions. In this sense, any particular autopoietic unity operates as a whole, as every composite unity does, and all the elements of its structure, components and relations, continuously participate in determining its characteristics, both as an autopoietic unity of a particular kind (class, species) and as an individual. (Maturana, 1980, pp. 54-55)

In other words, the structure at any moment produces the changes in structure that follow that moment. In this way, all of the components of the structure, both relational and material, continually participate in defining and redefining the nature of the whole system,

seen as a unity.

Dell (1982), who acknowledges Maturana's considerable influence on his thinking, jettisons the very term "homeostasis" in favor of the notion of "coherence" or "fit." A system "coevolves coherency" with its environment, says Dell. By "coherence" Dell means that the behaviors of members of the system "have a general complementarity; they fit together" (1982, p. 21). The system is also coherent in its environment, and may even be seen as a coherent, integral part of the environment. Observing a system seemingly shift in order to "regain homeostasis" in response to some impingement from the environment is merely a particular and arbitrary punctuation on part of the observer. One may focus differently and see the system as being one with its environment, in which case the view is of the wider system simply "fluctuating through the domain of its coherence" (Dell, 1982, p. 29).[1]

Meta-Change

If the normal state of things is ever-changing, what then can we possibly mean by change? If staying the same means changing, then do things ever really change? To even conceive of "change" would seem to require the possibility of periods of sameness, from which change

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[1]Dell's reasoning carries him to some other conclusions that I do not wish to embrace. The inclusion here of his notion of coherence does not necessarily betoken acceptance of other ideas in the article cited.

could occur. However, we are in the position of Ulysses who had to hold fast to Proteus as he shifted shape from one terrifying aspect to another. As long as the hero grasped even one lock of hair, he was eventually able to pin _something_ down, but the rest of the thing went on transforming itself even while he did so. Similarly, we may "look steadily" upon some portion of the universe, as Greenebaum (1972) would say, but the rest will meanwhile shift constantly.

The notion of "organization" advanced by Maturana (1980) and Maturana & Varela (1980) provides the means whereby we may cling to the tresses of the ever-changing universe, and hold it to a place of order and identity where we can converse and gain the understanding we need of it. They define the "organization" of a living system as those relationships in the structure of the system that must remain constant if the observer is to remain satisfied that the system she started out to look at is still the same type of system. It is in the constancy of certain relationships among components, and relationships among those relationships, that the "organization," which represents the constancy of the system, resides. When, for example, is a school not a school? We look for certain basic rules about relationships between members to decide that what we are looking at is a school. As long as those certain relational rules remain, all kinds of other changes can occur without the entity's losing its "schoolness."

Second-order change

Now that we have pinned Proteus and learned how to make him keep his elemental shape, we have a solid place to stand in thinking about

change. The systemic consultant searches for patterned change in human systems, because it is in how change is patterned and repeated through different content that relationship and thus structure is defined. We seek to see what rules or logic the changes we observe seem to follow.

Change in the patterns of change themselves is change of another order. According to Watzlawick, Weakland, and Fisch (1974), change in a human system may take place on two distinct levels. On one level, change may take place within a system according to the rules of the system, and thus without changing the patterns of interaction or the rules that govern the system. This they label first-order change. On another level, change in a system may actually alter the patterns and the structure of the system itself. This meta-change is second-order change.

Faced with a challenge, a "problem," the normal behavior of the system consists in changes of the first order. It responds in patterned ways that might be called its "problem-solving behavior." If problems are not alleviated through any of the patterns of behavior available through the present structure of the system, change of another order is necessary. The system needs new problem-solving processes, new rules, new patterns of behavior. Problem-solving processes, like other structural aspects of human systems, are intrinsically involved with beliefs and view of reality. Along with the structural elements, therefore, the system's worldview, or the social reality that the members co-create in their patterned

interactive behavior, must also change.

First-order change consists in changing the content of problem solving without change to the process. When a human system is unable to solve its problems or to evolve new mechanisms that can solve the problems, the system may yet continue to apply its first-order solutions in superficially varying ways. Take for example a family that goes to one professional helper after another to get aid in coping with their "delinquent" son. They see social workers, psychiatrists, parole officers, special schools. And through each new experience they are encouraged in their belief that the boy "has emotional problems." Neither their view of reality, nor their interactive rules and patterns, nor their problem-solving behavior are changed.

The therapist must find ways to effect second-order change, so that the system can behave according to new rules, new beliefs, and a new frame for the situation. Indeed, the solution that the family has been applying over and over is itself a part of the fundamental pattern, the real problem. Their repeated attempts to solve the problem (or more aptly the "symptom") are rooted in a family myth that "the boy has problems." This myth is no longer productive, and as long as their solutions follow the pattern of the myth, the family not only fails to curtail the boy's acting out, but their "solutions" actually contribute to the perpetuation of the symptom, for each new solution that they try is further expression of their continued adherance to the myth. The myth has become dysfunctional for the

family. The therapist must maneuver the family into risking a departure from present patterns and problem definition, in favor of more functional patterns of interaction, based on a more useful family myth, such as "he's acting young" in place of "he's crazy" or "he's sick."

Double-loop learning

First-order change is quite often sufficient to solve problems and continue coherent existence in the environment. However, coherence in a highly "turbulent" environment (see Emory and Trist, 1973) depends upon the system's continual ability to "learn," or to change its own structure.

In the field of organizational development, Argyris and Schon (1978) have developed a model for "organizational learning" and for interventions that help organizations become more effective "learning systems." While their intervention approach is not that of a systemic consultant, their conceptual model for change in an organizational system bears some resemblance to that of Watzalwick et al. (1974), reviewed above.

Briefly outlined, the goal of their model is to help the organization to be able to engage in "learning" that results in altering its very values and norms when appropriate. Some situations will demand only the sort of change exemplified by a thermostat that keeps the room heat constant, maintaining the system in "homeostasis" and avoiding significant structural or normative change. This is

"single-loop learning," in Argyris & Schon's model.

However, organizations must also be able to engage in "double-loop learning," which allows the organization to "resolve incompatable organizational norms by setting new priorities and weightings of norms, or by restructuring the norms themselves together with associated strategies and assumptions" (Argyris & Schon, 1978, p. 24). This means that members of the organization must be able to change the set of beliefs about the organization held in common by all members. Otherwise, the prevailing modes and norms define and constrain the organization so that it tries to solve problems according to pattern, even when the problems are not getting solved that way.

In Argyris & Schon's terms, many organizations tend to apply their usual single-loop patterns to solving problems, and when that doesn't work they try the same thing more, not being able to apply the secondary "feedback loop" that would change the problem-solving pattern itself. In addition, certain systemic features help keep this state of affairs in place, in particular, they say, the fact that the fundamental norms, beliefs, and objectives that maintain the single-loop pattern are usually themselves not open for discussion in the organization. The members of the organization are thus prohibited from even discovering the existence of these shared underlying assumptions.

Argyris & Schon posit that organizational learning takes place when a "dialectical process" is allowed in which, they explain,

organizational situations give rise to organizational inquiry--to problem setting and problem solving--which, in turn, create new organizational situations within which new inconsistencies and incongruities . . . come into play. These are characteristically manifested in organizational conflict. The organization's way of responding to that conflict yields still further transformations of the organizational situation. (Argyris & Schon, 1978, p. 42)

The ultimate goal is not to free the organization from problems, or even to solve its present specific problems. Indeed, "it is in the very nature of organizational problem solving to change situations in ways that create new problems" (Argyris & Schon, 1978, p. 42).

In good organizational dialectic, new conditions for error typically emerge as a result of organizational learning. Good dialectic is not a steady state free from conditions for error, but an open-ended process in which cycles of organizational learning create new conditions for error to which members of the organization respond by transforming them so as to set in motion the next phase of inquiry. (Argyris & Schon, 1978, p. 60)

The overarching goal is to enable the organization to engage in a continual dialectic involving organizational learning cycles managed by the organization itself. Members must be able to discuss and learn about the basic assumptions of the organization. The ambition of the consultant, according to this model, is to enable the system to engage in double-loop learning so as to solve its problems by itself in future, whatever those problems may be.

Conclusion

Argyris & Schon share with the family systems theorists a concern for the processes whereby systems customarily deal with problems. Moreover, the concept of double-loop learning closely parallels the family systems concept of second-order change (even to the "twoness"

present in both terms). Both of these concepts refer to learning, or change, that involves transforming the patterns and structure, the norms and values, the worldview and the very beliefs, that characterize the system and that influence all of its activity. Like Watzlawick et al. (1974), Argyris & Schon note that a system may deal effectively and appropriately with many problems of a routine nature using only its single-loop (or first-order) learning (or change) mechanisms. However, when the environment of an organization is turbulent or internal elements are in flux, just as when a family is under severe stress or is in developmental transition, the system will experience distress and may even falter and begin to fail, if it continues to apply single-loop (or first-order) solutions. These are the kinds of times when an organization calls in a consultant or a family enters therapy. The consultant's job is to help the organization achieve a higher order of change than that which its present structure allows. In the terms of the present work, this means changes in the rules and resources that make possible and that guide members' interactive behavior, and that their behavior produces and reproduces. It means changes in observable patterns of interaction within and among holons. It means changes in the shared worldview, the co-created social reality, the myths and beliefs of the system.

Each time a system exhibits such change, it may be said to have transformed, to have evolved, or to have developed. Every human system experiences such "development" in the course of its "life

cycle," its existence as a discernable system. In human systems all about us, then, there are examples of "natural" development, providing a laboratory for the systemic consultant to study systemic change. Too, a consultant will need to know how a particular organization has changed spontaneously through its own history to know better how to help it change in future. The next section, then, is devoted to a consideration of system evolution, or the phenomenon of development.

Evolution

As a human being passes from infancy to childhood and on through the many phases of adulthood, myriads of internal changes take place. While the passage is unique for each of us, there are commonalities readily identifiable even across cultural boundaries, suggesting that personal development may in certain ways be ineluctable in terms of the broad parameters defining its possible scope and necessary sequence. ·

In individual development the occurrence of second-order change may readily be seen. Sometimes gradually and imperceptibly, at other times dramatically and cathartically, the individual changes the manner in which she organizes her interactions with the world. Perhaps most notably this includes redefinitions of what the world is like and how it is to be interpreted: that is, a redefinition of reality.

This section examines the question of whether supraindividual

human systems also undergo developmental stages. Theorists of both family systems and organizations have suggested that this may be so. Further, they posit certain commonalities characterizing the development of similar kinds of human systems. Presented below are ideas from both family system theory and organizational theory in support of such a claim.

Family life cycle

Family system theory identifies stages of family development by the unique "tasks" that the family faces at each turning. When two people form a couple, for example, their special tasks differ from those in later years. Immediately, they are faced with separating from their respective families of origin and developing "a mutual accomodation in a large number of small routines" (Minuchin, 1974, p. 17). Later, perhaps, the birth of a child will entail new transactional patterns to allow for baby's care, the development of separate child/parent holons, and other reorganization of the family. Again new demands are made upon the family system as children grow and leave home, and as their parents age. Each new transitional point in the family's evolution places stress on the existing family structure and requires that it adapt to the changed curcumstances.

In addition to developmental transition points common to most families, various other contingencies may require the family system to change if it is to maintain functional continuity. Serious illness in a family member may require temporary restructuring of the hierarchy,

for example. A single family member may experience stress from an external source such that the family must accomodate to that member's changed circumstances, as when an adult member loses her job, or a child has trouble in school. The family's interactions with various social institutions in the external world may also strain its organizational functioning. And poverty, discrimination, and economic depression are global environmental threats, from the standpoint of the single family sytstem. All these stressors require the family to adapt its rules and its worldview.

Whether every human system of a given type (such as families) may be said to experience a common sequence of themes in developing over time is perhaps open to question. The importance of developmental change for the systemic interventionist is that it is (1) spontaneous and (2) second order. In families, development also appears to be (3) unidirectional: once the change is made, the family never reverts to a previous mode of structuring itself.

Families, of course, may be seen as a very special class of human system, for they are by nature exceedingly reactive to the personal development of their individual members. In negotiating a new developmental phase, it may be said that a family's growth process is such that new patterns of interaction and new systemic structures are necessary in order for both the individual members and the family as a whole to develop appropriately. Can organizations be seen as "developing" in this same sense, however?

<u>Organizational</u> <u>stages</u> <u>of</u> <u>development</u>

A very small body of literature does suggest the existence of
developmental life cycles in organizations. Prominent is Greiner's
(1972) work wherein he posits that growing bureaucratic corporations
characteristically develop through five recognizable phases.
According to his schema, each stage emerges through a revolutionary
period of "substantial turmoil in organizational life," followed by an
evolutionary period of quiet, gradual growth (Greiner, 1972, p. 38).
Each period of fairly even, stable growth, or evolution, brings the
organization to the threshold of the crisis period, or revolution,
that presages the next developmental stage and another period of quiet
growth. (See Figure 5.)

As the organization emerges from each revolutionary crisis into a
stable period of growth, it is marked by new patterns and structure,
and in Greiner's terms, a new "management style," characterized by a
particular "focus" and a particular set of assumptions about
management and decision making. Each stable period leads, however, to
a new "management crisis," as accepted methods and beliefs can no
longer deal adequately with the problems of a growing organization.
According to Greiner, this progression is unidirectional, and the
appropriate changes at each crisis point are "narrowly prescribed, if
growth is to occur" (1972, p. 41). Thus, the organization cannot
revert to a previous style or structure in order to deal with the new
crisis.

Furthermore, each new solution "breeds new problems," in that it

FIGURE 5

THE FIVE PHASES OF ORGANIZATIONAL GROWTH
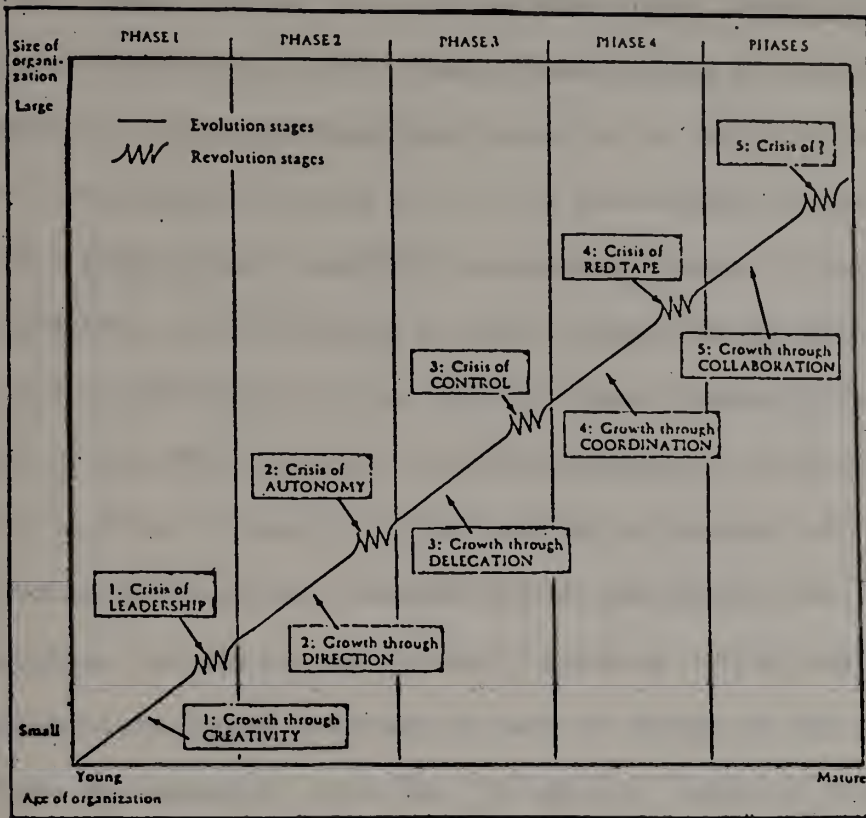
Note. From Greiner, 1972, p. 41.

allows for further change in the organization, and particularly it allows growth in size and complexity. It should be kept in mind that Greiner's is a model explicitly for industrial organizations experiencing (and inviting) continual increase in size and complexity. If top management decided not to encourage growth, according to Greiner, an organization could remain indefinitely at one stage.

Greiner's schema is remarkably parallel to the model of a family's developmental cycle, not in the particulars of the stages, but in the process that engenders development itself. Like the family model, Greiner's is referenced to inner changes in the system that stress its organizational mode, and that demand second-order change on the part of the entire system, including changes in both structure and beliefs, in order to cope with the internal stress and to reach the next developmental phase. Development is ineluctable and irreversable, as long as the system is growing. Solutions at one stage themselves become problems in need of change at the next stage.

Thus, for example, after the "delegation" phase is reached, the organization can allow individual units greater autonomny to take initiative and expand profitably, and top management can now focus on acquiring more of these units, thus expanding the scope of the entire company. However, as the organization continues to grow, top management can no longer keep in touch through its infrequent formalized communication with the field, and the delegative structure is no longer operationally effective for the system as a whole. A "crisis of control" is reached. However, for a time the organization

may continue to apply this solution, as "delegation" is now a part of the dominant ethos of the organization, though the more it's applied the more it contributes to the problem of controlling the growing organization. This problem must be solved through second-order change, a revolutionary process from which the system emerges with new structures and a new view of itself and its purpose in the world, now emphasizing the theme of "coordination."

Holleb and Abrams (1975) created a developmental model of the life cycle of alternative mental health organizations. Their model attempts to characterize the stages of development commonly experienced by organizations with experimental structures and forms. Such organizations are typically based on consensuality rather than role-related hierarchy, emphasizing the sharing of power, commitment, and responsibility among members. Holleb & Abrams identified a three-stage pathway for such organizations, leading to a crossroads and a crucial choice.

In its initial stage of consensual anarchy, the fledgling alternative organization is characterized by ideological fervor, a flexible structure, and fluid, undefined procedures. As the staff's tolerance for such ambiguity wears thin, however, the "flexibility and fluidity" are perceived increasingly as "chaos." Members begin to push for differentiation of roles and jobs, and for formalizing procedures that have heretofore been informal.

The second and third stages, then, involve differentiation.

Stage two, _informal differentiation_, emerges as the organization grows in scope and begins to focus more on competent service delivery than on ideological concerns. Members take responsibility for particular duties, including administration, according to skill and expertise, settling into more specific and differentiated roles. Leadership now becomes more established, often in the form of a strong core group. However, there are still no formal boundaries or role assignments. Membership in the core group is coveted by those who feel excluded, and control and influence are (covertly) protected by those who have them, fought for by those who don't.

Struggles over control and inclusion/exclusion become problematic, leading to the third stage, _formal differentiation_. Role assignments and decision-making procedures are openly formalized, the hierarchy is explicitly prescribed, and membership rights and requirements are overtly defined. The resulting organizational form represents a move toward "bureaucratization."

The alternative organization now stands at a crucial crossroads in the developmental path, according to Holleb & Abrams. The organization may follow the well-worn way to a full-blown _bureaucratic_ structure, or it may take the road less traveled by--and that will make all the difference. The final destination in this latter case is _consensual democracy_, in which the values and ideology of earlier times are reaffirmed. Now, however, there are clear and overt rules and procedures to define roles and responsibilities (even if they rotate or are shared), and representative committees or task groups

make decisions for the organization.

Discussion. Ingle (1980), in reviewing the work of Holleb &
Abrams (1975), points out that the data base for their model amounts
to "historical description" of alternative organizations, and it may
be erroneous to extrapolate an "organizational prescription" from
this. Ingle proposes the possibility that an alternative organization
might "deliberately develop clear organizational structures right from
the beginning," thus avoiding the pressure toward "bureaucratization"
effected by the ambiguity and chaos present in many infant
alternatives (Ingle, 1980, p. 29). Ingle argues that there are
"earlier choices," prior to the bureaucracy/consensual democracy
crossroads of the Holleb & Abrams (1975) model, and he doubts the
prescriptive value of their work (Ingle, 1980, pp. 29-30).

The same criticism may be leveled at Greiner's (1972) work. The
fact that many (or even most) organizations in business and industry
follow a similiar pattern does not logically necessitate that the
pattern is inevitable, or even irreversable. Organizations, in other
words, may differ from families in that "development" is for them a
process involving more choice than families have, including the choice
not to develop or to skip stages of development.

Greiner's work, however, is premised on a view of organizational
structure as responding to the problem-solving needs of the
organization. As problem-solving needs change, so must the structure
change. In the case of alternatives, too, the conditions and problems

of inception and early beginnings are very different from those of later stages. It may well be that "consensual democracy" would prove anomolous to a new-born alternative, ineffectual for allowing the early developmental processes necessary to these particular organizations.

I believe this is still an open question. Organizational development clearly does differ from familial development; however, there is some evidence that human groups other than families develop in recognizably patterned ways, and it is not unreasonable to hypothesize that organizations may experience common patterns of predictable, ineluctable, and even unidirectional, internal development.

Of particular interest for our purposes here is the fact that in both Greiner's (1972) and Holleb & Abrams' (1975) models the organization solves an internal developmental crisis, only to find that the solution eventually engenders new problems, and ultimately further change is necessary. Too, both models describe a need for second-order change at each developmental juncture, if such junctures are to be traversed successfully. The precise pattern of development is somewhat different in each organizational form, and as Ingle suggests, it may be that neither is preordained. However, I underscore the fact that the developmental process, as suggested by all of the above authors, is quintessentially identical: (1) The organization grows and changes internally such that its rules, resources and patterns of interaction and its shared worldview are no

longer adequate to handle the problems that exist. (2) Through second-order change, the organization develops new structures and a new view of reality, once again allowing it to cope effectively with its internal problems and with the world. (3) This developmental cycle is repeated over time.

The concept is here accepted that human systems are self-transforming, and in this sense do experience development over time. Moreover, as Maturana (1980) and Maturana & Varela (1980) point out, it is the existing structure at any given moment that presents the possibilities for future development and in some ways constrains (but does not absolutely determine) its direction. Development of human systems, in this view, need not be seen as the product of either "nature" or "nuture." Neither internal forces nor external pressures are seen as "explaining" radical change in social systems. The reflexive operation of interactive behavior in the autopoietic process of self-transformation responds both to internal conditions and to conditions that are external to the system under observation.

Summary

This chapter has examined the theoretical bases for an understanding of change in human systems, where change of some sort is a "constant." Second-order change, or transformation of structure and of social reality is seen as the kind of change that makes a systemic "difference." Development, in this context, is seen as the

self-transformation, or autopoiesis, of human systems as they are changed through the co-creative agency of their members' interactive behavior. In a human system both internal and external conditions are constantly changing, and thus the system experiences a continual series of developmental transformations of structure and worldview.

The next chapter examines the literature on independent alternative schools to discover whether these organizations might be said to share any common characteristics in their developmental life cycles.

P A R T   T H R E E

TOWARD A SYSTEMIC CONCEPT OF DEVELOPMENT

SECTION B: ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS

C H A P T E R   I X

ORGANIZATIONAL SELF-TRANSFORMATION

The task of this chapter is to glean from the literature on
alternative schools ideas about how those particular organizations
develop over time, and through what stages they may characteristically
pass. It will be useful to note the dominant themes sounded in the
literature on schools cited earlier and echoed in the many anecdotal
accounts of alternative school struggles, successes, and failures.
The discussion in this chapter follows the lead of literature on the
family life cycle in presenting (a) the characteristics of each stage
of development and (b) the tasks facing the organization at each
stage.

Development Patterns: Major Themes

Opening notes: ecstatic chaos

Beginnings are perhaps best typified as ecstatically chaotic. By
all accounts, good will, bon homie, excitement, and high hopes abound.
Everyone shares in a general sense of enthusiasm, of "excitement,
romance, and adventure" (Deal, 1975, p. 11). A conscious avoidance of

regulation making and formal procedures seems fairly common. This reflects both a rejection of traditional forms, with their excessive dependence on a vertical hierarchy and accompanying red tape, and acknowledgement of the need to create unique new forms more in keeping with alternative goals. Workable procedures are unclearly visualized (if visualized at all), and ways for getting decisions made, problems solved, and work done are unspecified. Informal understandings among members, usually inexplicit and vague, provide what little procedural direction may exist.

The main task of this period could be characterized as "rallying the throng." The original core group of founders must assemble the persons whose activities and interactions are to <u>become</u> the school. As members accrue, their interactions with one another are expressive of and influential in the rapidly evolving structure of rules and resources and patterns of interaction. The task is to accrue a stable enough membership that rules and patterns will eventually be able to emerge.

<u>The</u> <u>thematic</u> <u>material</u>: <u>mission</u> <u>defined</u>

A period of considerable upheaval, fraught with various possible horrors, is often reported to follow in the wake of a school's grand beginnings. Schools that survive this turbulent period--however it may be characterized and explained--appear to do so through the accomplishment of certain tasks. Most notably, mention is almost invariably made of the need to clarify and prioritize goals in order

to move ahead. This is a process involving more than mere logical prioritizing. It hits at the heart of the school: its mythos and its mission.

The Center for New Schools (1972) speak of conflict between "process goals," according to which the school operates, "outcome goals," which describe abilities and gains that students will acquire, and "specific practices" that may tacitly reflect various other goals and assumptions. Process goals, for example, include close relationships between staff and students, and shared decision making in which all participate. Outcome goals include students' ability to learn and to act independently, to develop strong individual interests and aptitudes, and to participate effectively in social and political processes. Specific practices instituted to attain some of these goals may include a weekly all-community consensus style meeting for making the important decisions about the school's operation.

The difficulties encountered after the halcyon days of the school's early life, say the Center for New Schools (1972), may include lack of participation by students in the meetings, the emergence of strong interpersonal conflicts during discussions in meetings, non-implementation of decisions made in meetings, lack of follow-through by students on their plans for study and coursework. As long as the community has not sorted priorities among its goals, they say, it will be powerless to repair these breaches, for each problem is in some way supported by one of the goals of the school, while it is problematic in terms of another goal, or in terms of

accepted practice.

Another way to view this phenomenon is to see the school engaged in the process of defining its mission in the world. Typically, it must sort out its values, beliefs and ideology in order to emerge with a clearer sense of mission, a collective set of beliefs and values. Many a school struggles long and hard with this stage.

> The Pilot School, committed to a notion of cross-cultural education, promised implicitly to deliver both basic skills and college preparation in an atmosphere of student initiative and choice. The school is still wrestling with the contradictions inherent in this promise. (Riordan, 1972, p. 42)

Singleton, Boyer and Dorsey (1972), in their study of a free school called Xanadu, remark on similar developments in what they term a "structure crisis" during the school's second semester. Some of the salient values and beliefs of Xanadu are described as follows:

> The climate of Xanadu will allow students to find themselves. It will provide an opportunity to search for the truth with self-direction within the framework of freedom and challenge, replacing the emphasis on excessive competition with one of human cooperation. Students will learn to be responsible for their own education, to make choices and face the consequences of those decisions. (Xanadu Manifesto, quoted in Singleton et al., 1972, p. 529)

At least two different sets of values are compressed into this excerpt from Xanadu's Manifesto:

(1) Students are individually responsible for their own learning, and must choose for themselves. Originally, the design for scheduling classes called for teachers to offer seminars based on expressed student interests and staff competencies. At the beginning of the second semester,

some of the more influential students led a successful drive to disband classes and substitute "individualized instruction," with staff to function merely as "resource persons." This resulted in a near-total acceptance of individual autonomy. (Singleton et al., 1972, p. 528)

(2) Work should be undertaken in a spirit of cooperation, rather than competition.

While students recognized that their education would be facilitated by organized group sessions, they feared that such organized groups would compromise the value of cooperation which all Xanadu members hold very seriously. Several students felt that competition would arise in an organized group setting. (p. 529)

Two other strongly held values are combined in the Xanadu broth, as well:

(3) The "authenticity" of personal experience was valued over "contrived" situations, as being the more powerful kind of learning experience.

In this connection, there was a failure to agree upon the place of "academic" pursuits. Students expressed a distaste for "contrived" school settings, preferring rather spontaneity and authenticity to "structure." One of the students who helped lead the campaign to eliminate classes echoed the sentiments of many students when he held that "We reject anything that even smells of structure." (p. 530)

(4) Tolerance for others was a strongly held norm of behavior at Xanadu.

The "acceptance" of the other is so pervasive that there fails to be an engagement of the other in critical dialogue. Partially, this is the result of the "ideological" self-selection of students active in Xanadu. Most students espoused radical political and social perspectives, and an integral component of such a belief system was a strong desire to be tolerant of others' perspectives. (p. 530)

Singleton et al. (1972) contend that these goals, values, and beliefs, all held in equal regard, effectively paralyzed the school

and inhibited it in developing workable procedures. Regularly held classes were not allowable, especially not if instituted by the (now demoralized) staff. Nothing could be done about lack of attendance at school meetings or lack of follow-through on students' individualized programs of study, even though some students complained that staff ought to provide "more structure" and engage in moral exhortation. Conflict resolution through debate and open discussion was effectively impeded by the high value placed on tolerance and acceptance of others' views and opinions. Likewise, group learning experiences might be seen as inimical to acceptance of individual difference. Thus, a tendency to avoid involvement in groups clashed with the value placed on cooperation.

A fifth factor comes into play here:

(5) The prevailing attitude of abhorance toward power and authority effectively restrained all participants from assuming leadership positions. This attitude may be seen as a corollary to the belief in individual autonomy and the political and social anarchy implied in a tolerance for any and all opinions as equally valid and acceptable.

In sum, the effect on Xanadu of these conjointly held values and beliefs was to inhibit the creation of regularity, of procedures, of structures for making decisions and solving problems. The task before the membership was to clarify the mission of the school, to prioritize among those values that conflicted with one another, to evolve a collective statement of belief, a mythos that would permit the

organization to make rules for decision making and problem solving,
for coping with the world and for change. As long as the conflicts
inherent in its particular collection of values remained unresolved,
Xanadu would be unable to take effective action.

Some alternative schools begin with a clearer ideology than do
others. Often, "outcome" goals for the educational program may be
clearer than are the "process goals" for the operation of the
organization. Even schools without the emphasis on egalitarian
student involvement in decision making that existed at Metro and
Xanadu face similar issues in the area of governance. At Magic
Mountain, it was the question of "who's in charge here?" that
beleaguered staff interactions year after year, long after the
educational mission had been formulated and specific expectations for
student performance and behavior had been clarified. And a definitive
position on educational priorities was not taken until after the
second year, when staff fully accepted that goals for student growth
would take priority over meeting the emotional needs of staff or
parents. (See Harvey, 1974.)

Completion of the main tasks at each stage involves a major shift
in worldview. School after school in the literature began
euphorically with a collective belief best stated thus: "A good
school welcomes every member's special qualities and meets every
member's unique needs." A wrenching shift must be made to a
self-image such as the following: "This good school is for people

with these particular qualities and these particular needs."

Thematic resolution: defining procedure

Sorting among values means limiting the school's horizons, admitting the impossibility of meeting all needs and accomplishing all worthy goals. As this necessity is faced and finally taken in hand, the school is enabled to move to another major task, one that is evidently also a universal feature of alternative school development. Standard procedures must be formulated for getting the work of the organization done, for operating on a routine basis, as well as for solving unforeseen problems and making major decisions. Many schools, of course, begin with those procedures defined on paper, but even for them considerable rebuilding of such procedures, as practiced, is apparently almost inescapable at a later stage. Duke (1978b) found in his study that "virtually every school in the sample underwent changes in [decision-making] processes during its first year or two of operation" (p. 59).

Several sources note that diffuse roles and the idea that "everyone can do everything" characterize many alternative school beginnings. Duke (1978b) notes a trend among schools in his sample to eventually move away from such diffuseness and toward a more segmented structure with greater division of responsibility and role definition. In addition, parental involvement decreased, and "the influence of teachers on decision-making increased over time" (p. 57).

The process of sorting and defining different jobs for different

members is often difficult for alternative school people.

> Teachers in nonpublic alternative schools are subject to role
> confusion, particularly if they have had experience in public
> schools. Parents and students do not escape this phenomenon
> either. Those alternative schools that survive the first year or
> two manage to minimize role conflict. Teachers accept membership
> as equals in the school community or they become recognized
> clearly as professional employees. Parents wrestle with their
> own participation until they can work out a relatively even
> distribution of responsibilities or until they can agree to leave
> most of the chores to the hired staff. Students who feel
> uncomfortable assuming considerable responsibility for their
> education return to public schools or traditional private
> institutions. Overall, the reduction of role conflict in
> alternative schools probably involves as much unlearning of
> previous roles as the learning of new ones. (Duke, 1973, pp.
> 72-73)

This process probably reflects in part the establishment of a
clear mission acceptable to the total community, such that the
operational structure no longer needs to involve everyone in
everything. The school can now begin to formulate procedures and
divide responsibilities, trusting that each participant will do his or
her part in accordance with the school ideology as agreed upon.

The structure is evolving now with increasing complexity and
sophistocation. Members can "recognize" the patterns of their mutual
interaction and the rules they follow. They can use their mutual
knowledge of the rules, their relational contracts with one another,
to get their business done. With such use, the patterns and rules are
elaborated and refined. When members have intimately learned and
adopted a set of patterns so that they are automatic, intricate
elaborations become possible. Infinite creative variations in
individual performance and application appear, which in turn influence
the continued development of the structure.

Many, many alternatives, as already shown, begin with a professed abhorence of "structure," of rule-governed procedure. Graubard (1972) observes that "a definite tendency of most free schools that last is toward more structure as the school gets older" (p. 156). As we have seen, rule-governed behavior is a definitive feature of human groups, and people who spend any length of time together in an identified group will always evolve patterns that allow them to align their own interactive behavior and to trust in the predictability of other people's responses. It has been the widely accepted but anomolous belief of many alternative school people that "the less structure the better." The anomoly here is in that "structure" is, as I suggest, both inevitable and unquantifiable. We may wish to evolve forms for alternative schools that are structurally more flexible than are bureaucratic forms. However, a human group by definition always has structure.

Even within classrooms, teachers have discovered that, in order for children to learn in a non-traditional, child-centered setting, the teacher must often more than double the time she or he spends in planning and organizing the space, the materials, the records, and in teaching the children to organize their own materials and time. A classroom in which different children are engaged in a variety of different activities, in which no neat array of desks is discernable, in which children may be talking to one another in twos and threes while the teacher converses with only a single child--such a classroom may actually be very highly structured, in terms of complexity of

organization, expectations for behavior, and evaluative activities.

Alternative schools, however, have displayed a certain embarrassment about adopting regular formal procedures, not understanding that using regular procedures in a human group is like trying to catch fish when you are fishing. There are many ways to catch fish--and you could maybe create a brand new way--but if you're not trying to catch fish you're not fishing at all. A mass of humans with no regular procedures for interacting is not a "human group" at all.

Deal (1975, 1978) argues that alternative schools are in need of highly evolved, sophistocated structures if they are to succeed under their own terms. Traditional structures might even be less complex than are the organizational structures that alternative schools may need to evolve in order to implement their ideas and accomplish their complex missions within the often hostile environments in which they operate.

> Yet structurally, alternative schools were primitive, undeveloped, fragmented, and highly informal. The counter culture ideology abhors organization, routinization, and bureaucracy, and as a result decision making in the alternative schools was participatory, consensual, cumbersome, burdensome, and ineffective. Problem solving was laborious, although enough problems existed to keep even a well-oiled system working at full capacity. (Deal, 1978, p. 119)

> The successful alternative schools developed a well-knit, sophisitcated organization capable of supporting the highly complex instructional program they had chosen to operate. (Deal, 1978, p. 121)

As a school matures organizationally, there may need to be a growing recognition that, "hey, we do have regular ways of doing

things around here; and it works for us that way; and, no, it's mostly
not open to question any more whether that's how we're going to
operate." At this point, the school is ready to formalize its
organizational procedures, if it has not already done so, and to stand
unembarrassed behind the coherence of its chosen structural form.

Coda: Attaining a "place"

Ideally, one can envision a final major task for the alternative
school organization, that of establishing and assuming its place in
the community. This would involve periodic long-range evaluation and
planning. It would include continual reassessment of the social
milieu and of the impact of external social factors on the school, as
well as the ways in which the school wishes to make its presence felt
and to have influence in its environment. It means continued
flexibility in order to stay coherent in a changing world.

An important task at this stage is the establishment of secure
ties and relationships in the surrounding community. Especially for
alternative schools, this could profitably take the form of
"networking" with other alternatives, sharing resources and knowledge.
In cities such as Berkeley and Chicago, for example, alternative
school network organizations flourished for a time, their sole purpose
being to link schools with each other and with other resources in the
community, such as funding sources and supportive businesses. This
stage could amount to a move toward "institutionalization."
Consideration of such a stage in life for an alternative school brings

up a fundamental question: do (or should) alternative schools expect

to become "institutions" in society? Or, if such an end is reached,

has the school by definition left the ranks of the "alternative"? It

may mean a degree of "coherence" with the external world such that the

school no longer challenges the prevailing worldview and ceases

thereby to offer an alternative. Riordan (1972) states the latter

case without qualification:

> Alternative schools must see themselves as transitional, not
> as ends in themselves, but as flexible, changeable institutions,
> as expendable forms that will facilitate the transition to the
> education of the future. (p. 45)

According to this view, it is the work of alternative schools to

engage in the struggle and the search, to endure the transience and

the ambiguity and the uncertainty, in order to prepare the way for a

changed society. Once institutionalized, today's alternative becomes

tomorrow's convention.

Few authors address the question of the eventual

institutionalization of alternatives. Perhaps it is unnecessary to

take a general stand on the issue, but rather possible to allow that

"success" for one alternative may culminate in its own demise, and for

another in its becoming a permanent and acceptable (thus no longer

"alternative") part of the (now changed) establishment.

Summary

This chapter has drawn on the existing literature about

alternative schools and their development as organizations to propose

a picture of the typical life cycle of such an organization. Two important caveats are in order.

First, this is an initial attempt to characterize a class whose members vary widely. The stages may not apply exactly to particular alternative schools. Also, this characterization is based on existing literature, most of it anecdotal, and does not stem from any rigorous long-range study of these organizations. Many of the conclusions are highly conjectural. The outline offered in the preceding pages is meant as a guide to those who may wish to employ systemic techniques of helping alternative schools to negotiate their developmental pathways, or to those who may want to conduct further on-site study of developmental phenomena in independent alternative schools. A given school's development may or may not fit the description offered above, and it should not be used prescriptively to indicate how a school "should" develop.

Second, the outline as provided is necessarily linear in form, but development itself is generally not. The stages may not occur one at a time in orderly sequence. Some schools may begin networking very early, for example, soon after their initial membership is amassed and well before routines are established. Some of the specific tasks of any one stage may be performed earlier or later than indicated in the outline above. The attempt here is to show that development, as a process of spontaneous meta-change, may include recognizable kinds of change, and to tentatively and broadly characterize the changes that an alternative school may expect to undergo. This does not mean,

however, that more than one kind of change cannot happen simultaneously, or even in a different order.

In general, the "developmental task" framework is found to be more useful in systemic work than is the proffering of advice or rules for success. The former attempts to state in broad terms the problem that the organization must solve in its given stage; the latter approach offers a set solution to such a problem, usually without overtly stating the problem. The systemic consultant would hold that each system may devise a unique solution to the problem (and many similar systems may indeed adopt nearly identical solutions in practice), but the underlying commonality is the developmental problem or task, not the solution to be chosen.

The traversing of each stage of an organization's development requires the system to shift its view of reality and take on a new self-image, as well as to evolve new rules. This is the essence of second-order change. Because you cannot be where you are now and also where you will be later, there is no way to give you the later perspective now. You can only see the world in your present frame. A certain amount of preparation might help, but as the immediate experience of wrestling with the changing reality of adolescence is ultimately the only way to grow from a twelve-year-old into an adult, so must organizations have immediate "experience" in order to "learn." There is no way to offer failsafe rules for the organization to follow in its unique and individual progress through its developmental stages. Perhaps knowledge of what to expect would help schools in

finding their unique solutions to the problems posed at each turning point. However, the forgoing chapter is not intended to imply that schools need to know about these stages and the tasks that they impose in order to be able to develop. On the contrary, the idea is that such changes <u>will</u> happen, and if the school is to survive at all it <u>will</u> find ways to negotiate them, whether or not the members of the school are aware of them as "stages."

At the same time, we are ultimately concerned here with the question of how to help schools that appear unable to find within their structures the resources for meta-change that will address their particular developmental challenges. This is when outside intervention may be called for, and an outside consultant may benefit from information about typical stages of development and accompanying tasks that might be stumping the organization.

Part Four of this thesis explores those situations in which an organization finds itself unable to achieve spontaneous meta-change that addresses its developmental tasks, whether they be tasks imposed by "life cycle" or by impingements from the outside world. At these times, meta-level change may need to be inspired in the system through the conscious efforts of persons who are not permanent members of the system.

PART   FOUR

TOWARD A SYSTEMIC CONCEPT OF INTERVENTION

SECTION A: SYSTEMIC THEORY

C H A P T E R   X

PROBLEMS

Introduction

For the purposes of a systemic theory of intervention it will be
useful to differentiate between "difficulties," "problems," and
"symptoms." A "difficulty" for a system is a challenge to its
resourcefulness, perhaps, but is not beyond the capacities of its
present structural form. Take, for example, an oyster with a pearl
inside. The system has responded to an irritating grain of sand that
cannot be got rid of, by encasing it so that the oyster is once again
able to continue comfortably in oysterdom, even without totally
eliminating the grain of sand from its physical organism.

A "problem," on the other hand, is defined as a challenge that
the structural members and the relationships and patterns of
interaction cannot overcome as they are currently configured. One of
the ways in which the structures of systems come to change is through
dealing with difficulties whose solutions depend upon a change in
structure. Such self-change, or autopoeisis, as we saw in an earlier
chapter, is often in the repertoire of existing systemic structure.

However, when the present structure proves unable to transform itself in order to meet a challenge, the system may be said to have a problem.

Both "difficulties" and "problems" are generally accompanied by a degree of discomfort for the members of human systems. A very rough signal of a problem, as distinct from a difficulty, might be discomfort that persists or recurs despite various attempts on part of the system to produce a change and achieve tolerable comfort for the members.

Generally, such persistent discomfort will manifest itself through some visible anomaly in the system. This anomaly, which flags the problem but is not the totality of the problem, is a "symptom." In the family systems literature the symptom is also referred to as the "presenting problem," since very often a family presents its symptom (or symptomatic member) to the therapist as "the problem."

Every aspect of a system is in some regard integral to the system. This is not to say that every element is necessary to the system. Like every other aspect of the system, the "presenting problem," or symptom, is also a coherent part of the system (though the system doesn't necessarily need it in order to remain coherently itself). This means other elements in the system live with and around the symptom. It is a part of their daily existence; systemic patterns and routines revolve around it and include it, and many patterns are premised on the continuance of the symptom and effectively support its continuance. The system maintains a certain devotion to the symptom,

embedded as it is in the system. This chapter investigates several ways in which the symptom in a family may be seen as an active ingredient in system-wide processes.

The Symptom as System Maintaining

The symptom as a problem-solving device

In a majority of cases, a family comes to therapy with a symptom or presenting problem that they see as strongly seated with one family member, the "identified patient." Occasionally, the family may define a particular relationship as "the problem," rather than a person. In any event, Minuchin's (1974) view of a symptom in a family is that the symptom itself, like every other pattern in the family repertoir, functions to maintain the family in its present structure. In turn, the family structure operates to support the continuance of the symptom.

> When a family labels one of its members "the patient," the identified patient's symptoms can be assumed to be a system-maintaining or a system-maintained device. The symptom may be an expression of a family dysfunction. Or it may have arisen in the individual family member because of his particular life circumstances and then been supported by the family system. In either case, the family's consensus that one member is the problem indicates that on some level the symptom is being reinforced by the system. (Minuchin, 1974, p. 110)

For Minuchin, then, it is important to understand just what "function" the symptom serves in the system. "Selecting one person to be the problem is a simple method of maintaining a rigid, inadequate family structure" (Minuchin, 1974, p. 110). The "identified patient"

might be seen as actually a protector of the family, obligingly carrying the symptom so that the family does not have to change its patterns of interaction, thereby risking turmoil and instability.

Thus, a symptom presented by a family in therapy may be seen as helping to arrest another problem, one that the system finds too dangerous to allow out of its cage. For example, Minuchin might see a child's constant misbehavior as keeping the parents from fighting with each other, giving them something to unite around, and ultimately keeping them together. By having a problem with their child, they avoid having one with their marriage. In this way, Minuchin sees the symptom as functioning directly to accomplish something that the system needs to have done. It is seen as an attempt to solve a problem--albeit an inappropriate and unfortuanate attempt.

The symptom as metaphor

Some family system theorists also see the dysfunction as an analogue for other less overt dysfunctions. They view a symptom in one subsystem as a metaphor for problems in another subsystem that are felt to be unresolvable there. The therapist seeks to understand how the family organizes to focus on the presenting problem or the identified patient as an analogue to other interactional dysfunctions that they feel they cannot address.

Haley (1976) offers the example of a family in which the father, as identified patient, is afraid he is going to die of a heart attack, though doctors assure him his heart is normal. The family therapist,

says Haley,

> will assume that the patient's statement about his heart is
> analogic to his current situation. . . . When he interviews the
> husband and wife together, the therapist will take an interest in
> the wife's response when the husband is feeling better and when
> he is feeling worse. For example, he might note that she
> communicates depression when the husband is emphasizing the
> better aspects of his life and health and that she appears more
> involved and animated when he discusses his heart problem. The
> family-oriented therapist will construct a theory that the
> husband's communication about his heart is a way of stabilizing
> the marriage. The kinds of data he will seek are those that
> reveal how the heart analogy is built into the person's ecology,
> or interpersonal network. (1976, p. 91)

Haley, then, focusses on the symptom as serving a metaphorical

function. It is both an attempt to solve a systemic problem, and an

analogue for communicating about that problem and the patterns that

surround it. The symptom is isomorphic to other patterns in the

system. Here, the symptom is not only functional in the sense of

doing something on behalf of the system. More than that, it is also

an outcropping of bedrock, isomorphic with the bedrock that elsewhere

underpins the system, an active indication that "the bedrock here is

granite!" (or shale, or whatever).

> Some people seem to be able to say, "You give me a headache," and
> not have the headache. Others must actually develop a headache,
> using themselves as an analogic tool to express a statement about
> their system. (Haley, 1976, p. 95)

The Symptom as System Maintained

At the same time, it must be remembered that the structure of the

family also supports the continuance of the symptom. The identified

patient does not carry the symptom in isolation, but through the

interactive collusion of the entire family.

For Watzlawick et al. (1974), the presenting problem can be accepted as a true "problem" to be dealt with, ignoring what further meanings or underlying disturbances it may portend or symbolize. However, the systemic forces that maintain the symptom are the therapist's focus of attention. The system can only come up with first-order change, and these first-order solutions actually help maintain the symptom, for they maintain the patterns of which the symptom is an expression. As they continue to be applied, these "more of the same wrong solutions" may actually exacerbate the situation.

> Is pornography a pernicious social evil? For many people
> the answer is an unquestionable (and unquestioned) yes. It is
> therefore logical to fight and repress pornography by all
> available legal means. But the Danish example has shown that the
> complete liberalization of pornography has not only not opened
> the floodgates of sin and general depravity, but has actually
> made people ridicule and ignore it. In the case of pornography,
> then, the "more of the same" solution (legal repression) is not
> just the greater of two problems, it is the problem, for without
> the "solution" there would be no problem. (Watzlawick et al.,
> 1974, p. 33)

In this view, the real problem lies with the fact that the system is limited to first-order solutions that maintain and may even exacerbate the symptom. The first-order solutions are the system's real problem.

The typical "free school" provides a relevant example of a solution that became the problem. The reader will remember the "romantic" laissez-faire ideology, according to which the key to solving problems of all kinds is to lift restraints and do away with rules. This will supposedly allow the best qualities to emerge from

every individual, and will also let the most appropriate
organizational forms evolve. When students did not take advantage of
staff offerings, laboriously planned and fervently advertised, the
tendency in some free schools was to do away with organized offerings
and make "resource persons" of the staff, leaving students with even
less guidance and fewer requirements (i.e. more "freedom"). When
formal models of all-school governance such as direct democracy and
consensual decision making failed due to lack of student
participation, the parallel tendency was to abandon formal procedures
in favor of informal ones, operating on the premise that less
government would be better. Decisions were made and action taken by
whomever happened to be in the right place at the right time with
enough interest in the matter to take part. Again, this solution
amounts to banishing formal rules and offering ever more "freedom,"
with students then engaging even less in those activities the school
most values.

According to Watzlawick, one might hypothesize that the solution
applied to problems in such a school is the "real" problem. The motto
"freedom conquers all" is at the heart of all the problematic
transactions here. Yet that precept is integral to the very nature
and character of the school. It may appear that this understanding
hardly benefits one in seeing how to bring about a happier state of
affairs in this school without doing violence to its basic mission. A
later chapter will discuss specific implications for intervention
practice in settings such as the free school in the example above.

Here we underscore the observation that the various solutions to the presenting problem, which have always come from the same set of assumptions about the symptom, have literally become the problem. The presenting problem can be solved, and if an intervention is to be successful it must be. But interventions will be aimed at helping the system achieve a higher order of change so that it will not keep applying the same wrong solution. Again, the presenting problem has been seen as embedded in the operations of the system. The very workings of the system may need to be shaken loose if the symptom is to be cured. Basic assumptions about the world may need to change.

The Symptom as a Move in the Game

The view that Selvini Palazzoli, Boscolo, Ceccin & Prata (1978) take of the symptom perhaps comes closest to reflexively combining its system-maintaining and system-maintained aspects. They see a presenting problem as one among many "moves" in a "game without end" that the entire family is playing (albeit a powerful move). In this way they relegate the symptom to the status of any other interactive behavior in the system. As discussed earlier, all interactive behaviors both produce and are produced by the rules and resources of the system. The rules of the family system generate the interactive behaviors of the family, including the symptom. These behaviors in turn collectively reproduce the rules, and thus reproduce the symptom. Schizophrenic behavior, for example, stands as a very powerful "move"

that follows the family rule that has everyone disqualifying both self and other. "I'm not really here, and neither are you," says this "crazy" behavior in what is a mastermove, for this system. Insofar as the family collaborates to maintain the rule of disqualification (by following it), they unwittingly collaborate to maintain the psychotic behavior. (It's important to note that they are not "making" the schizophrenic member "crazy." The rules are crazy.)

A "natural group" such as a family or work team, say Selvini Palazzoli et al. (1978), is

> a systemic unit held together by rules peculiar to it alone. These rules are related to the transactions which occur in in the natural group. . . . Families in which one or more members present behaviors traditionally diagnosed as "pathological," are held together by transactions and, therefore, by rules peculiar to the pathology. Hence the behavior-communications and the behavior-responses will have such characteristics which maintain the rules and, thereby, the pathological transaction. Since the symptomatic behavior is part of the transactional pattern peculiar to the system in which it occurs, the way to eliminate the symptoms is to change the rules. (pp. 3-4)

> The "problem" should be considered only as a move, undoubtedly central, in the formation and maintenance of the game. (p. 137)

The Milan team goes after the game, rather than the symptom, which is a mere move in the game. (Though the therapist may learn a great deal from this "move" about the nature of the game.) They even cite cases in which the symptom has disappeared but they believe the essential rules of the game have nonetheless remained intact. They hypothesize that the family system in this case gives up the symptom in order to avoid the threat of the unknown that looms if therapy were truly effective and the rules were changed. When this happens, the

family presents itself "cured" of the symptom without justification in terms of

> a related change in the transactional patterns of the family system. . . . The main characteristic of such an improvement is that it is sudden and inexplicable, accompanied by a carefree attitude and a certain optimism--tout va tres bien, Madame de la Marquise--which is in no way substantiated by convincing data. With this attitude, the family implicitly conveys to the therapists its collective intention to catch the first departing train, that is, of getting out of the therapy as fast as possible. (Selvini Palazzoli et al., 1978, p. 113)

Summary

Family systems theorists see a "presenting problem" as a lead for them to follow in helping the family system to reorganize more effectively. The therapist uses the presenting problem to gain information about the structural rules and patterns, paying particular attention to those rules and patterns that maintain the presenting problem and those rules and patterns that the problem, in turn, maintains. Some therapists also see the problem as providing metaphoric messages about other system dysfunctions. Some see the family's habitual problem-solving behavior as the real problem. Some see a set of transactional patterns involving the entire system, and including the symptom as one such transaction, as the problem to be dealt with in therapy.

Challenges are faced continually in any human system as it goes about its business of maintaining coherency in its universe. Some challenges require simple, repetative change loops; in other cases the

system undergoes second-order change, evolving brand new rules and patterns, in order to meet a challenge. In actuality, human systems are probably continuously involved in both kinds of change, though not necessarily in a dramatically obvious manner. Every living system is both auto-corrective (through first-order change) and auto-transformative (through second-order change).

A "problem," as distinct from a "difficulty," arises when the human system is unable to proceed with structural change sufficient to allow it to deal with the challenges presented to it. The "symptom" signals the presence of a problem involving a need for change in structural components, including both rules and patterns of interaction. The problem is that the system has not successfully changed itself to meet the challenge, and thus has suffered chronic discomfort beyond the bounds of tolerance among its membership. The challenge itself is not considered to be the "problem."

In severe cases, a system with a problem may be threatened with dissolution, as is the case with a failing independent school. It may be literally impossible for the system to change itself enough to meet the challenge presented without giving up those relations that define it as the type of system that it is, i.e. its "organization," in Maturana's (1980) terms. In other words, a system may encounter a problem that has no solution for that system.

More often, solutions are possible but the resources for finding and implementing them are not within reach of the members of the system. In these cases, a family therapist or organizational

consultant may help.

Problems may arise with regard to circumstances originating outside the system, or developmental processes within the system. In families, turning points in the family life cycle may present challenges that the family is unequipped for. Symptoms may appear after the birth of a second child, say, or when it's time for a young person to leave home. Organizations, as we have seen, also face successive developmental challenges, and any of these could find the organization similarly unprepared to make necessary changes.

The implications for intervention strategies of a systemic view of the problem are far reaching. The therapist or consultant will not work purely to remove the presenting problem (though in most cases this will certainly comprise a part of the goal of therapy). The overarching goal of the intervention process is to allow the system to reorganize so that the symptom may no longer hold a legitimate place in the structure of the system, and so that the system may maintain coherency in its universe without the level of suffering that had been the cost of coherency in the past.

C H A P T E R   X I

INTERVENTION

Introduction

In the course of normal, effective operation, a human system
deals with an endless stream of what it sees as "problems" through
first-order patterns. These "problems" are nothing more than the
reflexive impingements of environment and system upon one another.
Human systems are able to change their own structures, their patterns
of coherency, and when old structures are inadequate new ones may
evolve. Watzlawick et al. (1974) refer to such change as
"second-order change."

It is possible, however, for a system to be structured such that
effective structural change is inhibited at a point when such change
is needed. At such times, families may seek therapy, and
organizations may call in consultants. How might a systemic
interventionist respond to such a call?

We begin with the work of systemic family therapists, for in that
field, as in no other, systemic theory has been tested in countless
situations of human need. I believe that the general approach to

intervention taken by systemic family therapists is applicable to
other human systems (such as independent alternative schools), and the
body of specific technique used to help families achieve second-order
change may at least serve as heuristic guide to evolving techniques of
systemic organizational intervention.

This chapter will examine at some length various systemic
techniques in family therapy. Concluding the chapter is a review of
literature documenting attempts to apply these techniques to
organizational settings.

Systemic Family Therapy

Practitioners in different schools of family therapy emphasize
different aspects of systemic interaction in their work with families.
Minuchin (1974), for example, focusses on the hierarchy and power
aspects of family structure in conceptualizing his plans for change.
Watzlawick et al. (1974) emphasize the family consensus as to what
"reality" is, particularly their understanding of their problem, or
the way in which their reality "frames" the problem. Other
therapists, most notably Selvini Palazzoli et al. (1978), looking to
the self-reflexive nature of interactions within human systems, seek
out the debilitating paradox that may be reflexively enveigling
members of a troubled system.

Every school of systemic family therapy does have in common an
understanding that when therapist and family come together, they form

a new system. Interactions can take place within this therapeutic system that will leave the family system changed and reordered when it withdraws from the therapeutic system. The therapist pays close attention to herself as a member of the theraputic system, while carefully monitoring her participation in the unique patterns of interaction that characterize the family and provide information about the logic that underlies the family world view.

Because human systems are highly complex, highly interactive and reactive, and highly coherent, one can encourage them to reorganize through a variety of different approaches. The following examination of various systemic family therapy approaches and techniques is offered in a heuristic spirit. The differences among them need not be the subject of argument, but may supply a pluralism that will benefit systemic organizational consulting, especially in its beginnings, as it forges new tools and methods for working with a different clientele. In using the work of these practitioners and thinkers to help build new approaches to organizational intervention, one must remember that years of praxis have lent themselves to the refinement of techniques especially suited to families. As we apply the theoretical premises of these authors to practical work with another sort of human system, we may wish to address ourselves to the differences among them as being possible versions or variations that in no way comprise the full set of possibilities that systemic organizational theorists may eventually develop in their unique field of application.

"Structural" Techniques

Therapists of the "structural" school, such as Minuchin (1974), often encourage the family to interact with one another in their presence. Through this <u>enactment</u>, the therapist gains an understanding of the inner logic of the family system and begins to frame her own version of "reality" about this family. The family acts out its structure: its rules and relationships, the hierarchy and power relations, all are manifested in the behavior of family members with one another and with the therapist.

From the family's enactment of its structure, the therapist pieces together the cyclical patterns that require and reinforce every member's contribution to the total situation. Involved are (1) the consensual family <u>definition</u> of the situation (their "reality"), which has a logic and coherence all its own, and thus which is never, according to its own lights, "crazy", and (2) the family structure, which is to say its rules and resources and patterns of interaction. Both the family reality or worldview and the family structure are continually manifested and recreated through the interactions and behavior of all members of the system.

The structural therapist is interested in changing both the reality frame <u>and</u> the structure of the family. The therapist often proceeds fairly quickly to challenge the family reality, usually using the ongoing activity in the session to introduce, say, a new view of a member's personality or competence. Again, this is not to say that

the family's reality is wrong, or an illusion, compared to the therapist's. It is merely not serving them well to believe as they do. It is leading them to attempt solutions that do not solve their problems. They may not adopt the therapist's view of reality, either. What is essential is that they be loosened from their old reality so as to emerge with a new one of their own.

For a structural therapist such as Minuchin, a heavy emphasis is placed on directly "restructuring" the family, and most interventions are designed to have immediate impact in the session. Structural techniques help the family to restructure their relationships, at the same time serving to reframe their situation so that the family worldview begins to shift toward a new reality. Three major restructuring techniques are boundary marking, unbalancing, and complementarity.

Boundary marking. With this technique, the therapist moves to delineate and/or redefine "boundaries" between holons (or the rules for holon identity). The spacial arrangements people make with one another are seen as analogic to their psychological relationships. Thus, the therapist might ask members to exchange seats during the session, for example, so that a child is not "in the middle" between his parents, and to remove him from their subsystem, metaphorically and physically. Throughout the session, the therapist physically and verbally blocks dysfunctional alliances and encourages other members to interact more closely. "Talk to your wife about what chores your daughter should do," she might say, and when daughter interrupts,

"This is just between Mom and Dad. You'll get to talk later." Thus, the therapist draws on the isomorphic nature of family transactions. If Mom and Dad learn to ally with one another, as a spouse holon, over their daughter's chores, and to exclude her participation in their subsystem, they will be able to do so in other spheres, and a new family pattern will emerge.

Unbalancing. By unbalancing the system, the therapist aims to change the hierarchical relationships among members. Here, the therapist temporarily supports an individual or holon, deliberately breaking family rules and changing the balance of power. The therapist may affiliate with a weaker member, whose position in the family is changed thereby, allowing for changed behavior on that person's part, and helping expand the realm of possible and permissible interpersonal transactions. Affiliating with a dominant member, on the other hand, may intensify that person's power to the point where a family threshold is crossed, and the rest of the family rallies to challenge the unbalance, again shifting their accustomed pattern of submission and dominance.

Complementarity. A third approach to restructuring involves challenge to the family's linear punctuation of their problems and relationships, helping them to see themselves as complementary parts of an interdependent whole. This endeavor mainly involves verbal challenges, such as questioning the nature of the problem as presented, so that the family consensus is shaken and uncertainty is introduced. The therapist may devise ways to show how each member

acts to control and contribute to the family's situation, how nobody

is helplessly responding to the acts of others. For example, she

might say to the teenager, "You're acting like a very young child,"

and to the parents, "How do you keep her so young?" and finally, "Plan

how you will help her grow up." The problem, then, is reframed.

Instead of a "bad" child or a "crazy" child, she is a "young" one. In

this context, the parents can form a plan; they can understand the

part they play, so the child is no longer out of their control.

Further, the matter of blame is skillfully defused.

> The concept of causality loses its rough edges of blame in a
> conceptualization that posits the indivisibility of context and
> behavior. Both the assignment of responsibility and the
> consequent allocation of blame recede into the background of a
> more complex design. (Minuchin & Fishman, 1981, p. 197)

Minuchin's structural work is noteworthy for its directness,

often involving physical movement of members in the room, purposeful

"joining" with one holon or another on part of the therapist, and

"homework" assignments designed to shift alliances, force hierarchical

shifts, affirm or loosen "boundaries", or realign relationships

between subsystems. At the same time, Minuchin emphasizes throughout

his writings the importance of worldview in the family system.

Worldview, or the framing of the problem, changes with the family

structure, and vice versa. For Minuchin, the therapist is "a

constructor of realities" for whom

> the goal is always the conversion of the family to a different
> worldview--one that does not need the symptom--and to a more
> flexible, pluralistic view of reality--one that allows for
> diversity within a more complex symbolic universe. (Minuchin &
> Fishman, 1981, pp. 214-215)

"Strategic" Techniques

The term "strategic" is used in family therapy to refer to a range of interventions that may be broadly characterized as non-directive. The therapist does not directly tell the family how to reorganize, but applies acupressure, as it were, to a receptive spot. Strategic interventions are often delivered in verbal form, but carry important messages on non-literal levels.

Paradoxical judo

The Mental Research Institute in Palo Alto, California, (Watzlawick, Beavin & Jackson, 1967; Watzlawick, Weakland & Fisch, 1974; Watzlawick, 1978) and the Family Therapy Institute in Washington, D.C., (Haley, 1976; Madanes, 1981) use a form of paradox in their strategic interventions. Such a "paradoxical" intervention is designed to use the system's "resistance" to theraputic change as an impetus to actually bring about change. The effect is a sort of psychological jujitsu.

> A paradoxical intervention is one that, if followed, will accomplish the opposite of what it is seemingly intended to accomplish. It depends for success on the family's defying the therapist's instructions or following them to the point of absurdity and recoiling. (Peggy Papp, 1981, p. 246)

One such paradoxical intervention involves prescribing more of the problematic behavior. For example, the mother of the child who won't go to school is told to keep her child home from school this

week because the therapist is concerned that mother will be lonely and
worried if the child goes to school, and for now it's more important
for him to stay home with her. If the family, indeed, rebels against
this framing and the accompanying assignment, the boy will go to
school, and the mother will prove to the therapist that she is <u>not</u>
lonely and worried. If they follow the directive, on the other hand,
the boy will stay home, but the family will no longer be organized in
the same way around making him go. Their repeated attempts to make
him go to school (solutions that are rooted in a dysfunctional myth)
will have been interrupted. They will have begun to accept a new view
of themselves and their problem that will mitigate strongly against
their continuing in the same pattern.

Similarly, the insomniac is told that after he turns off the
light and goes to bed, he must at all costs keep his eyes open until
he falls asleep. He must work to keep his eyes open as long as he is
awake. Haley (1976) describes the case of a five-year-old boy who
masturbated chronically in public and without enjoyment. He told the
boy to keep a chart of his masturbation for a week and to identify
when he enjoyed it the most. He was subsequently told that on Sunday,
the day he enjoyed it the most, he was to masturbate exactly twice as
many times as on the avarage day, even getting up early if need be to
get it done. He was not to masturbate on the other days, since he did
not enjoy it as much on those days. Within a very few weeks the boy
had lost interest in masturbating and had begun to engage in
age-appropriate social activities.

This mode of intervention channels the forces present in the system in order to effect change, rather than directly restructuring the system. Second-order change does not necessarily require a massive retraining, or a prolonged search for deeper insight. Rather, such change may be accomplished through skillful employment of energy already in the system, energy that we might think of as having been locked in bondage to whatever dysfunctional loop we seek to undo.

Counterparadox

Bateson and his colleagues (1956) at the Mental Research Institute in Palo Alto first identified the double bind in families of schizophrenic patients. A double bind involves a message that simultaneously obligates someone to behave in two mutually contradictory ways. Three ingredients are essential to a double bind: (1) The relationship must be important enough so that the person will not leave the field and will want to follow the binding injunction. (2) The injunction must be internally contradictory or paradoxical. (3) There must be a systemic rule that effectively keeps members from meta-communicating about the double bind and thus escaping it.

It is probably the so-called Milan group (Selvini Palazzoli, Boscolo, Cecchin, and Prata, 1978, 1980) of the center for the Study of the Family in Milan, Italy, who are best known for the sophistocation and finesse with which they work with paradox and double binds in families. Their work involves (1) identifying the paradox or double bind which ties the family members in interactive

patterns that include the symptom; and (2) offering an intervention that is usually itself considered paradoxical in nature. In contrast with the previously described paradoxical interventions, however, the Milan intervention is not intended to be defied or rebelled against. Instead, it lays out a directive that's <u>impossible</u> to follow because it involves a paradox. The Milan style of paradoxical intervention is meant as a profound <u>message</u> for the family.

At this point we need to examine the use of the term "paradox" by Selvini Palzzoli et al. (1978, 1980). To this end, the reader is reminded of the discussion in an early chapter in this dissertation dealing with the reflexive operator in causal loops. Hofstadter (1979) labels reflexive loops that are problematic or paradoxical "strange loops." For example, the Cretan who says "All Cretans are liars" creates a "strange loop." For the Milan team the term "paradox" refers to the "strange loop" that is created when the content of a communication defines its own context as an impossibility and vice versa. For example, the Milan team refer to the incomprehensible remarks and seemingly random behavior of schizophrenic patients as an analogic message saying in effect, "I am not really here," at the same time presenting the other with some literal content. If the other person responds to the literal content alone, ignoring the contextual message ("I'm not really here"), he is likely to find himself involved in a pretty "crazy" interchange, or perhaps find himself talking to a "nobody" who looks blankly into space. But if he were to respond to the analogic context of the

schizophrenic's remarks, and behave as though the patient were not there, he would have to behave as though the patient had said nothing at all. Since the patient did say something (and especially since the patient is there) this is "crazy" too. Selvini Palazzoli et al. (1978, p. 173) quote this enthralling nursery rhyme, which seems relevant here:

> The other day upon the stair
> I met a man who wasn't there.
> He wasn't there again today.
> Gee! I wish he'd go away!

The team searches for the terms of the (usually paradoxical) nexus of rules, messages and contexts of messages that bind a troubled family and that include the symptom. (Be it remembered that in being so bound, the family actively creates and recreates the bind.) Selvini Palazzoli et al. (1978) refer to theoreticians of general systems theory who

> have spoken of P[s], as being that nodal point in which converge the greatest number of functions essential to the maintenance of a system. Therefore, if one directs an intervention toward the nodal point P[s], one will get maximum change of the system with a minimum expense of energy. (p. 49)

> Our results have indicated that when we are able to discover and change one fundamental rule, pathological behavior quickly disappears. This has led us to accept the idea proposed by Rabkin: "In nature, happenings of radical importance sometimes take place suddenly when a fundamental rule of a system is changed" (1972, p. 97). (Selvini Palazzoli et al., 1978, p. 4)

The notion of this nodal point P[s] is perhaps somewhat elusive, but the Milan team clearly searches out a critical nexus that involves the family and the problem in a strange loop or repeating cycle. They make interventions based upon the hypothetical existence of such a

point and the hypothetical nature of that point within the system they're working with at the time. They watch the system respond to the intervention to learn more about the nodal point. They theorize that when they can touch this nerve center with just the right prescription the system will be able to make a transformational leap.

The Milan team's usual approach to untying the paradox is to present the family with a "counterparadox." Most often this takes the form of an injunction to change nothing. After positively connoting all the interactions that bind the members, the therapist will say, "What you are doing is essential for the well-being of the family, and we are convinced that it would be a mistake to change what you are doing at this time." In so doing the therapist, according to Selvini Palazzoli et al., is presenting a new paradox to counter the one that binds the family. The stage has been set for therapy, that is for change, by all that's come before: the making of an appointment with a therapist, the interview; all has been done in context of "therapy," or change. For the "expert" to prescribe "no change" in a context of "this is all in order to help you change," is considered a paradox.

The Milan approach to family intervention is predicated on their view of the troubled family as engaged in a "game without end." Particularly in the families of schizophrenics, they find members engaged in playing a game they cannot win, but in order to keep trying to win it they must at all costs continue the game. This means they are simultaneously invested in keeping other members in the field of play, as well as trying to win out over them. The paradoxical binds

that result are intricate and highly sophistocated. The Milan approach consists in identifying the essential rules of the game that bind the members and developing an intervention that frees the system to rewrite the rules. How is this done?

First, the Milan group involves a four-person team in which one or two members work with the family in the session, and the other members watch from behind a one-way mirror. The session is broken into five segments:

1. <u>Presession</u>. If this is the initial interview the team reviews any information available, or if not goes over notes from the previous session. They develop a tentative hypothesis about what "game" the family may be playing such that the presenting symptom is needed to keep the game from ending.

2. <u>Interview</u>. The therapist in the room with the family asks questions aimed at testing out the initial hypothesis, and at generally allowing family issues to emerge. The family is observed by the other team members, with an eye for analogic as well as literal communication that might yield information about the family system. The session is videotaped as well.

3. <u>Intersession</u>. After 50-90 minutes the therapist leaves the room to consult with the team. They discuss the session and design a prescription.

4. <u>Intervention</u>. The therapist returns to deliver a carefully worked out prescription to the family.

5. <u>Postsession</u>. The team meets to discuss the family's immediate

response to the intervention, to evaluate and refine the hypothesis, and to project possible future directions to take with the family. At this time a synopsis of the interview and the details of the intervention are recorded.

The metaphor of the "game" focusses the therapist's attention on observed outcomes of behavior rather than supposed reasons for it. The therapist attends to the actual behavior of members, rather than their reported thoughts and feelings. She is concerned not with the historical reasons for the behavior, but with its manifest effects on other members and relationships in the system. Though the Milan group do not refer to Giddens in their literature, their stance strikes me as particularly consonant with his ideas on "structuration" as rules and resources reflexively involved with patterns of interaction. If patterns of interaction are created when members call upon rules and resources to achieve their ends in the interactive system, then it is consistent with theory to look for the <u>outcomes</u> of interactive behavior in order to understand the pattern of which it is a part.

In this context, even expressions of feeling are seen as interactive behaviors, thus moves in the game. In order to help them avoid the linear punctuation implicit in the language of expressing feeling, the Milan therapists substitute the verb "to seem" or "to show" for "to be". Instead of "she was depressed today," they say "she seemed depressed;" instead of "he was bored," "he showed boredom." The effect of this linguistic shift is to focus attention on the <u>behavior</u> (which is observable and can have an observed effect

in the system) rather than inner feelings or motives (which are unknowable and are not interactive components in the system). A record of a family session with the Milan team contains the following passage:

> The father, Mr. Franchi, shows, during the session, a veiled erotic interest in the designated patient, who, for her part, shows hostility and scorn toward him. Mrs. Franchi shows an intense jealousy toward husband and daughter, while she shows a strong affection toward her other daughter, who, in turn, shows no sign of reciprocating this affection. (Selvini Palazzoli et al., 1978, p. 28)

This description, above all, relates the actors and their behaviors such that (a) the feelings "shown" are not ascribed to the actors as permanent qualities as in "she is hostile," thus (b) the possibility of showing other affects, and the existence of choices for the actors, is affirmed. The Milan approach sees the game as binding the actors, not their individual "beings." There are no crazy people, in this way of thinking, "only a crazy game" (1978, p. 103).

Selvini Palazzoli et al. (1980) isolate three essential principles to guide the conduct of the therapist during the session: hypothesizing, circularity, and neutrality.

Hypothesizing. The therapy team begins even the initial session with a tentative hypothesis as to the nature of the relational patterns in which the symptom takes part. The hypothesis may immediately be proved untenable, but even its disproval contributes information and eliminates certain lines of further inquiry. It is a prerequisite that the hypothesis be "systemic"; it must "include all components of the family, and must furnish us with a supposition

concerning the total relational function" (Selvini Palazzoli et al., 1980, p. 6). Thus, in testing this "circular" hypothesis, the therapist's attention is continually called to the ways in which all members do indeed contribute to the "total relational function." Indeed, the most powerful function of the hypothesis may be that it constrains the therapist during the interview to actively track down reflexive relational patterns.

   Circularity. This involves an overriding commitment to seeking out the reflexive operations of the system. To this end, the therapist looks for the effects of interactive behavior, not the implied or stated intentions of the interactants.

   A basic technique of the Milan team in this regard is "triadic" interviewing, or "gossiping in the presence of others." Rather than asking the mother about her relationship with her daughter, the therapist asks the son. For one thing, the mother's concern for how the therapist regards her relationship with her daughter will figure largely in the mother's response if she answers the question. More important, mother is likely to talk about her intentions and feelings, while a third party can talk about what mother and daughter do, thus moving away from the linear punctuation that is the inevitable view of a participant in an interaction. Too, the son will likely show the therapist some of the effects of the mother-daughter relationship on the rest of the system through his punctuation of their interaction.

   Another technique for pursuing "circularity" is that of raising questions about differences and change during the interview. The

therapist will ask about differences among members: "Who acts the most bothered when Johnny won't go to school?" Or differences in relationship: "Who is Janie closer to, her mother or her father?" Or changes over time: "Did your mother and your sister fight more before or after your brother left home?" Or even hypothetical differences: "If someone in the family were going to stay home forever and not get married and not move out, who would be the best one for your mother? For your father?"

In all of these examples, the question is directed toward specific behavior, asking about what people _do_, not about supposedly intrinsic qualities. Thus it's "What does he do when he acts sad?" not "Why is he sad?" And "Who acts the angriest?" not "Who is angriest?"

Neutrality. This refers to the therapist's "metaposition" regarding the family system. The Milan therapist maintains a careful and constant stance of nonalignment with any one member (in contrast to the structural therapist, who may temporarily ally herself with a member or group to unbalance the system). The Milan therapist also takes care to never ever convey a moral interpretation, either good or bad, right or wrong, of any behavior discussed or exhibited. In the therapist's thinking moral judgements have no place, for such a judgement pulls the therapist into a particular punctuation of the situation. In the interests of the "circularity" principle, this is to be strictly avoided. Also, say Selvini Palazzoli et al.,

> the declaration of any judgement, whether it be of approval or of
> disapproval, implicitly and inevitably allies him with one of the

individuals or groups within the family. At the same time, we try to _observe_ and neutralize as early as possible any attempt towards coalition, seduction, or privileged relationships with the therapist made by any member or subgroup of the family. (1980, p. 11)

Also in the interest of maintaining neutrality, the therapist grants "equal time" to all family members, asking different members for their answers to the same questions, never allowing anyone to hold forth overly long before moving on to someone else.

The therapist has a fine line to walk, and the principle of neutrality is his balance pole. He must join with the family in a new system of therapist-and-family, but he must maintain a "metaposition" in that system.

Positive connotation

In addition to (and in the interests of) the above guiding principles, the therapist is at pains throughout the session to positively connote any interactions commented upon, and to comment positively on the contributions that every member makes in the continuation of the game.

This practice serves several functions. First, it allows the therapist access into the family system, because it signals to the family no threat to the continuation of the game. In saying that the behaviors of each member in some way help the family, the therapist avoids raising the system's "resistance" to an outside threat.

Second, nobody is "blamed," even for a moment. This is particularly important with regard to the "identified patient," who's

considered "wrong" in some way, be it "bad," "crazy," "sick," or

whatever. The therapist is thus countering the family's established

punctuation of the situation.

> In this way, the therapists were able to put all the members of
> the group on the same level, thus avoiding involvement in any
> alliances or divisions into subgroups, which are the daily bread
> of such systems' malfunction. Dysfunctional families are in fact
> regularly, especially in moments of crisis, prone to such
> divisions and factional battles, which are characterized by the
> distribution of such stereotyped labels as "bad," "sick," "weak,"
> "inefficient," "carrier of hereditary or social taints," etc.
> (1978, p. 56)

The therapist defines members' behaviors as complementary to the

system, and this may release family members at least momentarily from

the tension of maintaining their usual symmetrical escalation.

Third, in positively connoting the behaviors that produce and

reproduce, and that are produced and reproduced by, the rules of the

game, the therapist is positively connoting the game itself and the

family's endeavor to avoid systemic change. This is prelude to (and

actually an instance of) the theaputic intervention that is the

hallmark of the Milan team: prescribing the symptom. (We'll return to

this a little later.)

Fourth, the positive remarks made about each type of family

interaction serve to overtly define the relationships between family

members. In many families, and particularly those with a

schizophrenic member, clear definitions of the various relationships

among members are forbidden by the rules of the game. (See Sevini

Palazzoli et al., 1978, for a complete discussion.) Simply defining

relationships subtly breaks a rule and lays the rule open to change.

Fifth, the therapist's own relationships within the family-therapist system are clearly defined and the therapist's leadership is established. By acting as relationship definer, the therapist communicates analogically that he has no doubts about his own "hiererarchical superiority." As a corollary, the positive connotation serves to "mark the context as theraputic" (Selvini Palazzoli, 1978, p. 62).

Because the connotation is _positive_, the family is unable to disqualify the therapist's observations. This is particularly important in families with schizophrenic members, as these families regularly disqualify their own and one another's messages (see Selvini Palazzoli et al., 1978). The aims enumerated above can be accomplished because the family cannot reject a context that accepts their structure, without rejecting themselves. This they will not do, since their game revolves around continuation of said game and thus said structure.

Interventions

Selvini Palazzoli et al. (1980) suggest that the interview process itself may be a powerful intervention. The very questions asked by the therapist, in search of the nexus where the rules reflexively bind the family members, may covertly direct the family's attention to that nexus, in such a way as to allow a new punctuation that may trigger a transformation. In general, however, the Milan team ends each session with an intervention in the form of a carefully

worded "opinion" that reframes the family reality, and/or a unique, meticulously prepared "prescription," or ritual task to perform at home.

The Milan team's interventions attempt to communicate with the family about their situation on an analogic more than a literal level. Though they often rely on a carefully worded verbal or written message, the true message encompasses the context in which it is delivered as well as the words themselves. It's very important that the therapist deliver the message with sincere inflection and complete absence of moral overtones. Sometimes the family is given a prescription to be read aloud by them, immediately and/or at home. In this case, it's important which member(s) are to read the message and the conditions under which it is to be read. All of these contextual circumstances contribute actively to the message itself.

Take for example the nuclear family that was enmeshed in its extended family, or "clan," living in the same apartment building with the families of siblings and cousins, everyone having an open-door drop-in-anytime policy. In keeping with a clan rule against criticism of the clan or any of its members, the family members regularly disqualified statements by other members that implied any criticism of any family relatives. After several sessions with the family, the team acted as follows:

> The two therapists . . . declared themselves extremely
> preoccupied by . . . the emerging hostility [of the family]
> toward the clan, which endangered the accordance and well-being
> of the whole group. It was of vital importance that . . . the
> family commit itself to follow the prescription the therapists
> were about to give. The family, duly impressed, agreed to do so.
> The prescription was as follows.

In the two weeks that were to precede the next session, every other night, after dinner, the family was to lock and bolt the front door. The four members of the family were to sit around the dining room table, which would be cleared of all objects except an alarm clock, which would be placed in its center. Each member of the family, starting with the eldest, would have fifteen minutes to talk, expressing his own feelings, impressions, and observations regarding the behavior of the other members of the clan. Whoever had nothing to say would have to remain silent for his assigned fifteen minutes, while the rest of the family would also remain silent. If, instead, he were to speak, everyone would have to listen, refraining from making any comment, gesture, or interruption of any kind. It was absolutely forbidden to continue these discussions outside of the fixed hour: everything was limited to these evening meetings, which were ritually structured. As for relations with members of the clan, a doubling of courtesy and helpfulness was prescribed. (1978, p. 93)

This ritual contained several messages for the family, all on an analogic level, none communicated in words by the therapists. Some are not available to the reader without more information about the family, but clearly this family was being told "you are a distinct unit, apart from the clan," by the injunction that they spend this "secret" time shut off from the rest of their relatives. The prescription that all be silent while one person talked and offer no comment afterwards also carried the message "every individual has a right to express his or her own perceptions without risking contradiction or disqualification by others." This message was conveyed without ever actually pointing out to the family their pattern of disqualifying each other's criticisms of clan members. The prescription of continued reverence for the clan was necessary for keeping the therapist allied with the system, and preventing the family from seeing the prescription as a frontal attack.

In speaking of such rituals (which are a common tool of the Milan team), Selvini Palazzoli et al. explain:

> The family, especially in that it presents itself on the level of action, is closer to the analogic mode than to the digital. This preponderant analogic component is, by its nature, more apt than words to unite the participants in a powerful collective experience, to introduce some basic idea to be shared by everyone. (1978, p. 96)

Besides conveying a strong analogic message, the ritual actually "introduce[s] into the system . . . a play whose new norms silently take the place of old ones" (1978, p. 97). Thus in following the prescription the family finds itself actually playing by new rules which then become a part of their repertoir in choosing how to interact.

It is important to note that the therapist does not discuss the intent of the prescription, and does not explain the thinking behind it. An attempt to explain the supposed purposes and reasoning behind the intervention would only open it to immediate disqualification and would nullify its effectiveness. The family is expected to make its own unique sense of this seemingly senseless, sometimes even ridiculous, prescription. Ultimately, it is _in_ _the_ _family_ _system_ that sense must be made; and if the prescription touches a critical nerve center in the system, it will not appear senseless to any but an outsider. This also assures that the family can take responsibility and credit for any subsequent change.

In sum, the Milan approach involves two main types of intervention, both of which are directed toward achieving change

through analogic communication, more than through direct action. Their _reframing opinions_ delivered at the end of the session, and their _ritual prescriptions_ for enactment at home, are both seen as having profound analogic message value to the family.

Reframing is accompanied by positive connotation of all members' behavior, including the symptomatic behavior. The reframing also connects all the important interactive behaviors together systemically.

Rituals are seen as temporary and as primarily meaning laden, rather than as directions for permanent structural change (which is the intent of the structural family therapist's homework tasks). Rituals are designed to draw attention to the systemic nexus that binds the family. They thus serve to clarify for the family confusing and paradoxically binding aspects of system operation. "The ritual type of intervention often has a significant impact in enabling the family to clarify chaotic patterns and to confront inherent but unrecognized contradictions" (Tomm, 1984b, p. 267).

The family-therapist system

All family system theorists view the theraputic situation as a system in its own right. The Milan team, however, appears to have discovered powerful potential for change in the self-reflexive operator that is the therapist who is aware of the working of the system and who consciously changes the rules while being a member of the system that's supported by the rules. It's a little like

logrolling for a lumberjack.

At the same time, Milan therapists give their "prescriptions" at the ends of sessions without a clear prediction of how the family will readjust afterwards. This contrasts with Minuchin's structural approach, in which he knows how the hierarchy ought to look and maneuvers people--sometimes even physically--to help them change the hierarchical structure then and there, as well as outside the session. The Milan team, on the other hand, operate on the premise that if they can identify the nexus of game rules that are binding the players and that are producing and are produced by the symptom, an intervention aimed at challenging that particular nexus need not prescribe the precise manner in which the structure ought to change. The family system, they believe, will re-evolve according to its own unique resources. Thus while the family-therapist system provides the environment for change in the family system, the unique nature of the change depends upon the inner world of the individual family, and the change is seen as being created within and by that system.

In order to locate the critical nexus in the family structure, the therapist must join the family in a new system. Using the stance of neutrality, the therapist is able to penetrate the family game, find the nexus, and be accepted in the game to the extent that the family will actively respond to the intervention as a challenge to the rules _from_ _within_. All families have effective ways to fend off challenges to their structures that arise from without. The therapist must enter the system (and the therapist's neutrality helps the family

to allow the therapist in) so as to introduce challenge <u>as</u> <u>a</u> <u>member</u> of the conjoint system.

If an intervention goes awry, the team looks at the family-therapist system, not the family system, to understand why. "The important thing is <u>to</u> <u>carefully</u> <u>consider</u> <u>every</u> <u>feedback</u> <u>as</u> <u>an</u> <u>output</u> <u>of</u> <u>our</u> <u>own</u> <u>behavior</u>, and to keep it as a guide to our future behavior with the family" (Selvini Palazzoli et al., 1978, p. 118). Usually, when an intervention brings no results, or backfires, the Milan team look to their own behavior in the therapist-family system to understand the dynamics. Frequently they punctuate the problem as an error on their part: the intervention was okay but was done too soon; it missed the mark completely; it inadvertantly conveyed a "moralistic" message; etc.

Another hallmark of the Milan approach, though, is their ability to capitalize on the creative potential in error. Every such "error" brings more information on how best to proceed next. The entire process of designing theraputic interventions is ipso facto a matter of trial and error, for every family system is absolutely unique.

An obvious danger to the therapist in the therapist-family system is that the therapist will begin to take part in the family game "for real," and will lose effectiveness as a self-reflexive operator. The three principles for working in the session, outlined earlier, are intended to keep the therapist in a "metapositon," but they are not failsafe. Even if the therapist is able to avoid linear punctuations, alliances, moral judegments, and the like, the family-therapist system

may evolve its own sort of game in which the therapist gets caught.

As we have seen, some families respond to interventions with
progressive changes, while others, who at the moment seem to be
struck, return to the successive sessions completely unchanged,
and, in fact, more than ever entrenched in their family game.
They have either disqualified or "forgotten" the comments of the
therapist, or have succeeded in finding some other way of
escaping an apparently well-directed intervention. The resulting
disappointment of such a reaction stimulates the therapists to
become all the more zealous in the effort to invent more and more
powerful interventions, while the family continues to disqualify
them.

Thus begins an unending game in which it is impossible to
decide whether it has been the family that has enticed the
therapists into a symmetrical escalation, or rather the zeal or
hubris of the therapists themselves. (Selvini Palazzoli et al.,
1978, p. 147)

The Milan team have evolved a tactic for dealing with the above

problem, in which the family-therapst system has become an escalating

game of "you can't change us," versus "oh yes I can, watch this one!"

The team cease escalation and declare themselves at a complete loss,

impotent to help the family change. At the same time, they make an

appointment for the next session and collect the fee, which

communicates to the family "a definite professional assurance in

complete contrast with the declaration of impotence" (1978, p. 149).

The family now has to "come up with something new next time in order

to continue the game," since the therapist has not actually left the

field.

Seeing their adversaries undernourished and weakened, the
family returned to the battlefield offering emergency rations.
In these sessions, more "secrets" were revealed than in all the
previous sessions combined.

The basic strength of this tactic lies in the fact that it
exploits one of the fundamental rules of the family game: never
permit the collapse of the enemy. He has to be kept in fighting

condition and, in any moment of weakness, should be given
encouragement. But this, naturally, with prudence and
discretion, and only if the enemy has proved himself worthy of
such consideration. (Selvini Palazzoli et al., 1978, p. 150)

In another example of the family-therapist system at work,

Selvini Palazzoli et al. (1978) describe the manner in which the

therapist gives up the "parental" role often assigned to her in that

system, so as to terminate therapy with the family system left in

charge of itself and the parents in the family left in parental roles.

The refusal of the therapists to maintain the role of parents in
the theraputic situation is not to be seen as a refusal, but as a
confirmation of the parents, in that they should be parents, and
are certainly able to be. This is so true that the therapists
withdraw. . . .

       We can add that this intervention is therapeutic for another
reason. When the family comes to therapy, the very fact that the
parents are requesting help implies a disqualification as parents
because they need help. By abdicating their parental position to
the real parents at the correct moment, the therapists validate
the parents and confirm them in their natural role. (Selvini
Palazzoli et al., 1978, pp. 170-171)

Families who have worked with the Milan team frequently come away

stating that they managed to change even though the therapist didn't

do anything for them.

When a major transformation has occurred the family generally
does not attribute it to therapy. They tend to associate it with
non-therapy events and often do not even remember the triggering
intervention. Interestingly, when no change has occurred the
family tends to remember the intervention much more clearly.
(Tomm, 1984b, p. 269)

The Milan team is careful to leave the family in charge, not only of

itself, but of its own ability to transform.

The team approach

The team is invaluable to the Milan style of therapy. The team keeps the therapist from joining the family game "for real" and helps the family-therapist system stay "theraputic." Teams are widely used in systemic family therapy, largely for this reason. The participation of more than one therapist directly in the session with the family is less common, but when used allows different members of the system to direct themselves to different therapists, thus displaying some of the system dynamics. The Milan team has now abandoned this approach, which originally for them took the form of a heterosexual couple in the room with the family, and the other two team members behind the one-way mirror. They hold, however, that the participation of at least one other person behind the mirror is absolutely essential.

Some of their remarks on the working of the team (a system in its own right) may be helpful. Selvini Palazzoli et al. suggest that it is best (and perhaps essential) to begin with team members who can work smoothly together with a minimum of symmetrical competition.

> This type of work demands a harmonious group which is not
> disturbed by competition or factions, whose members share a
> reciprocal respect and willingness to accept observations and
> suggestions. The number of members of the group is also
> important. If the team is too small, it has difficulty in
> controlling the power of the [family's] schizophrenic play. If
> it is too large, important points can get lost in long and
> rambling discussions and moreover the danger of competition and
> of the forming of cliques is greater. In our experience, four
> members seem the best combination. We repeat our conviction that
> an extremely difficult therapy, such as that of the family in
> schizophrenic transaction, can be confronted only by a team free
> from internal strife. The least competitive urge within the
> team, in fact, immediately instrumentalizes the problems of the

family as a pretext for argument within the group. Teams created by the authorities of institutions are especially prone to this danger. . . .

In conclusion, we can say that a therapeutic team dedicated to research is a delicate instrument, exposed to many hazards, internal as well as external. One of the greatest hazards comes from the families themselves, especially until the team is sufficiently experienced. At the beginning of our work with these families, it often happened that we were taken in by the family's game to the point that our resulting frustration and anger bacame transferred to the relationship between ourselves. (Selvini Palazzoli et al., 1978, pp. 16-17)

Selvini Palazzoli et al. (1978) stress again and again the

importance of relative freedom from excessive hubris or professional

competition in a successful team. Even though a desire for fame and

fortune, or a wish to "help others," may have influenced the therapist

in her very choice of profession, during the session with the family

she must be free of such motivations, which are liable to render her

vulnerable to the machinations of the family system.

Feelings of anxious zeal, of rage, of boredom and futility, of hostile disinterest ("if they want to stay like this, that's their problem") are a sure sign of the symmetrical involvement of the therapists. (p. 126)

The therapists must have learned to play in as detached a manner as possible, as they would in a chess tournament in which little or nothing is known about their adversaries. The only important thing is to understand how they play, in order to adjust oneself consequently. (p. 125)

We see here how the image of the "game" and the stance of

neutrality combine to help the therapist retain that "metaposition"

that allows her to experience the system without submitting to the

linear punctuation that is the common lot of system members. If

despite the best of intentions the therapist loses the systemic

perspective, the other team members are there to provide balast and

right the ship. In terms proposed by Nigro and Neisson (1983), the individual therapist interacting personally with the client system assumes a "second person" position vis a vis the system. From that position the therapist has access to the more intimate knowledge afforded by nuance and by the very valences she must try to resist. The team behind the mirror, by providing a "third person" perspective, contributes different but importantly complementary information.

In this way, the team is a system with a hierarchical organization in which one level (the "third-person" element) monitors another (the "second-person" element), and each contributes importantly different information gained from its particular view of the client system.

Assuming the team to be basically well-maintained, those times when the team becomes confused or when strong feelings arise may be seen as bellweathers for the therapy itself. For example, a heated argument among the team members as to what is the "correct" hypothesis can be seen as the team's systemic response to involvement with the family system, and may help the therapists to understand how the family game is played. Even in a well-maintained team, though, the therapists may find themselves ensnared by their own game, for example offering ever more powerful and sophistocated interventions to a family that continues to disqualify each and every one. A team, in sum, that watches its own game may find there clues to the game the family is involved in. One hopes that the team is able to escape the potential "tar baby" in this situation and get itself instead thrown into the briar patch where it was born and bred!

Conclusion

Some of the main aspects of systemic family therapy that the systemic consultant may profitably study are the following:

Joining. All the family therapy theorists discuss the importance of the initial joining of therapist (or consultant) with client, though strategic therapists such as the Milan team join in a more "neutral" manner than do structural practitioners. Joining requires methods that facilitate the client's acceptance of the consultant. For example, the consultant may take a "one-down" position vis-a-vis the client. In an organizational context the consultant might purposely remark that she depends on the expert knowledge that the organization's members have about their own organization, and of which she is totally ignorant. Another technique that aids in the joining process is positively connoting the behavior of all holons in the system.

Defining the goals of the consultation with the client. As a formal step, defining the goals of therapy or consultation is stressed more by structural family therapists than by, say, the Milan team. A formal goal definition is done in collaboration with the client, using behaviorally specific terms and attempting to isolate an attainable and discrete change that will signal success for the consultation.

Interventions. Specific intervention formulation varies widely among various schools of family therapy. Structural approaches use

the direct influence of the therapist in modelling for the client's emulation "more functional" interactive behavior, and in maneuvers such as unbalancing, complementing and boundary marking. Strategic therapists, on the contrary, themselves remain neutral in the system, offering instead interventions that work by communicating analogic meaning more than by direct action of the therapist in the system. "Opinions" that reframe the social reality and "prescriptions" of ritual tasks to be carried out at home are the main tools of the Milan team. Some strategic therapists, such as the Palo Alto group, use paradoxical injunctions that are meant to bring the system's "resistance to change" into action in a way that actually results in change.

All systemic family therapy theorists would probably counsel the organizational consultant to view the interactions in the system as mutually causing one another, and to discover exactly how the causal cycle works in the client system. All would take care, in presenting opinions or tasks, to use the language of the client system, reflecting their dominant ethos or worldview. All, in designing a task to be performed, take care to include all members in the task and to positively connote each member's involvement. All would be sure the task is designed to get the client to do something, rather than telling them to stop doing something. Each would carefully work out the task to "fit" the particular client system, taking into account factors such as time and economic constraints, as well as the client's worldview, mythos and values.

Termination. Both structural and strategic therapists take care not to overstay, since they believe that much of their ability to influence second-order change lies in their position as outsider to the system. Too long a "stay" with the client system erodes their outsider status. All systemic family therapists also take care to leave the client "in charge" of their system. This author believes, however, that Minuchin's (1974) approach is less´successful in this regard, since his direct guidance of the change process is unmistakable.

Teams. The strategic therapists use teams more consistently than do structual therapists, and though neither approach is inimical to the use of a team, the strategic is perhaps more difficult to accomplish with only one consultant, especially as practiced by the Milan group.

We have examined in some detail the intervention techniques of two very different schools of systemic family therapy. Between the "structural" approach of Minuchin and the "strategic" approach of the Milan team lies a range of possibility. Some therapy teams operate eclectically, drawing more on structural techniques with some families, employing strategic techniques with others.

The question that looms is whether similar approaches are applicable to an organizational system. We next examine those few instances where organizational consultants or researchers have tried to answer this question in practice.

Organizational Consultation Based on Sytemic Family Therapy

The theoretical concepts presented in this dissertation have been applied to flesh-and-blood human systems almost solely in the field of family therapy. As theory and practice have developed in that arena and have proved successful in helping families to overcome major problems, theorists and practitioners have increasingly wondered what would come of an attempt to work with other systems in a parallel manner. (This dissertation itself eminates from and hopes to encourage this dawning interest.) In this section we examine the beginnings that have been made toward systemic consultation in organizational systems. Since others working in this vein have recently provided thorough critical reviews of this small body of literature (see Brandon, 1983; Terry, 1982), here we will not repeat this quickly exhausted exercise, but will briefly cite the most significant work and indicate the learnings to be gained from those endeavors.

The earliest attempts to bring family theory to larger organizations were carried out by practitioners working with Bowen's (1966, 1971) theory of triadic relationships in families. Of the small group who took triadic theory into other human groups, Minard's (1974) study is most significant. She was asked to consult with a day care facility on the treatment of a four-year-old child. She saw the problem of the child's acting-out behavior, plus a few other difficulties in the organization, as linked triadically to unresolved

conflict elsewhere in the system. The significance of her work is not in the fairly direct, insight-oriented interventions she employed, as much as in that she looked to the larger system to understand the behavior of a "symptomatic" member. She sought to engender change in the structure of the system such that conflict could be resolved diadically, without the triangulation of another member, in this case a child. She did not focus directly on remediating the child's behavior. Instead she saw the child in the total context, and the total context producing the child's behavior, and being in some measure also maintained by that behavior.

It is most interesting to note that the symptoms exhibited by two individual children in the day care center disappeared, but Minard says that some of the difficulties in adult relationships continued, though there was some improvement. Triadic theory focusses on getting the two parties whose direct relationship is somehow being carried on through a third party to deal with one another directly, thus freeing the third party from his or her troubled role in the transaction. The resolution of the conflict between the other two members is made their diadic business. The therapist works toward releasing the child (in this case) from involvement in the conflict so that the two other parties can resolve their conflict with one another. Minard's interventions appeared aimed at moving the child out of the triangle, but how the interventions would actively help the adults resolve the conflict is unclear, at least from the case as presented. Possibly her inexperience with organizational settings hindered her in this

aspect of the work.

One is also led to wonder whether the special focus of Bowenian theory held the seeds for an outcome in which the children in the system showed greater improvement than did the adults. Bowenian work ultimately focusses on the differentiation of the individual from the family (or the group). Bowen's work revolves around one's individuation from one's family of origin and is thus centered upon the individual's holonic relationship as child in family, even though one continues such work throughout one's life. Small wonder that this orientation appeared to produce the most change in individuals who were the "triangulated-in" parties (such as the child is seen to be in the most common family triangle, consisting of two parents and child). The extent of actual systemic second-order change in the day care center is indeterminable in this case. The main contribution, again, is in Minard's treatment of the entire context in her analysis, if not in her intervention.

The next significant trial was made by Hirschhorn and Gilmore (1980). Though not trained in systemic family therapy, they attempted to apply Minuchin's structural approach to a 90-member social welfare agency. Their grasp of the concepts was slightly flawed, judging from their misuse of some of the vocabulary and their somewhat linear evaluation of the entire enterprise. Their greatest contribution was in their structural analysis of the organization. They succeeded in identifying several cyclical patterns that placed members in double

binds and/or kept the structure from evolving appropriately. They used Minuchin's tools for mapping family structure to show the relational rules that guided and described members' patterns of interaction. The interventions they employed were directive in nature, reflecting Minuchin's structural school and his prescriptive approach. Hirschhorn & Gilmore set out to produce quite specific changes in the hierarchical and holonic relationships. They judged their efforts to be "moderately successful," in that they did succeed in some of their moves to realign members in the hierarchy, though not to the extent they would have liked. Given their complete inexperience with both the conceptual frame and the technology, along with the exploratory nature of the entire undertaking, "moderate" success is perhaps greater success than one might have expected.

They note among the possible contributions of family systems theory to organizational consulting the following points (1980, p. 20):

1) The approach enables organizational learning to take place relatively quickly. Thus the approach may be used at points of crisis where considerations of "mere surivial" preclude the lengthy process of "diagnosis and reflection" such as are advocated by Argyris and Schon (1978). Also, it is possible to work in situations lacking the "basic level of organizational health" that is a prerequisite for many of the "process consultation" strategies.

2) "Process" and "task" may be linked in designing the intervention, where many other strategies concentrate on one or the

other. A consultant is often either a "process consultant" or a "substantive expert." Here, the strategies can simultaneously address substantive issues and effect systemic change, for example by having one holon get together to work on a task while another holon does another task, thus strengthening holon identity while members continue to "produce" in the content area.

3) The approach helps the consultant to refrain from over-involvement in the system, thus the clients will be able to "own" the outcome. At the same time, the consultant remains active as "coach" and thus avoids a "too passive" stance.

4) The considerable potential for change through non-rational processes is unleashed. Insight is not a prerequisite, nor is rational explication. "Family theory and therapy open up some new strategies using metaphor, paradox, and play" (1980, p. 21).

Among the concerns involved in transferring family therapy techniques to organizational consulting, Hirschhorn & Gilmore list the following (1980, pp. 35-36):

1) The task of "joining" an organization of 90 members is different from joining a family in a therapy session.

2) The timing and scheduling of the work must be very carefully considered. Also, the consultant must decide whom to work with and how frequently. Work with families does not well inform the organizational consultant on these points.

3) Tasks or prescriptions need to be relevant to the natural "content" of the organization. The consultant must be sure to include

in her analysis an understanding of "the substantive content of the organization's work, the wider task environment, and a historical perspective" (1980, p. 36). Again, this is quite different from working with a family.

Brandon (1983) tested a systemic analytic tool in a work unit within a small insurance company. Her study compared the sytemic tool with a well-known Organizational Development (OD) analytic tool. Her study is valuable in that it points up several cautions and concerns for future trials.

In general, the methodology of the study itself, in attempting to follow traditional scientific technique, interfered with fully implementing a systemic approach. For example, the author felt that in the interests of "objectivity" it was important for an independent investigator to actually carry out the analysis using the systemic tool Brandon had developed. Brandon herself did the work of selecting a site and making all the arrangements. The two independent investigators (one for each analytic approach) had minimal contact with the organization prior to their analytic work. For the traditional OD analysis this presented no problem, but systemic analysis depends upon having first-hand experiences with the operation of the system, experiences that are as wide-ranging as possible. Much experience was gained by Brandon in her initial overtures to the company, and she could not even pass it on verbally to the systemic investigator because of the methodological premise that the research

would be contaminated thereby. Research about systemic analysis will need to be done according to methodological premises consistent with axioms such as those presented in the theoretical section of Part Two in this dissertation, in order to avoid the risk of obviating the phenomena the research seeks to study.

Another lesson from Brandon's study pertains to the use of teams in this work. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, teams are more common in systemic family therapy than are single therapists working alone. Brandon's systemic investigator had experience with both family therapy and with organizational consultation, but had always worked as a member of a team. His distress at having to operate without the multiple views and stabilizing influence of a team's firm grasp of the systemic perspective points out the possible importance of using the team approach in this work. This may be especially essential as we first begin to develop the field of systemic organizational consulting. There is much that's new to be learned, and a team learns more than the sum of its parts!

A third important consideration pointed up by Brandon's work is the relationship of assessment to intervention in systemic consultation. Her study attempted to isolate assessment, when systemic assessment consists in an ongoing cycle of hypothesis, intervention, reevaluation, and new hypothesis. Beginning with the initial contact, the consultant is forming hypotheses and testing them through observation of the system's response to her own behavior (which is, in the final analysis, all an "intervention" really is).

Brandon's investigator was constrained to a hands-off analysis, which is not an approach ever used in family system theory or therapy. Again, this kind of bifurcation of a whole process, in which analysis and intervention are inextricably and reflexively linked, is unlikely to yield a highly useful understanding of the process. Researchers will have to go "whole hog," even though it may fly in the face of traditional social science method, and even though it may seriously increase the difficulties for those hoping to gain terminal degrees through research in this area.

Only very recently has the use of techniques from the "strategic" branches of family therapy been documented, and so far nothing of great significance is in print. Terry (1982) consulted with a small feminist organization using a full range of structural and strategic approaches to assess and intervene in the organization. Though she was an experienced family therapist, this was Terry's first "go" at organizational consulting. However, the signs of "systemic change" that were evident after eight sessions seem encouraging.

Imber Coppersmith (in press) discusses the organizational ramifications of the systemic consultant's work with human service provider systems. A consultant may often be called upon to help an agency handle a particular client, and the systemic practitioner is thus given an opportunity to work systemically with the context of the organization itself. (Indeed, such was Minard's (1974) situation, discussed above.) At other times, the consultant may have been asked

to provide training in some content area, and again the systemic
practitioner can make use of her special expertise to enable the
organization to assimilate the learning in ways that require
second-order change. Finally, and more rarely, the consultant may be
asked to help the organization address organizational concerns
directly, usually couched in terms of "interpersonal conflict" or the
like.

Imber Coppersmith's work is significant, most broadly speaking,
in that it addresses the importance in any systemic consultation of
selecting the wider context rather than the narrower one for providing
help and facilitating change. Thus, even when asked to help with a
difficult client case, the systemic consultant will wonder how it is
that the organization needs her help with this case. How can the
organization change so as not to need outside help in future? What is
it about this case that is important in the ongoing operation of the
organization, such that improvement in the client is
counter-productive to the system in some way, and the continuation of
the client's symptom is important in the system in some manner?

Imber Coppersmith also defines several specific areas to which
the systemic organizational consultant must attend. These are (1)
negotiating the contract; (2) determining the method, frequency and
extent of contact; (3) entry into the organization; (4) assessing
the context and the problem; (5) conducting interviews; (6)
designing and presenting interventions.

Her recommendations for each area stem directly from the family

therapy field, where much has been learned about these matters, and we will refer to them more specifically in a later chapter. Of interest here is the fact that Imber Coppersmith offers several examples of organizational consulting using a "family systems" perspective and "strategic" methodology. Though briefly described, she provides actual instances of "entering" the systems; of intervening strategically to help a system accept new content being taught; and of introducing change in an organization through positive connotation. Her article ends with a description of a case in which a mental health facility engaged a consultant to confer about a difficult client whom they had been unable to "cure." The consultant treated the "stuck" case as the "presenting problem" in a "stuck" system. The consultant used her knowledge of system operation and systemic intervention to allow the system to change enough to "cure" the patient. After that success, she was invited to engage in a ten-session content-based consultation on the design and implementation of interventions for the population served by the facility. Though Imber Coppersmith does not in her article describe the procedures used, beyond the overt "teaching" that was no doubt expected, she reports that the agency did not reengage in the dysfunctional patterns that had marked their activity around the original "stuck" case, and they were subsequently able to handle difficult clients on their own.

Summary

The literature clearly reflects the youth (and innocence) of the field of systemic organizational consultation. Attempts to use theory and techniques developed in work with families have met with some success, limited by factors that are neither surprising nor insurmountable. Those practitioners who have had no experience in family therapy (e.g. Hirschhorn & Gilmore, 1980) have taken their inexperience into the work. Those whose work is primarily in the family therapy arena (e.g. Minard, 1976, and Imber Coppersmith, in press) have moved toward organizational consultation as a natural outgrowth of their work with their usual clients. That is to say, in doing their jobs as therapists, called in to help other human service professionals with a difficult case, they have naturally, as always, looked to the larger context to understand the existence and nature of a presenting problem. Thus their work, while it teaches valuable lessons about organizational problem solving (since it _is_ organizational problem solving), tends to be done in the guise of "family therapist" or "therapy consultant," rather than "organizational consultant." When people are _expecting_ the consultant to help the organization to change, there may arise some subtle but important differences requiring changes in technology.

Understandably, these earliest contributions have been most valuable for showing how the situation may be addressed differently by thinking about it differently. For example, Minard's (1976)

assessment of "the problem" as involving the organizational context, not an isolated child's pathology, is a quantum leap in addressing the behavior of client populations in schools and other social service facilities. Many person-years of actual fieldwork will be necessary in order to develop techniques for bringing this paradigm into actual organizational consultation practice.

The work cited above points out some general directions for organizational consultants to follow and some pitfalls to avoid. There is no doubt that the characteristics of organizations will necessitate the development of a modified systemic technology for use in those settings. A beginning effort will be made toward the conceptual work of developing that technology, with specific thought given to the special world of alternative schools, in the next three chapters. The author acknowledges that such conceptual work is only a bare beginning, a crude marking of the trail for the pathfinders to come, who will find ways to enter the labyrinth that is an organizational system and facilitate changes there.

P A R T   F O U R

TOWARD A SYSTEMIC CONCEPT OF INTERVENTION

SECTION B: ALTERNATIVE SCHOOLS

CHAPTER XII

ORGANIZATIONAL PROBLEM FORMULATION

Introduction

This chapter will characterize, in light of the earlier chapter on the systemic view of problems in human systems, the kinds of problems that an organizational consultant might confront in independent alternative schools, and the manner in which the consultant might search for and view the problem.

In families, problems often arise when a new stage in the family life cycle is emerging, for example when a child leaves home, or at another major point of change, such as the death of a member. So, too, one would expect the developmental changes through which an organization passes to occasionally pose challenges that the structure seems unable to meet. Earlier we outlined the stages through which alternative schools often appear to journey. Here we return to that outline in order to discuss further some of the tasks and challenges of each stage. Any of these tasks could become problematic for the organization. If the structure is "stuck" in a relatively static homeostasis, the school will be unable to maintain its coherence in

the world and internally, for both the world and the internal
components of the system are constantly transforming.

The following pages will explore how schools have had problems in
negotiating the tasks and transitions outlined in the earlier chapter
on alternative school life cycles. This will give the reader a broad
view of some typical kinds of problems in alternative schools.
Following that, a return to the three schools whose structures were
described in an earlier chapter will provide a chance for an in-depth
systemic problem formulation in each case. Some general remarks on
systemic formulation of problems in such settings conclude the
chapter.

<div align="center">

Problems During Developmental Stages
</div>

Problems with beginnings

At the initial stages of an alternative school's life, the
structure is in such creative flux that the casual outsider (as well
as the intimate insider) might see nothing but problems. The systemic
observer, however, might see this bubbling primeval soup as the proper
state for that period in the school's life.

Truth to tell, problems (in the systemic sense) in the early
period of "ecstatic chaos" are largely undocumented. Schools that
fail in their first few weeks or months go unnoticed in the
literature, except as statistics. Hence there is no data on which to
base an overview of the problems linked to early failure. In general,

too, early failure is likely to be the only sure way to identify the existence of systemic problems at this stage of knowledge about such organizations. That there are numerous difficulties, very tough challenges, at this stage is inevitable. There are many ways for an alternative organization to structure itself in response to those challenges. A recipe for success is inimical both to the experimental nature of the schools and to the systemic view of structure as evolving out of the process of dealing with such challenges.

Problems with mission

Mission, worldview and self-image are inextricably bound together. An organization's espoused goals express its image of its world and its place and purpose in the world. While family systems cannot be said to have clear "goals," organizations do speak in terms of goals. Especially for alternative schools, goals are expressive of a whole belief system or "myth" about how the organization sees itself. This view of organizational goals closely parallels the concept of a family's worldview, self-image, or myth.

Problems typically emerge around an alternative school's struggles (or failure) to clarify and prioritize values and goals. It should be noted that a human system is capable of holding conflicting values and images of itself without collapse. The degree of distress accompanying such conflicts probably depends upon the nature of the specific conflict, and the resources available in the system for maintaining both parts of the conflict as viable in the social

reality. In large systems, such as a nation, this is quite easily done. Even in very small systems, though, a certain level of contradiction is not only possible to live with, but probably inevitable, and maybe even desirable.

However, we saw earlier how the amalgam of lofty ideals and worthy ends that has brought together the beginning membership of a school may contain inconsistencies and conflicts that lead to the inclusion of double binds or even paradoxical injunctions in the rules that govern behavior in the organization. If these various ways of defining the school's mission and self-image are not prioritized or somehow reconciled, troubles are likely to beset the population. Assuming that the espoused goals are indeed reflected in the rules, resources, and patterns of interaction of the school, people's behavior (including their thinking) will be torn in different directions. The experience of family therapists indicates that such systems may become quite troubled.

In speaking of human service agencies, Imber Coppersmith (in press) notes that typically those organizations are defined in terms of altruism and caring; but also they are increasingly defined as "big business" with financial constraints taking precedence over human needs. "The consultant must attend to both these definitions and to the tensions between them. Both are actual and while they are seldom the spoken issue of the consultation, they are crucial to the organization's on-going interactions" (Imber Coppersmith, in press). Different members of such an organization may be spokespersons for

different aspects of the organization's definition of itself, with administrators taking on the "big business" belief system and direct service providers maintaining the mission of altruism. Typically, each will accuse the other of working against the organization's best interests. If the conflict can be resolved and the agency can develop a new worldview and self-image that all can uphold, the transition will have been safely crossed. If not, the agency has a problem.

Individual freedom versus community. In alternative schools, as we have seen, the conflicts among beliefs and values can be subtle and varied. The "free" or romantic type schools are especially noteworthy for their attempt to embrace certain ideals of a potentially conflicting nature, though rarely have people in these schools appeared to understand the conflicts inherent in their stance. Repo (1970) encapsulates the goals of free school advocates thus:

> Uppermost in people's minds is a wish to be free to pursue their own interests and at the same time have an opportunity to relate meaningfully to others. (Repo, 1970, p.xiii) (Emphasis added.)

"Free" schools see people's alienation from one another in society as a broad social problem, and they highly prize a sense of community and social responsibility within the school community. This is also generally true of progressive type schools, but in free schools this ethic is combined with another philosophy of "do your own thing as long as no one gets hurt."

Therefrom, a complex set of contradictions is engendered. In brief, the goal of individual freedom may run up against the goal of "community building" when some individuals don't choose to help build

the community, or to carry out their "social responsibilities." The
problem, as Bennet et al. (1978) state it, is this:

> How can personal autonomy and decision making be balanced with
> group and institutional decision making? How is the tension
> between individual freedom and group responsibility resolved?
> (p. 105)

Chesler (1978), who studied student involvement in governance in
six alternative secondary schools, speaks to the twin issues of
individualism and community. All six schools

> found themselves struggling to resolve the dilemma between "doing
> your own thing" and "working for the good of the collective
> unit." (Chesler, 1978, p. 297)

Riordan (1972) identified such a conflict at Pilot School in
Cambridge, Massachusetts:

> To overstate the case somewhat, the staff began with the
> assumption that the kind of human relationships they envisioned
> not only would evolve easily and naturally at the school, but
> that such relationships would obliterate many problems that exist
> in regular schools. Students would be eager to learn and would
> respect others; behavior problems would disappear. This, in
> fact, did not happen. Students, coming out of eight years'
> experience in public school, were not transformed (nor were the
> staff, for that matter). Students did not step forward
> immediately to take charge of their own education. When home
> groups were given money to spend during the second year, some
> groups chose to spend it not for "educational" films or trips,
> but for ice cream. The following question is raised: Given that
> things don't work out right away, do we wait patiently for
> students to come around, or do we take matters in hand, as they
> do in the regular high schools?
>
> . . . Staff members, committed to student responsibility and
> reluctant to behave in the old ways, were often uncertain about
> how to react when individual freedom and choice conflicted with
> community needs. (pp. 24-25) (Emphasis added.)

The Center for New Schools (1972), in their study of Chicago's
Metro School, already discussed in previous chapters, suggest that
Metro, like many alternative schools, subscribed to a basic belief in

what they call "organic development." According to this "theory of
organic development," the organization of the school, as well as the
personal growth of individual members, is supposed to emerge
"organically" from the natural and uninhibited confluence of
unfettered human spirits. Members sustain

> the belief that just about any problem--student involvement in
> decision-making, race relations, moderately severe mental
> disturbance, the development of relevant curriculum--can be
> solved in a free and open atmosphere with a strongly articulated
> commitment to interpersonal honesty. (Center for New Schools,
> 1972, p. 336)

Inevitably, disillusionment sets in when it becomes clear that
all problems have not been solved, "that people really haven't changed
as much as was hoped" (p. 336), and that many difficulties show no
sign of receding. During the ensuing period, say the authors, goal
conflicts emerge, and the manner of their resolution is crucial to the
future of the school. They suggest that the situation may best be
viewed "as a conflict between the school's process goals, outcome
goals, and specific practices" (p. 337). For example:

> How much longer do we struggle along with the all-school meeting
> when it is clearly not working? Is testing this specific
> practice our highest priority or should we be looking for other
> ways to achieve the goal of shared student-staff decision-making?
> How important is concentrating our effort on shared
> decision-making anyway, as opposed to dealing with some of the
> cultural bias in our curriculum? Since students haven't come
> forward to participate in decision-making, do we conclude that
> student involvement isn't important to the growth of the school
> community and drop it, or do we keep after students or force them
> to become involved because it is absolutely necessary to prepare
> them to be active decision-makers in later life? (Center for New
> Schools, 1972, p. 337)

During this difficult time, the surfacing of conflicts such as
these may force the school community and its leadership to clarify and

prioritize the various goals of the school and to develop thoughtful

and well-defined practices to accomplish these goals. "On the other

hand," warn the authors, "adhering to the philosophy of natural

organic development—a belief that 'whatever happens is the best

possible thing that could have happened'—leads to a rather

predictable continuing crisis, often characterized by harsh

irreconcilable conflict between various people in the community, low

morale, and exhaustion" (Center for New Schools, 1972, p. 338). If

whatever does happen is the best thing that could have happened,

criticism of past performance is not possible, so a reevaluation of

conflicting priorities and goals is excluded. When students do not

choose to be involved in decision making, the goal of getting them to

participate in order to prepare them for later life may conflict with

the goal of assuring student freedom, or again with the goal of

actually making decisions that are vital to institutional survival.

The belief in organic development, say the authors, prevents the

organization from setting clear priorities among these various goals.

What commonly follows is the all-too-familiar phenomenon of "burnout,"

manifested by individuals withdrawing from full involvement to narrow

areas of concern, high dropout and turnover, and ultimately,

organizational failure.

Applied to the individual, the theory of organic development

maintains that the "natural experiences" of childhood, if "allowed to

occur without interference," will prove "far more sustaining and

enlightening than anything we teach them" (Marin, 1972, p. vii).

Applied to the community, the theory holds that procedures for human
interaction and governance, as well as the individuals in the
community, will also best develop "organically;" thus it would be a
gross error to impose a preconceived form for community organization
and decision making. Direct democracy, and often even consensus of
the entire community, are common procedures in the governance of these
schools. The idea of representative government, involving delegation
of the power of some to a single person, goes against the
"individualistic" grain, whereby no one may speak for anyone else.
Everyone is unique; therefore everyone has to be included, directly,
in the decision. And, according to the theory, in the "free and open
atmosphere" that results, almost every problem can be solved.

Graubard (1972b) suggests the logic through which "freeing the
children" and "meaningful relationships" may be linked in the minds of
free school advocates:

> Free school people are deeply committed to removing the harmful
> effects of coercion, manipulation, enforced competition. . . .
> [This] seems a necessary condition for the warm and trusting
> relationships between student and teacher and student and student
> which the free school philosophy claims are in themselves a
> vitally important part of a good educational process and are a
> basis for good learning even of the traditional sort. That is,
> the idea of emotional growth and maturity receives great
> emphasis, and the quality of the relationships that make up the
> school community are percieved as the most vital element in this
> kind of education. (Graubard, 1972b, p. 157-158)

The logic appears to run as follows: If we remove manipulation
and coersion from the educational process, then, as the shackles fall,
warm and trusting relationships between the young people and their
adult guides will grow up naturally, organically; the youngsters will

then _feel_ like turning to the adults for nurturance and guidance in the process of their own unfolding. They will do so, then, _at need_, and it will never be necessary for the adults to _impose_ their guidance on an unwilling subject. A true "learning community" will bloom, as long as these premises hold true.

Unfortunately, experience does not appear to have borne out the theory of organic development. Evidently, prizing individual freedom from the imposition of collective rules has impeded rather than promoted community building.

Present versus future. Another "built-in goal conflict" in such schools is noted by Riordan (1972). The high regard for freedom of individual choice in the schools may ultimately mean, he says, a loss of choice at a later date, if a student does not choose to learn basic academic skills.

> Conferring with a student who is deficient in writing skills, and who has elected an English course in "media" where very little writing will be done, a staff member may project his or her own bias to say that grammar does not matter and can not be taught, and buttress that argument with the school's commitment to "choice." That choice, however, may actually limit the student's later options instead of empowering him. (Riordan, 1972, pp. 25-26)

In other words, the goal of preparing students for survival and success in the world (empowerment later) may conflict with the goal of full autonomy for students in directing their own learning (empowerment now).

<u>Survival</u> <u>versus</u> <u>change</u>. Kozol (1972a), speaking for the

"revolutionary" wing of the "free school movement," points out a

similar potential source of conflict: that of preparing children in

"the basics," necessary for survival and advancement in the present

real world, as opposed to preparing children to <u>change</u> that world.

Says Kozol,

> The question, then, in my own sense of struggle, is as
> follows: How can the Free School achieve, at one and the same
> time, a sane, on-going, down-to-earth, skill-oriented,
> sequential, credentializing and credentialized curricular
> experience directly geared in to the real survival needs of
> colonized children in a competitive and technological society;
> and simultaneously evolve, maintain, nourish and revivify the
> "uncredentialized," "un-authorized," "un-sanctioned,"
> "non-curricular" consciousness of pain, rage, love and revolution
> which first infused their school with truth and magic,
> exhilaration and comradship. (Kozol, 1972a, p. 49)

Such conflicts emerge particularly in settings that see

themselves as helping to change society. Even children who are to be

prepared to help bring about "the revolution" must still be prepared

to live successfully in the world as is. Yet it is precisely the

traditional insistence on "basic skills" that these people view as the

overpowering conservative force exerted by educational institutions to

maintain society in its present state, for the valuation of "basic

skills" means valuation of the society to which those skills are

"basic." How can we make the revolution when we knuckle under to the

curricular standards of the establishment?

<u>Laissez-faire</u> <u>versus</u> <u>adult</u> <u>guidance</u>. Sometimes values or

self-image conflicts are tacitly inherent in the generally accepted

"goal package" at the school, and are apparently not a matter of overt contention among members. In other settings, however, when consensus is not reached on the values of the school open conflict appears among members who strongly advocate one main pathway or another. According to Novak (1975), ASPE began with a sense of "homogeneity" and "like mindedness" among the founding parents, but by the second year a basic conflict between "progressive" and "laissez faire" educational goals had emerged, with two distinct camps.

These two viewpoints, or paradigms, produced two significantly different and apparently incompatible versions of life in this school. A child who looked free and fulfilled from the romantic or laissez-faire perspective, for example a child who worked with, cared for and studied gerbils, hamsters and other small animals in the school, to the exclusion of almost any other activity, might, from the progressive position, look like a child in need of some alternative activities to occupy his time, e.g. reading. What the romantic defined as teacher responsiveness and availability, the progressive called irresponsibility and lack of accountability for one's actions. What the romantic teacher called a program, perhaps only a short-lived engagement with a child around some specific question, problem, or skill, the progressive teacher termed disorganization, chaos and lack of continuity. Furthermore, what the progressive called a program, the romantic termed control of the child. Finally, what the progressive defined as reaching out to discover the child's needs, the romantic defined as manipulation, and what the progressive called acquisition of cognitive skills and competence the romantic called indoctrination.

These two perspectives, then, when combined in one program, produced an endless series of charges and counter charges, the validity of which . . . remained unresolvable, so long as they were viewed from within a particular paradigm. (Novak, 1975, p. 120-121) (Emphasis added.)

Adult needs versus children's needs. A slightly different kind of prioritizing is exemplified in schools like Magic Mountain, where

the struggle was in trying to balance the needs of adults against its

ostensible primary commitment to meet the growth needs of children.

> Beginning with the belief that it was possible for staff and
> student to reap rewards simultaneously within the educational
> endeavor, we gave permission to staff to satisfy personal needs
> for pleasure and closeness; however, it became apparent that
> pursuit of these needs came into conflict at times with the needs
> of students. Hence, priority had to be given to professional
> demands; delay of gratification became important for staff, if we
> were to satisfy our primary goal. (Harvey, 1974, pp. 169-170)

In the beginning, Harvey (1974) notes, there was at Magic Mountain

> an unstated assumption that staff and student gratification would
> be synergistic. [Staff] did not anticipate the conflict which
> was to occur between the primary goal and this unstated
> assumption. (p. 171)

> In a comment that sounds a theme found in Harvey's (1974) work,

Duke (1978b) observes that

> achieving the ideal of an alternative learning environment for
> children sometimes can clash with the establishment of an
> alternative environment for adult affiliation. More than a few
> parent-initiated alternative schools have been unable to
> establish one or the other as a priority--a situation often
> resulting in collapse of the school. Occasionally, "second
> generation" alternative schools will emerge from the ashes of
> these failures. Six such schools were found in the sample. Each
> constituted an admission by a group of parents or teachers that a
> school cannot provide for the learning needs of students and the
> emotional needs of parents simultaneously. (pp. 128-129)
> (Emphasis added.)

Along these lines, the inimitable Kozol (1972a) decries those who

derive

> egotistic joy in being able to boast to one another of our
> "wide-open" and "participatory" nature. . . . Too often, what
> one finds is that they have superbly "open" and wholly
> "participatory" sessions, often lasting well past one or two
> o'clock at night, "relate" beautifully, "communicate" honestly,
> "touch," "feel" and "open up" to one another marvelously, but
> never seem to arrive at the decisions that their children's lives
> and the survival of their school depend upon, grow totally
> exhausted and end up closing in six months. It seems to me that

people who are looking for group therapy ought to find it
somewhere else and not attempt to work out their own hang-ups at
the price of eighty children. (Kozol, 1972a, p. 22)

In general, problems arise not in that adults in these schools
derive personal satisfactions, but that the school may hold to the
myth that it must and will meet both adult needs and student needs.

Problems with procedures

As schools successfully sorted their values, relinquishing or
down-grading some in favor of others, they were actively involved
already in the creation and recreation of rules and resources that
reflected and supported the values. Procedures for getting things
done in the organization are one important aspect of the "rules" and
"resources," in the broad sense in which we employ the terms.
("Rules," the reader is reminded, are both enabling and constraining.
They enable what gets done, and constrain some of what does not.)
Alternative schools have treated anything framed as "regulation" (in
the sense of "constraint") as anathema. Thus they have not easily
evolved regular procedures for dividing responsibilities and areas of
control.

Some romantic schools, for example, did not evolve formal
procedures for decision making that required student participation.
As shown earlier, this is linked to some of the conflicting beliefs
held simultaneously in the system.

Other schools have had difficulty in dividing responsibilities, a
difficulty stemming in some cases from a reluctance to produce

anything resembling a power hierarchy. Their fiercely egalitarian ethos frowned on allotting members control over different organizational baliwicks, whether based on their various capacities and talents or on other more arbitrary criteria. The issue of "control" in such schools remains unresolved and emerges as a theme around which much energy and attention is organized.

Problems with place

The task of attaining a place in the community is, as discussed earlier, a controversial one. It may be that continued, unresolved conflict with elements in the wider context (which ordinarily would signal the presence of a systemic problem) is for an alternative school "business as usual." To be "alternative," in the sense in which these schools mean to be, is to challenge tradition. If the school were not experiencing a certain amount of conflict in the wider context, one might assume no challenge was issuing from the school.

As long as the structure of the school is adequate to deal with the stress on the system, the presence per se of conflict with the wider world may not signal a systemic problem. On the other hand, there is doubtless a limit to the amount of conflict with elements in the outer world that a school can tolerate. If the school is unable to obtain some measure of peace within its wider community, it indeed has a problem.

In this case a systemic consultant would look to the larger system, to the community, or to the system made up of school and

whatever other element(s) were involved in continual conflict. The consultant would wonder how the conflict was operating within this larger system, how it made sense in that context.

As with problems at the earliest stage, the literature is largely silent with regard to problems having to do with the relationship of the school to its community. The consultant will have to be guided by general principles of problem formulation applied to specific cases.

If an alternative school is to assume a recognized place in its community, that is to become "established," one might project a possible problem involving a shift in worldview and self-image that would need to accompany this task. Not only would conflict with the external world need to be kept to a tolerable level, but the school would need to come to terms with itself as an "established institution," a member of the community with a degree of acceptance there that might not fit with the "alternative" image. One can easily imagine the emergence of internal conflict among members symptomatic of a problem of this type. How are we still an "alternative"? Have we been coopted? Or have we maybe changed them? There are plenty of ways to view the situation, and to join battle internally over differing views. In this case, a consultant may handle the problem without directly involving elements in the school's wider community, since it is a problem mainly involving the system's own view of itself.

Again, much of the above is pure speculation, since the literature has not provided data to indicate how alternative schools

that have become "established" have fared in negotiating the
transition from seeing themselves as "flexible," "resilient," and
above all "renegade," to a self-image that includes qualities of
"solidity," "permanance," and a larger degree of social acceptability.

Summary

At each developmental turning, the school will face new
challenges and new tasks. Major developmental junctures involve
second-order change in the structure of the system, accompanied by a
major shift in worldivew and social reality. Usually, a new
self-image emerges. If the system has not the resources to effect
such a change, the school has a problem, and may even fail.

The next section offers three examples of such systemic problems.

Three Cases

Developmental transition is only one construct to which a
systemic consultant might link an organizational problem, though
always a useful one to consider. In the following pages the three
schools discussed in depth earlier--Metro High, ASPE, and Magic
Mountain--will again be the focus. In the case of each, the author
will demonstrate a systemic formulation of an apparent problem in the
school.

In this effort, she will be calling on the principles of problem
formulation developed in the theoretical section of Part Four. In

particular, she is guided by a mandate to search for unifying themes tying the problem to all holons in the system. She must attempt to show how the symptoms of the problem make sense in the structure of the system. She must demonstrate how the system has gotten itself "stuck" in its structural evolution so that, though it operates with a high level of pain and discomfort, it seemingly cannot change.

Some heuristic questions are these:

Presenting problem. Who in the system is complaining about what? How might various members' complaints be seen as different punctuations of a single pattern of interaction? In other words, how is the symptom an integral part of a repeated interactive cycle?

Organizational myths. What are the supporting myths of the system? (These include the school's mission, broad goals, self-image, etc.) What are the rules about interactive behavior that directly express the mythos? In what ways do these rules conflict and place members in paradoxical positions or double-binds? In what ways does the school's self-image of what it is doing differ from what it actually appears to be doing? What transition might the school be facing that accounts for such a discrepancy?

Conflict. What are the areas of long-unresolved conflict in the school? If there is more than one recurring theme, what unifying thread runs through all of them?

Rules and patterns of interaction. How does the structure of the system reflexively operate to hold itself relatively unchanged, even though the school is so highly troubled that it badly needs to change?

What are the patterns of interaction that include any symptomatic behavior? What are the rules governing such behavior? How might these troubled interactions be seen as moves in a game?

What is the game?

The answers to these questions will define the problem as the consultant sees it. Lacking first-hand knowledge of the schools, one can only speculate as to possible answers to many of these questions in the three cases below. In fairness to the three schools whose problems are bared to the world in these pages, the author offers a further caveat. While one can equally well describe in reflexive and mutually causal terms non-problematic aspects of system structure and change, the focus here is on problem solving. All three schools were actually not as beset with problems as may appear in these pages. Certainly in the case of Magic Mountain the problems were painful but not debilitating; the school has grown and is recongnized as something of an institution in its community. A founding member at Metro has informed the author that the issue of individual freedom, which will be treated as central to its problems, was "subsidiary to the main purposes of the school." Clearly, many other important educational activities were ongoing at Metro despite the problems with participative governance that were the subject of published literature on the school. Perhaps some people at Metro would have viewed the governance issue as a frustration but not a problem that couldn't be lived with.

Thus, in presenting the _problems_ in these schools the author has decidedly _not_ presented a complete picture of the schools. The purpose has been to investigate problem solving, not to clearly represent all aspects of each school. Many essential (and admirable) characteristics have been omitted. The material in this dissertation should not be be taken to fully or fairly describe the schools, and it does not even begin to document or assess their contributions to their clientele or to the field of education.

The Gift That Kept on Giving: Metro High

In the case of Metro, the "presenting problem" that the staff, at least, would bring to a consultant is the evident failure of student participation in governance. Some might say the "problem" is that "they don't participate," others that "we can't get them to participate." Some students might say, "What problem?" Those involved in trying to make all-school meetings and other participative forms work would speak much as the staff would: "Other students won't participate," or "We can't get them to."

Given the information about Metro presented in earlier chapters, how might we fit together what the staff were doing and what the students were doing to specifically account for the lack of student participation in school governance? We have seen that students did not _need_ to participate in order to achieve their ends. When staff, who needed to keep the school running, went ahead without them,

students' non-participation was reinforced by the fact that the decisions did get made without them, and moreso by the students' reinforced perception of "rules" as something imposed on them. They could thus continue in their stance of "the only good government is no government" and abstain from participating in a process they abjured. A deeply pervasive pattern here might be characterized thus:

Staff behaved as <u>freedom</u> <u>givers</u>.

Students behaved as <u>freedom</u> <u>receivers</u>.

Staff worked hard to involve students in decision making at Metro, and also allowed them not to take part. This is a bind already discussed at length in terms of community versus individual freedoms. A deeper understanding of the bind is obtainable from the freedom giver/freedom receiver construct. To say that staff <u>allowed</u> students freedom is to place this interpretation on their interactive behavior, showing them in their full capacity as handers-out of freedom. They <u>could</u> have withheld it and <u>forced</u> the students to participate in formal governing bodies.

As freedom receivers, students accepted the gift of freedom. They were not freedom <u>takers</u>, though, as they did not work actively to acquire freedoms. Had they been freedom takers they might, for example, like Chesler (1978), have seen participation in governance as a crucial means to that end and insisted on participation. They would then have been freedom <u>owners</u>. Instead, they behaved as receivers of freedom and in that role took advantage of being <u>allowed</u> to "do their own thing as long as it didn't hurt anybody," including not going to

boring meetings.

Each side in this bargain needs the other. It's impossible to give a gift if the intended recipient takes it first. Giving is best done with a recipient who wants the gift but who waits for it to be given. Receiving, on the other side of the coin, is best done with a donor who is eager to give. Receiving also cannot be done by taking. The best way to receive and keep receiving is to find an eager donor and then wait for the gift to be given. If it's grabbed it's not a gift, and the relationship no longer holds on either side. It's also important that a giver by definition has something and the recipient by definition doesn't have it until it's given. To sustain such a relationship, the gift needs to keep on being given, but not owned by the recipient. Somehow the giver must keep ownership and the reciever must keep on not having ownership.

This was accomplished at Metro by the continued "allowing" of freedom to students by staff, and the continued receiving, rather than taking of freedom by students. The school was begun by adults who felt students were not free in traditional schools (and the students who came to Metro agreed), and so staff set out to give students freedom in their new school. The complementary stances involved in this transaction never shifted. Both students and staff unwittingly collaborated in the continuing of the pattern, through their interactive behavior which both followed and recreated the rules that held it in place. All members were involved in responding to and continuously reproducing a structure that made freedom the gift that

kept on giving.

For example, when the staff made decisions without the students, the perception of "freedom" as something staff still had to give and students to receive was reinforced. Students felt rules were externally imposed (they were not "free"); staff felt the school needed the rules and needed everyone to follow them, including the absent students.

But staff could then allow the students (give them the freedom) not to follow the rules.

The maintaining of communication channels that largely excluded students from knowing meeting agendas ahead of time (much less knowing there would be a meeting) makes sense in context of maintaining a freedom giver/freedom receiver relationship between staff and student holons. This is not to say that communication channels were kept that way on purpose, but that communication channels reflected and supported the entire pattern, both produced by the pattern and reproducing it.

Seen as a whole transaction, this is a perfectly integrated and complementary set of roles and positions. However, it is the rules, or the structure, that govern and direct this transaction; it is not the members' conscious wish that it happen. In effect the interactive patterns and the rules of the system kept staff in role of freedom giver and students in role of freedom receiver.

At the same time, it is their interactive behavior that creates and continually recreates this circumstance. Hence, while members

don't _mean_ to do it, their inteactive behavior is in this sense
responsible for it.

It will take a quantum leap for this system to escape its
paradoxical bind. Right now, it appears that the entire structure
opeates to keep staff and students in their respective roles, vis a
vis freedom. The main student body remains passively hedonistic in
its interactive behavior. The staff are busy and energetically active
in their recurring concern for keeping students stocked with a supply
of freedom. The students "misbehave" and absent themselves from
meetings. The staff arrange meetings and attend them, make many
decisions over lunch and after school, and pass formal rules that they
then don't enforce. The communication system stays informal and
exclusive of students.

The systemic consultant sees all of these patterns and the theme
that runs through and links them all as operating to keep the system
from being able to change, as well as producing trouble for the
members. Seeing this holistic picture, the consultant has a way to
understand how it is that the members are bound into paradox by their
own myths and self-image and deep sense of mission, and, more, sees
that the system has been unable to evolve a less troublesome set of
beliefs and a different structure to match. The consultant might see
in such a situation a paradox just waiting for a strategic
counterparadox.

Two Battles; One Problem: ASPE

This school had traversed some difficult territory, but after
four years two major areas of conflict remained, dating from the first
days of the school's operation. One was the issue of laissez-faire
education versus a guided discovery approach. The other was the issue
of parent participation in the school.

The teachers were doing a good job of keeping the daily program
operating. A now ancient self-image of a parent-run school persisted,
however, rooted in deeply held beliefs about parent control of their
children's education. This was at odds with the operational control
by teachers that the school structure reflected and supported. The
school clearly had a problem. First, after four years it was still
battling over its educational approach. Second, it had changed
structurally, but it was unable to accomodate a new social reality
that better fit the current operational structure; it continued to
hold on to the myth of parent participation in spite of its
predominantly teacher-controlled operational form.

The systemic consultant to such a school would search for
connections between these two indications of trouble. Why, the
consultant wonders, is the organization holding so determinedly to its
old view of itself? What is the old view doing to help keep the
system from changing? How is the structure of the system recreating
the old view? What is the battle over pedagogical practice doing to
support the existing structure? How do the rules and relationships
among people keep the battle alive? What is the "game" in this system

that includes these two conflicts as essential components?

An examination of the second source of trouble, having to do with parent participation, brings to mind how ASPE parents said they believed in having freedom from governmental restrictions such as those mandating how their children would be educated. In their counterculture lives, this was one of many personal freedoms that they sought to claim for themselves. These people also expressed a wish for a less alienated existence than that which was the common lot for middle class North American suburban families. They wanted a community, they said. The "free school" seemed a perfect vehicle for both goals.

The astute reader has no doubt already noted the parallel between these two sources of trouble. On one hand are the parents' two overriding goals--personal freedom, and community--and on the other are the two conflicting educational goals that the school was embattled over--personal freedom for children to be involved in whatever, and adult guidance for them to be involved in community activities. The astute reader also remembers well the many examples of schools in which these same goals were held in equal regard, and which contorted themselves in the attempt to embody both at once. The author refrains from repeating herself yet once again on this matter. The interest here is in the discovery that the two seemingly separate struggles at ASPE may be seen as isomorphs of one another.

One might hypothesize that the continuation of the battle over educational philosophy helped to keep the parents--and the

school--from having to give up one of the two values in favor of the
other. As long as the balance was kept between those in favor of
personal freedom and those in favor of community and social
responsibility, the seemingly impossible choice need not be made. The
problem, in this framing, was that ASPE was a school totally dedicated
to not making that choice, which put in other words could be seen as
having to choose between either having the government run their lives,
or having to live lives separate and alien from other like-minded
people. It seemed that the implications in choosing an educational
program involving adult guidance of children's activities conflicted
with the implications in the parents' claiming the right to educate
their children without government interference. The implications in
choosing a laissez faire approach to education, however, conflicted
with their desire for a community rather than living an existence of
individual alienation.

Such might have been the unconscious logic that for ASPE people
followed from the "myth," the "worldview," the "social reality" that
operated in the school and that encapsulated the problem. Whether the
connections drawn here between the two "battles" in the school do in
fact explain the bind that kept the school in trouble is impossible to
determine. From the information available, however, a consultant
might tentatively form such a hypothesis, intending to test it through
personal interaction in the system.

"Who's in Charge Here?": Magic Mountain

Magic Mountain safely navigated such troubled waters as "adults' needs versus children's needs" and "freedom versus community." The theme that haunted this school from inception was "Who's in Charge Here?" (Harvey, 1974). The reader may remember the successive vignettes in which this theme was played out over the years, primarily among staff and students. Though the school had a director, leadership was always a bone of contention. The problem pervaded other kinds of role definition as well. For a long time the two core teachers did not divide the curriculum areas. Either both teachers worked together most of the time, or they traded academic disciplines back and forth. In the second year, for example, the two teachers collaborated on designing almost all aspects of the curriculum, so that during math period both were equally "in charge." Also, the school practiced an "integrated curriculum" approach, which further legitimated this reluctance to specialize. Later, by the fifth year, some academic baliwicks had been established, but others were freely traded back and forth.

As far as was practicable--and probably beyond--the core team resisted specializing or dividing the territory. As long as this persisted, "the territory" was there to be taken, thus struggles over who would have it continued. This aspect of the "game without end" involved keeping the other person from getting control of the curriculum by not specializing oneself. For if someone had claimed one corner, she or he would thereby have forfeited being in charge of

the rest, and "the game" was to be in charge in every situation, or failing that to keep others from being in charge. In their attempt to always be in charge, the members carefully made sure no one was exclusively in charge of anything.

In this way, members of the core team played out a myth that made everybody equal and interchangable. "I can teach math and you can teach math. There is no difference between us." The denial of difference meant nobody "lost" by being less competent or less authoritative; it also meant nobody on the core team was affirmed for fitting a unique niche, meeting a unique need. The net effect was an attempt to keep everyone equal, and equally in charge. The denial that anyone was in charge, while everyone was trying to be in charge of everything, was the essence of this "game."

This game, one must remember, was not played consciously or on purpose. Each member saw only one punctuation of the entire picture. Each member saw only the ways in which others were "contrary," "frustrating," even "malevolent," perhaps "helpful;" and the ways in which he or she was constrained to respond. The rules of the game were unspoken, always. It was taboo to even speak about the notion of "power" or "control" as having any bearing on school life--a true signal that the issue was both important and toxic in the system!

The systemic consultant, deriving such a picture from the behavior of members, would see the "game" as the problem, not the "personality differences" that the members themselves might have identified as their problem.

Summary

Problems in human systems are inextricably linked to two major aspects of system life: <u>worldview</u> and <u>development</u>. To be sure, the two facets are themselves reflexively interlinked, for as the system develops, its worldview changes, and shifts in worldview facilitate system development. The solution of a systemic problem involves both a reality shift and a developmental transition. Punctuated differently, we could say that the problem is the system's inability to effect such changes through its own inner resources.[1]

The definition of an actual problem involves carefully watching the interactions of the members and seeking the reflexive rules in the patterns of those interactions. Repetative, cyclical patterns of interaction are the tangible "stuff" of systems to which the consultant has access in order to identify the problem. The consultant searches for the theme that appears throughout these patterns. At Magic Mountain, she might hear the refrain "We are all equal," repeated with endless variation. At Metro, the chorus was perhaps, "We grow organically." At ASPE the theme might have been "We'd rather fight than choose." The consultant would listen too for the possible point-counterpoint within the major theme: "No one's in

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[1]In a sense, this statement is unsatisfactory in its vague reference to "inner resources." If an organization calls in a consultant, or a family goes to a therapist for help, it could be said that the system has called on "inner resources" to procure the help it needs in order to change. However, we will let the statement stand as a marker between "natural development" and "outside intervention."

charge of anything; I'm always in charge," at Magic Mountain. "We are all free agents; we are an interdependent community," at Metro.

The consultant thus builds an understanding of the central myth that supports social reality in this system. This is the myth that members may somehow need to reshape or replace as they reframe reality for their system.

In some cases the central myth may have been appropriate at an earlier point in the life of the system. However, the organization has been maturing, changing, growing, and no longer does the worldview fit the new circumstances. Alternately, it is possible that circumstances outside the system have changed such that the central belief-set about that outside world (and about the system in relation to the world) no longer works for the system. The school cannot successfully transact business with the outer world within the parameters of the myth. In either case, the organization is faced with a need to develop new structures and a new worldview.

The consultant tries to understand from the history of the organization what major changes have taken place within the system or in its immediate environment that now require second-order changes in the organization's structure. What evidence is there of structures that were established at an earlier stage, but are counter-productive at this one? In alternative schools, for example, the earliest stage of rallying round the flag is often marked by a rejection of all overt constraints on individual freedoms. During the initial period of high spirits and intense commitment to the cause, the rules against infringing on personal autonomy operate in the organization's favor.

Members are attracted and affirmed and their commitment to the organization is secured. In turn, as long as the members "freely" and "autonomously" commit themselves to the communal project, the myth sustains the collective operation. The fact that the structure requires members to collaborate, to cooperate and even to compromise with one another, does not necessarily damage the myth, for the myth maintains that they are <u>freely</u> participating. It is only at a later stage that this myth may impede rather than impel the organization's success.

The consultant takes note of how the present structure operates. What are the rules that guide behavior and that give it its communicational value? What resources are available to members as they go about their business in the system? In particular, the consultant watches members' patterns of interaction, viewing each act as though it were a move in a game, trying to deduce from the observed behavior what the game might be. The reflexive picture that the consultant forms looks something like Escher's "Drawing Hands." Each part of the cycle helps the rest of the parts to become as they are. The consultant takes this picture as her model of the problem. From this model flow the interventions designed to help the organization develop new structures and reframe reality, in order to continue without debilitating pain on the part of members and with an increased capacity to achieve its purpose in the world. The next chapter explores the intervention processes that would accompany the consultant's systemic definition of the problem.

CHAPTER XIII

SYSTEMIC ORGANIZATIONAL CONSULTING

Introduction

Very little has been published to document attempts made by
outside consultants to help specific schools analyze and solve their
particular organizational problems, and so far, unfortuantely, no
accounts of systemic consultations with independent alternative
schools have been published. Hugenin and Deal (1978) provide the one
report that this author could uncover of a full consultation and
intervention of any sort with an alternative school. Theirs was a
traditional Organizational Development (OD) approach, involving an
assessment of the organization using questionnaires, a standard data
feedback technique, and training sessions for staff in group problem
solving. As such, it does not greatly inform the systemic
consultant's work.

Other authors (The Center for New Schools, 1972; Mulcahy, 1975;
Riordan, 1972; Rosen, 1975) have written about research and evaluation
methods appropriate for alternative schools. Their observations and
recommendations emphasize the importance of approaches that leave

participants in charge of decision making. The Center for New Schools (1972) strongly recommend phenomenological methodology as a means of assessment that avoids bringing into the setting a set of values that is alien to that of the alternative school.

These recommendations are in keeping with a systemic approach to consultation. The purpose of this chapter is to develop a set of propositions intended to guide consultants who wish to use a systemic approach to organizational problem solving in independent alternative schools. After some contextual discussion on the makeup of the consulting body itself, the chapter then discusses the various aspects of conducting a systemic consultation in an alternative school, creating hypothetical examples from the schools described in earlier chapters. At the end, a set of heuristic propositions are summarized.

The Consultant

The weight of the literature strongly supports the use of a team approach in systemic consulting, rather than working as an isolated individual. The team, above all, helps maintain a systemic stance. Human systems have a high valence for individual human beings. The team countervails the client system. By maintaining a systemic perspective, the team helps the individual keep from being subsumed by the system she hopes to help.

Too, involving several people in working on and thinking about the same case will help advance the field of systemic organizational consulting. The working of several minds with different prespectives

on the same set of circumstances not only increases creativity in the consulting itself, but enhances the learning and the development of new methodology in the field as a whole.

In family therapy teams, a single therapist often interviews the family, with the rest of the team behind the one-way mirror. The one-way mirror provides distance for the rest of the team, who thus are less likely to enter the game of the system.

This arrangement will not transfer to an organizational setting. Even if the client system were small enough to get all the members into a room with a one-way mirror, the implied context of "therapy" would be an intervention of sorts, and very likely not a helpful one. It will be necessary to devise ways to use a team such that not all the members are equally involved in directly taking part in the give and take of systemic commerce, yet all have intimate knowledge of the consulting process and of the interactions of the interviewer or spokesperson with the organization. For example, a team of four can divide tasks among themselves during all their visits to a single site. One person might conduct the actual interviews with members or groups in the organization, while another took notes, a third operated a tape recorder and a fourth simply stayed in the background and watched. Such a team will have the capacity to collect different kinds of information as the client system is seen from the different positions of various team members.

The team should work out ahead of time how they intend to present their organizational structure. Work with the client organization can

potentially be affected by how the team later plays on its presentation of itself. It may be more difficult for the organization's members to relate to a team of interchangable members than one with clearly differentiated roles. Also, the team itself is likely to have more problems working with such an arrangement than if it divides responsibilities in some way. The Milan team's practice of rotating roles at each new job could be a useful model.

The team will need to take care of its own systemic business between times, lest their own symmetrical "games" stand in the way of a clear systemic view of the client system. It will take time for the team to evolve a structure that allows it to do its business smoothly and effectively, and time to maintain that structure in good working order. One of the nemises of early work in the field of systemic organizational consulting is likely to be the necessity of working with untried teams using an untried methodology.

The use of a team in working with organizations will at least be more readily understood and accepted by the clients than is the case with families. The thought of unknown people lurking behind the one-way mirror has its own effect in the family therapy session. (To be sure, this effect, like many others, can be used productively by the creative therapist.) An organization will readily accept a "work team" with a leader or spokesperson plus assistants or colleagues as a commonplace of their context.

Particularly in the early stages of this budding new field, consulting teams should include a preponderance of members with direct

experience in systemic family therapy. The systemic approach is not exactly esoteric, but it requires learning a new framework for understanding cause and effect. The "methodology" has no substance without the paradigm shift involved in taking on this view. For most people, previous experience in working with real human systems, taking the systemic perspective in analyzing their problems and designing and implementing interventions, will be important. From the first contact onwards, every interaction with the client system is potentially significant to the work. Prior experience in working systemically on one's feet would be invaluable. So little is known about how the methodology will transfer to organizations that an inherent ease with the theory in practice will be important.

The consultant with a background in education in general and alternative schools in particular will be advantaged. Although a facile systemic thinker and practitioner will be able to operate effectively without such extensive knowledge of the context, the process of initially joining the system would be facilitated if the members perceived the consultants as "like-minded," or at least sympathetic to the school's mission.

Throughout the rest of this chapter the terms "consultant" and "consulting body" are variously employed. The two may be taken as interchangable, standing for either an individual or a team.

Contracting to Consult

Negotiating the consultancy contract is no mere formality to be dispensed with so that the "real work" can begin. In systemic practice, intervention commences with the very first contact. The consultant needs to gather information with which to negotiate a contract that will itself be "theraputic," setting the stage for the sort of intervention the consultant envisions, if not itself comprising an intervention. In Giddens' (1977, 1982) terms, rules and resources for a new system made up of consultant body and client organization are in creation at this moment. The consultant body needs to bring its influence to bear such that those rules and resources will enable the original system to have been changed when the consulting system dissolves.

Several tasks must be accomplished during the contractual stage of the consultation. An opportunity for gathering certain kinds of information is presented immediately. The client's understanding of the consulting process and the definition of "success" for the consulting project need to be established. These activities set the stage for the work to be done, and in some measure they provide an initial chance to intervene and observe the response of the system.

The consultant's stance during this stage is noncommital. Both consultant and client are deciding whether to enter into an association. No assumptions are made on either side as to whether a contract will be made. An important first step on part of the

consultant body is to establish this noncommital environment for the
initial pre-contract stage of the consultation.

Initial contact

The consultant body will presumably be contacted by phone or in
person by some member of the organization. To begin with, the
consultant needs to understand the context for this request. Why did
this person ask for help? Why now? Who else wants a consultant to
come in? Who doesn't? How might the entry of a consultant be
someone's move in a game? Unless the consultant body finds answers to
these questions, they are in danger of losing efficacy by unwittingly
playing into a systemic game. Knowing this to be a possibility, and
in what way, the consultant body can strategically frame their entry
in such a way as to nullify the potential "move" and neutralize their
effect in the client's game. Imber Coppersmith (in press) cites the
case of a geriatric care facility whose director requested
consultation to deal with problems in relationships between staff and
patients. In gathering pre-contract information, the consultant
discovered that the relationships between staff and director had
deteriorated markedly in recent months with both sides assigning blame
to one another.

> The request by the director for a consultant to deal with
> staff-patient relationships was seen by the staff as a further
> criticism of their work and as a distraction from recent errors
> they believed the director had made. If the consultant had
> immediately negotiated a contract with the director to deal with
> "staff-patient relationships" she would have formed an alliance
> with the director and the consultation would have failed.
> Instead, the information gathered was utilized by the consultant

to offer a consultation to deal first with staff relationships which included the director as an initial step towards dealing with other issues including patients. (Imber Coppersmith, in press)

The consultant would be wise to allow time for an informal visit to the school during the pre-contract stage, to observe inobtrusively, watch "how things are done around here," and see how it "feels" to be in the school. Meetings with small groups and/or informal interviews with a sampling of the membership might be included in such a visit. Choosing whom to speak with, if not with everybody, is a significant communication to the system. Speaking only with people of leadership status would probably be a mistake, for example, particularly in a non-traditional organization.

From these activities the consulting body forms an initial hypothesis about the systemic situation in the school before entering officially as "the consultant." This assures that the consultant is not unwittingly playing a part in the systemic game, rather than helping to change the game.

The contract itself needs to specify (1) the definition of the problem to be worked on, (2) the logistics of the consulting process, and (3) the definition of success for the consultation.

Defining the problem to be worked on

The consultant, after an initial assessment, may think that the presenting problem as stated by the client in the initial contact should be redefined, with the collaboration and consent of the client. A good example is the one cited above of the geriatric facility in

which, had she entered with the problem definition as originally given, the consultancy would have failed. After an initial assessment of the organizational system, the consultant body should clarify the "problem to be worked on" with the client organization such that the consultants are not allied with any one faction, they are left with permission to work directly with all the holons they deem necessary, and the problem definition does not impute blame, imply a moral stance, or tell the client what's "wrong" with them. It should positively connote the members' contributions while describing a trouble they share.

The problem to be worked on should be distinquished from the consultant's private systemic hypothesis about the system, though obviously the consultant is guided by that hypothesis in formulating a statement of the problem to be worked on that will allow the systemic problem to be addressed. The problem to be worked on should refer to areas of acknowledged difficulty in the organization, stated in the language of the client.

Consulting logistics

Identity of the client. Throughout all of these decisions and negotiations, the consultant needs to keep in mind who the client really is. Whatever holons are actually contacted and worked with, the school as a whole is the client. Thus, for example, even if the initial request is to "fix" a troubled relationship the consultant body plans the contract and then their entry into the system so as to

be able to "treat" the school as a whole system. Occasionally, a need may arise to treat an even larger system (say in the case of a school within the public system, or a school having problems in relation to its residential neighbors). Rarely, but conceivably, the consultant might treat a smaller system within the school, for example a single class group. Usually, however, the systemic approach looks to the wider context than that within which the problem is originally framed by members.

Whatever the nature of the contract, the consulting body must make sure everyone in the system understands who is involved in meetings with the consultant and for what purposes. Otherwise the consultation may be perceived by some as a covert alliance with others, and its efficacy will be lost.

The "target" holons. The consultant needs to determine first with whom to work. This is often a judgement call and depends upon the setting and the nature of the problem that the organization is experiencing. It is not necessary to meet with all of the holons involved in the problem, or even those at the top of the hierarchy. Some systemic family therapists have been able to help a family system to change by meeting with only one member. The consultant needs to determine at what point in the system the introduction of change would be most effective.

In an alternative school such as Magic Mountain, the staff would be a logical holon to focus on, since almost all systemic activity

flows through the staff holon. Also, being the most cohesive holon, they are most likely to exhibit clearly the isomorphic patterns in the system. Even at Metro, contracting to meet with the staff (after initial pre-contract meetings with all holons) might have been appropriate, and the consultant could leave open whether or not to meet with the students at some point as well. (At Metro, choosing to meet with just the staff would itself have been an intervention, communicating to that holon, "You are the ones in control here.")

At a parent cooperative such as ASPE the consultant might want to meet with parents in smaller groups (say by classroom) during the pre-contract stage, but meet with a smaller membership deemed to be central to the structure during the rest of the consultation.

The principle at work in this choice is that change at any point in the system will affect other parts of the system. At the same time, experience with families suggests that some points provide better leverage than others, and the consultant must determine what holons are most strategically located. At ASPE, for example, the staff holon might have served well, since it contained in microcosm the pedagogical battle in which the school was engaged, and contained one member (Jean) who was also a parent and a founder of the school. The drawback to such a plan is that the staff holon did not contain any "non-participating" parents. However, this holon could still be the choice of focus if the consultant had decided to intervene through focussing on the pedagogical battle rather than the participation issue.

Observation. Besides formal gatherings with selected members,
the consulting body may want to engage in observational visits to see
the organization in operation. Such opportunities are not usually
open to family therapists, but an organizational consultant can take
advantage of the fact that on-site visits by a consultant are
commonplace and even expected in organizations. Such "informal"
visits would be particularly useful during the pre-contract stage. If
used later on, the consulting body must take care not to allow members
of the organization to share "secrets" and must behave so as to avoid
any possible suspicion of covert alliance. Here, a team can function
especially well, particularly if one person is seen by the
organization as the team "leader." The "leader," who will convey all
official messages from the consulting body to the organization, could
behave neutrally and carry on all conversations in a highly public
manner, while other team members, as they "tag along" on a tour of the
school could freely observe candid interactions and enter into
seemingly mundane and unimportant exchanges with various members,
including students.

Planning the contacts. The frequency and number of contacts with
the organization is another important consideration. The Milan team
discovered that human systems often appear to require a lengthy period
of time for an intervention to thoroughly affect the structure. If
they saw the family too soon after an intervention they ran the risk
of unwittingly undoing their previous intervention by re-intervening

while the system was still readjusting itself. From the usual pattern
of once-weekly therapy sessions, they moved to holding sessions at
intervals of a month or more.

One might speculate that a larger and perhaps looser system, such
as a school, would require more time than a family to assimilate a
strategic intervention. If the consulting body plans to work in a
structural rather than a strategic mode, however, more frequent
contact might be called for, since structural interventions use the
physical presence of the consultant with the system to model and
direct change during the actual contact. The consulting body must
beware not to become a "fixture" in the school, however. Attendance
at several weekly staff meetings in a row, for example, would tend to
reduce a consultant's effectiveness as she became virtually another
staff member.

The consulting body may even want to refrain from specifying at
the outset exactly when each consultation contact would occur, saying
only how many times they would come and for how long each time. This
would have the advantage of keeping the organization from relegating
the consulting sessions to a regular spot on its calendar, along with
board meetings and parent-teacher conferences. Schools operate on
12-month cycles, and (unless the school is less than two or three
years old) the typical school soon evolves a yearly routine of events.
The consultant may wish to avoid becoming part of the routine of the
academic year. It is also possible, especially in an alternative
setting that has failed to establish a comfortable routine, that the

consultant would purposely strive for such routine in the very
scheduling of the consultation. "We will meet from 7:30 till 9:30 pm
on the first Tuesday of the month for 6 months." A purely logistical
concern is, of course, the need to schedule far enough in advance to
assure full participation.

The optimum number of contacts will be a matter for early
practitioners to explore further. The scant literature to date
indicates that five to eight contacts may be minimal for work of this
nature (Terry, 1983; Imber Coppersmith, in press), but with more
experience consultants may find it possible to influence systemic
change in fewer sessions. Many more than ten or twelve seem likely to
endanger the consultant's status as "outsider" and thus the leverage,
as well as the systemic perspective, so crucial to this work.

Consultation goals

The consultant should probably include in the contract a clear
and explicit statement of the goals of consultation. These are
related to but distinct from the description of the problem to be
worked on. How will everyone know, concretely, when the consultation
has succeeded? This statement needs to be made in the language of the
client system, and needs to refer to observable outcomes. "Everyone
will feel more fully included," is not an observable outcome.
"Parents will take on some of the tasks that teachers are now doing,"
is observable and behaviorally concrete enough to stand as a sign for
systemic change.

The selection of such goals is not a light task, and the consulting body may need time after their initial assessment of the situation to prepare for it. Non-behavioral goals are easy enough to eliminate out of hand, but some behavioral goals may actually express a condition of no change rather than a second-order transformation. "We will all take turns teaching everything," might be an example of a "no-change" goal for Magic Mountain. At Metro a goal to hold all-school meetings attended by all the students and staff once a week would be another example. Not only are such goals not expressive of change, but they are huge and probably unattainable.

One way to help the client (and the consultant) to think in concrete, achievable terms is to ask, "What is the absolute smallest change you can imagine that, if it happened, would be an indication that matters were improved?" For Magic Mountain this might be something like "shorter staff meetings" (probably with fewer wranglings and fewer issues having to be decided by the entire group). For Metro it might be something not directly related to student participation in governance, but expressive of student concern for the well-being of the school community, such as a reduction in the incidence of theft and vandalism.

The setting of clear goals with the client system is not a necessary feature of all systemic family therapy. While this author advocates a "strategic" openness to the system's internal creativity in making structural realignments, it would, however, seem wise to negotiate specific goals in working with an organization.

Particularly because some of the techniques that the consultant uses will appear unusual, the clients may need to know that the consultant body is working toward the same goal they are, not some outlandish idea of their own. Also, the achievement of the goal will later facilitate the timely withdrawal of the consultant body. The goal statement has other potential uses as well, for example a strategic acknowledgement of impotence on part of the consultant body, should that become necessary. ("We're really stumped on how to reach that goal. We're clearly out of our element here.") Or an admission of grievous error. ("We were wrong all along, and you were right from the very start. We never should have talked you into setting that goal. It wasn't what this school needs to do at all. We see that now, after you've been trying to show us our error all along.")

Once the consulting contract is clear, with goals specified and logistics laid out, the stage is set for the consulting body's proper "joining" or "entry."

Forming the Consultancy System

The "consultancy system" here refers to the consulting body plus the client organization. Joined together, a new temporary system is formed for the express purpose of influencing the organizational system to change. While carrying on the pre-contract negotiations, the consultant is also "entering" into and "joining" with the client system. Therefore, comments in this section on the joining process

must be taken to refer to all contact between the consultant body and the organization, from the very beginning.

The consultant body must be <u>acceptable</u> to the organization, in the fullest sense of the word. In the case of alternative schools, acceptability will be enhanced by some of the factors discussed already: an obvious knowledge of and sympathy for the educational and social missions of the school, and a careful avoidance of any alliances within the system.

Specifically in order to stay neutrally acceptable in the system, the consultant can offer affirmation of the work of the members both individually and collectively. "The consultant communicates affirmation by her stance of openness, curiosity about the system and non-critical interest" (Imber Coppersmith, in press).

At the same time, if the consultant acknowledges the members' expertise in knowing about their own system, she not only affirms them, but avoids the "me-expert, you-need-help" relationship that otherwise pertains. This technique of "taking the one-down position" is one that family therapists use to avoid awakening the system's "dealing-with-experts" routine. In particular, any tendency to compete symmetrically with a perceived "expert" is thereby allayed. In an organization of competent adults despairing about their ability to make a cherished ideal come alive, it may be essential to assume a one-down position on entry.

One prominant pitfall on entry, as Imber Coppersmith (in press) points out, is that the consultant body may unwittingly "mirror" the

organization's troubled patterns in its own relationship with the
organization. "Thus a system marked by tentativeness and ultimate
paralysis in decision making may engender similar tentativeness in the
consultant" (Imber Coppersmith, in press). The school that wrangles
heatedly over every detail of operation may engage the consultant in
wrangling over negotiating the consultation contract.

Again, a team is helpful in noting when the system may be
engaging one of the consultants in such an interaction. What might be
done at such a juncture depends upon the team's modus operandi. If
one person acts as "spokesperson" for the team, others might be able
to interrupt the ongoing discussion and call a team huddle in an
adjoining but private space prearranged for that purpose. Or the team
could agree that at such a point another member could intervene
directly in the discussion with a strategic comment. The latter
course would require a very well-oiled, intimate team, in which the
spokesperson would be able to turn around in mid-air, as it were, and
land on her feet facing another direction. A third way is for the
rest of the team to save their observations for later. The mirroring
on part of the spokesperson is an error, but an error to learn from.
All is not lost, and the next consultation session will find that
spokesperson better prepared to avoid the systemic vortex.

The bases for a successful consultancy are laid at the very first
moment of contact. Rules and patterns begin to form immediately out
of the consultant's and client's mutual interactions. The marker for
the formal birth of the consultancy system is the agreement to a

contract between the consultant body and the organization. The consultancy contract is the formal "constitution" for the consultancy system. Whether the contract is verbal or in writing, it should clearly state how often, for how long, and doing what activities the consultant body will spend time with the organization. Any fees should be specified, and the manner of payment. There should be clarity as to the problem the consultants are to work on. And in the process of collecting information to use in defining the contract, as well as in the negotiation of the contract with the members, the consultant body should have established the relational bases for the structure of the consultancy system.

Assessment

From the initial contact, the consultant body will be using a variety of procedures for collecting information about various aspects of the organizational system. In this section we identify the areas that are likely to be important to find out about, as well as methods for gaining information.

Assessment areas

1) The presenting problem. This area has been covered above to some extent. Guiding questions might include the following:

Who in the system is labelling a problem?

What are the elements of the labelled problem?

For whom is it a problem? For whom is it not?

Who in the system labels a different problem, and what is it?

When did the presenting problem begin?

How do various members account for the problem?

What has already been tried to fix the problem?

How is this problem maintaining the relational patterns in the system?

How are the relational patterns maintaining the presenting problem?

In what way is this problem a "logical," "sensible" aspect of this sytem?

2) Worldview and self-image. This refers to the social reality of the system: the manner in which the system defines its relationship to and its place in the larger community, and what Imber Coppersmith (in press) calls its "cherished beliefs" about itself and its mission. The consultant is looking for myths that may or may not be descriptive of the organization as it is actually operating, and which may or may not be internally consistent with one another. At the same time, the consultant should note the language in which the members couch their expression of self-image, mission and worldview. Certain key words or phrases, for example, may have special meaning in this system.

In particular, the consultant should find out how the school views its degree of success in its work with students. How do adults account for any difficulties or frustrations encountered in their work with students? What image is projected when the school is viewed in

its capacity as workplace for the adults? In general, do staff appear to be "over-involved," close to burnout, and/or despairing; or optimistic and gratified in their work?

3) <u>Relationship</u> <u>to</u> <u>larger</u> <u>context</u>. This has to do with how the school fits into its surrounding community. The sources of support, sources of stress, and patterns of interaction with other elements in the community are important factors. Included is its relationship to the families who send their children to the school (particularly if parents are not highly involved in the daily operation of the school). Also important is the school's relationship to other organizations in the community that it may need to work with: other schools, colleges, referral agencies if applicable, and the like. Is there help and support in this wider system, or is it marked by competition and mistrust? In addition, alternative schools often have troubled relationships with neighbors, landlords, and community members who disapprove of the behavior of the students. The consultant needs to be sensitive to stressful circumstances such as these, and the extent to which they may be the "facts of life" for a non-traditional (and tradition-challenging) organization. In other words, while such stressors should be noted, the consultant may need to view them (and may need to help the client to view them) as a "given" for an organization that purposefully rocks its contextual boat. (Positively connoting such stressors, by suggesting they are a signal that the school is truly successful at being "alternative," might indeed be a useful intervention in some cases.)

4) <u>Organizational history</u>. What major transitions has the organization made? The consultant is looking for possible evidence of an outdated myth that no longer fits present conditions in the school, or events either inside the school or in its community that could be linked in some way to the appearance of the presenting problem or symptom. What developmental stages has the school traversed? What is its present stage and its upcoming stage?

5) <u>Organizational structure</u>. This area includes the structural design of the school, i.e. the way in which decision making and division of responsibility is supposed to occur. It also includes the actual decision-making behavior and role differences observed in action. The nature of the hierarchy, the alliances and coalitions, and the nature of holon definitions are important aspects of the structure. In addition, it would be important to know which holons that are currently "peripheral" may be potentially useful in helping the system to change. For example, a group of dedicated parent volunteers who are not now viewed as central to the problem area might comprise an untapped strength for the school to draw on in restructuring itself.

An especially important structural feature to understand in working with an organization is its <u>communication channels</u>. How do various holons exchange information with one another and with the outside? Is there a network, or a single line of flow? Is there a nexus, and if so who sits at the center of the web? Do some channels only flow one way? What are the mechanical means of communicating

(e.g. memo, word of mouth, posted notices)? This information will tell the consultant much about relationships among holons, and also the consultant may eventually need to _use_ these channels to communicate with the membership.

Here, as in other assesment areas, patterns of relationship figure largely. Other than the patterns that operate in connection with the presenting problem, what patterns seem salient? What are the rules that members' interactions obey and that lend message value to their behavior? What are the main resources for various member holons as they go about their business? What are the strengths of the relational network?

Assessment methods

Assessment, hypothesizing, and intervention comprise a constantly cycling loop in systemic consultation practice, commencing with the initial contact. Early on, the consultant body has to assess the situation sufficiently to make a neutral and acceptable entry. The systemic consultant uses the results of every intervention to inform the next intervention design. Thus every intervention is an aid to assessment. In turn, every assessment method itself affects the system being assessed. The systemic consultant acknowledges this and uses assessment strategies to influence the system so as to gain information about it.

The consultant will use interviews and observation, and perhaps even questionnaires to collect data. But the systemic consultant

body's most important "instrument" is <u>itself</u>.

<u>The</u> <u>consultant's</u> <u>use</u> <u>of</u> <u>self</u>. Only a small proportion of the
information needed by the consultant is data that can be "objectively"
reported, such as historical facts about the organization, the
presenting problem, and attempts to solve it. A large proportion of
the information needed is about observerable patterns of interaction
among members. Some of this can be obtained by self-reports from
members, making especial note of each person's punctuation of the
interactional cycles. Much of it is obtained through the person of
the consultant, who acts as a "sensing" instrument in the consultancy
system. Not only by observing the interactions of others, but by
observing her own reflexive effects in the interactional world of the
system, the consultant gains the information on which to base a
hypothesis and intervention strategy.

The consultant observes how others respond to her, and generally
how it "feels" to be inside this sytem. If the consultant body is a
team, teammates can help keep the consulting process self-reflexive,
such that the consultant remains aware of the whole while being
subjectively involved as a holon within it.

<u>Observation</u> <u>and</u> <u>interviews</u>. In a "structural" approach, the
consultant encourages the group to enact their troubled relational
cycle in her presence so that she can remark upon it to them and
actually redirect it then and there. Whatever the consultant body's

approach to intervention, they will need to observe the interactive patterns of members with each other. Besides the "participant observation" that the consultant body employs during interview sessions with the group, some of the methods of qualitative research may be readily adaptable to these purposes. Inobtrusive observation and recording of various meetings central in the running of the school would be appropriate for highly collaborative organizations. A lunch hour spent at the school, observing out-of-classroom interactions between and among adults and students could yield much information. In a school with many influential members, such as a parent cooperative, the consultant body might choose to meet separately with various holons to conduct guided interviews without offering strategic opinions until after meeting with all the holons. The consultant to an alternative school might consider holding a fairly structured "interview" with the entire membership using a formal "town meeting" format "moderated" by a member of the consulting team, in which members could be recognized in order to speak to the question on the floor.

During interviews with smaller groups, the consultant could employ the circular questioning techniques of the Milan team and others, as described in an earlier chapter. Here, the consultant asks several different members to answer the same question. She may ask a member to comment on the relationship between other members. She elicits descriptions of specific behaviors. She asks about differences among members.

To the part-time science teacher at Magic Mountain she might say, "Carl, how do you see the relationship between Sara and John?" "And what does Sara do when John is late to staff meetings?" "Who would you say Sara is closest to?" "Who is closest to John?" And to several different members she might put the question, "What if this problem didn't get solved? What would happen?"

The use of video equipment in an organizational setting is probably prohibitively obtrusive. However, a compact high-quality tape recorder could probably be accepted and would be invaluable. It would help the consultant body review sessions and retain a systemic perspective, and would enhance the learning that will need to occur, particularly in the early instances of systemic consultation. The consultants can explain to the members of the organization that they are always trying to improve their consulting skills and would like to tape the sessions in order to monitor how they are doing, promising strict confidentiality to the participants. Once again, a team in which someone who is not engaged in directing the interview could operate such equipment would have an advantage over a single person having to interrupt the process to manipulate tapes.

Questionnaires. Qualitative instruments have a limited use in this work, since they cannot yield the kind of data about human interactive cycles available through direct observation of member behavior by an outsider to the system. Brandon (1983) indicates that the analysis afforded by a well-known Organizational Development (OD)

instrument[1] informed and in some ways complemented a systemic analysis of the target organization. However, the systemic analysis itself was not made under the best of conditions, and whether in a full-fledged consultancy the OD tool would have been easier to use or more informative than interviews and observations combined with strategic interventions is impossible to say.

Terry (1982) gave a "homework assignment" to a client that combined information-gathering with intervention (as does all strategic intervention). She asked the members of the organization to draw diagrams of the organizational structure as they saw it "originally," "currently" and "ideally," respectively. She also asked each member to prepare a chart in which they rated all the possible two-person relationships in the group of seven people, saying whether they were "too distant," "just right" or "too loose," and again marking each "as it is" and "as it should be."

The exercise had interventional value, and also yielded information. For example, the relationship charts gave the consultant triadic information, that is, information on the relationship between the person making the rating and the two people whose relationship she was rating. The differences among the members' representations of the organization's structure, as well as certain striking similarities (or omissions) were also telling.

The rating of each diadic relationship by each member of the

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[1]She used an adaptation of Likert's (1967) scale for measuring organizational effectiveness.

organization does have possible quantitative uses and yielded a chart showing each person's rating. However, the chart displays the raw data, reproducing members' verbatim responses, and Terry found no reason to quantify this data. In truth, Terry's "homework assignment" was not at heart a quantitative assessment tool. It was intended to uncover qualitative differences among people's perceptions (punctuations) and qualitative information about members' relationships and the patterns of relationship characteristic of the structure of the organization. In addition, the assignment had message value and interventional force of its own, in that it focussed members' attention on certain areas and not on others.

In general, unless there is such interventional benefit or message value to the group, either in themselves reviewing the results or in the process of doing the activity, this author suspects that the investment of members' time in traditional quantitative assessment activities will usually be too great and the kind of information yielded not relevant enough to warrant their use in this kind of consultancy.

Hypothesizing

As the consultant body is carrying out the assessment activities, they are beginning to form private hypotheses about the nature of the systemic problem. Their hypotheses guide their subsequent assessment activities, as well as their intervention strategies (which in some

cases are one and the same). Every "error" made in the work with the client is new grist for the hypothesizing mill. This point will be an important one to bear in mind during the early days of systemic consultation. Certainly many errors will be made, but each can be seen as providing new information to build a more useful systemic hypothesis.

A systemic hypothesis must include every component in the system and must suggest the ways in which all the components are interactively related. The hypothesis should be based on observed behavior in the system, rather than reported feelings or imputed motives. It should identify the logic whereby the presenting problem makes sense inside the system.

Though handicapped by the lack of directly observed behavioral evidence, for illustrative purposes we have attempted in a former chapter to build such hypotheses when we explored how a systemic consultant might define "the problem" in three schools described earlier. At Metro, for example, the situation was described systemically as a complementary relationship between freedom givers and freedom receivers. At ASPE different ongoing battles were seen to reflect a single underlying theme of participation and community versus individualism and freedom. At Magic Mountain we saw the issue of "who's in charge" at the core of the systemic bind.

In working with an alternative school, the consultant body will formulate and explicitly outline a private working hypothesis as soon as possible. Usually the initial contact by someone within the school

will include enough information for this early hypothesis. This gives the consultant a fixed point to help her stay oriented while she directly interacts with the system. Because each system has its own logic and its own orientation, it is important for the consultant to have a prearranged course to follow, to avoid falling into the system's orientation. At the same time, the consultant needs to remain flexible enough to notice when the hypothesis has been shown by members' interactions to be erroneous. She needs to be ready to formulate a new hypothesis on the spot in this case. The skill of maintaining a hypothetical frame without relinquishing flexibility is one that must be learned through experience.

From the systemic hypothesis, the consultant body projects an idea of the deeper systemic changes that would betoken success for the consultancy. The character of this formulation depends on the orientation of the consultant. The "structural" approach is prescriptive, and the structural consultant formulates clearly for herself just how the hierarchical relationships and holon relations need to be reformed. A "strategic" approach will identify the nexus of rules and relationships that are binding the members in a troubled interactive cycle, and the consultant body will know that this cycle needs to be broken. However, they will not know how the structure should look later on.

This is a major difference, and bears further comment. This dissertation is concerned with alternative schools characterized by non-traditional hierarchical relationships among members. For these

organizations, this author considers a non-prescriptive approach to be most fitting. For one thing, unless the consultant body has broad experience with non-traditional hierarchical organizational forms, they run the risk of prescribing a philosophically untenable structure and losing the client's acceptance of them as people sympathetic to the school's mission. Even given a consultant with personal experience in consensual decision making, collaborative leadership and the like, it must be acknowledged that the alternative schools' organizational forms are experimental, and the manner in which each organization adopts and adapts them will necessarily be unique, thus difficult to predict, much less to prescribe. Finally, these organizations are pioneers. The consultant who does not recognize and respect this essential aspect of their self-image is unlikely to succeed at working with them. In the opinion of this author, the consultant who sees wider social value in furthering these pioneering efforts, knowing the territory to be incompletely charted but believing it to be well worth exploring, will be best suited to work in these settings. A necessary aspect of such a bias on the consultant's part is a lack of any predisposition for any one hierarchical form. In sum, I see the "strategic" stance, which is noncommital as to the "proper" configuration that the system's structure should take on, as being better suited for use in alternative schools than is the "structural" stance, which purposely directs the re-forming of the system's structure along predetermined lines.

Not only is the "strategic" approach more likely to meet with success in individual cases, its open-ended nature is more likely to allow alternative organizations to evolve new organizatonal forms, new solutions to organizational problems not heretofore realized. The consultant who harbors the broader mission of enabling the evolution of new organizational stuctures should seriously consider the strategic approach to organizational intervention.

Intervening

Every intervention must be unique, tailored to the relational peculiarities of the system and couched in terms of the language and beliefs of the system. This is particularly true of formal interventions such as assigned "tasks" and consultants' "opinions." More subtle, but also potent, are the interventions that consist in the design of the consulting process and the questioning of members in interviews or meetings. In this section we will discuss various kinds of interventions, with hypothetical examples from the schools described earlier.

Design of the consulting process

Decisions as to what members to meet with, and in what combinations, must be made with an eye for the messages that will be communicated by those choices. If a consultant at ASPE chose to meet only with the school staff, a message as to who's running the school

would be implicit. This would amount to a very strong intervention in that school, and though it might be the right idea, it would almost certainly be ill-timed if it occurred at the outset. A plan with a higher likelihood of success might be to meet initially for pre-contract discussions with small groups of parents and with the staff separately, positively connoting each group's participation in the school. Each parent group might be asked to select one or two members to join the staff in the consulting process itself. This move amounts to an intervention requiring the parents (a) to collaborate with one another apart from the staff, and (b) to experience a representative form of participation, which evidently they had never tried. In addition, it gives the consultant a managable microcosm, fully representative of the organization as a whole, with which to introduce other kinds of change.

Interviewing

A skillful consultant is able to ask questions in a group interview that yield new information for the members as well as the consultant. Selvini Palazzoli et al. (1980) speculate that their technique of "circular questioning" may itself bring enough "news of difference" to the system to initiate second-order change in many cases.

This is done in part through the blameless punctuation implied in the circular method. The consultant asks various members to provide their explanations of the situation, listening with serious interest

to each one. This lends equal value to each member's contribution,
countering the common tendency in many troubled systems to devalue or
discount some members' views. And in accepting everybody's version
without demanding to know the "real" truth, the consultant quietly
defuses the cycle of blame that generally accrues to such situations.
The message in the consultant's behavior says that everybody has
mutual responsibility, and also mutual control of the situation. The
mutuality of influence becomes apparent to members. Various different
views and definitions of the situation become available.

Other reframings of the social reality may become available
through the questioning process. For example, a consultant at Magic
Mountain would be wise to ask members questions about the differences
among them, since "interchangability" was a myth they were struggling
to maintain, and when it failed (as it usually did) a member might
blame another for not being more like him or herself, or else might
blame him or herself for not being more like another member.

Picking up on a theme that was one bone of contention in the
school, the consultant might ask, "Who here is the most involved in
social politics?" "Who is the least involved? And what is that
person very involved in?" Such questions not only highlight the
alliances and splits, but show the members that they are different
from one another in important ways. The astute consultant would be
sure to positively connote each member's special uniqueness after it
had been elicited. If an opinion or prescription were given at the
end, it would make mention of each member's special qualities, perhaps

requiring that those qualities be used in performing a collaborative task.

Opinions

The strategically formulated systemic opinion offered at session's end by the Milan therapist to the family is among their most powerful interventions. This author sees no reason that a very similar method would not be effective in an alternative school. In many cases it is unlikely that the entire membership would be present when the opinion was given, but this need not reduce its impact on the system. For one thing, changes made in one part of the system will influence the rest of the system, and if the consultant has chosen wisely whom to work with directly, the effect will be felt, even if some members of the system never hear the opinion verbatim. Also, the consulting body may wish to consider various means of communicating with the wider membership in an organization. Imber Coppersmith (in press) suggests the use of a written memo, sent to everyone in the organization, particularly in an organization where communication by memo is common. Another possibility might be to draft a copy of the opinion and seal it, to be read aloud by a specially chosen person at the next scheduled all-school meeting. This could be used, say, in a student-teacher run school such as Metro. Knowing that "the word" from the consultants was going to be read, students might be motivated to attend. If they did not, the consultant would have information to use for next time. And in either event, the very reading of the message by a teacher or administrator would have message value in the

system.

The astute consultant, having entered the system and come to know its structure and communication channels, will doubtless devise new and creative ways to communicate an opinion to the entire organization if this seems warranted. If it seems useful to include the students, for example, the consultant could use whatever means is usual in the school for conveying an important message to the student body. Again, this could be done by the consultant personally, but additional message value is gained through the careful choice of someone within the system to convey the opinion.

Tasks

The reading of a message to others in the school without the consultant body being present would actually constitute a "task." Tasks are given to members to perform away from the consultant body, somewhat like homework is given in school. The Milan team is particularly fond of asking families to perform special "rituals." These are tasks, usually carried out repeatedly, with carefully drawn parameters as to who, when, where, how often, and for how long the ritual will be performed. Other tasks may be designed to be performed only once, and with less rigor. For example, the teachers at Metro might be instructed to get together to plan how they were going to teach the Metro students about self-governance. This would be a "structural" intervention, designed to separate the teacher holon from the students and place the teachers in charge. Further, it forces

them to grapple directly with a seeming paradox, and one that has
paralyzed them all along: If you really prize self-governance, how
can you force people to learn to govern themselves? Here the
consultant would be prearranging an answer: You do make them learn
it, and _then_ they are allowed to govern themselves. Again, this is a
somewhat prescriptive approach.

Sometimes a task can be framed in terms of the usual business of
the organization, such as having a group of teachers make plans for
the students' education in the example above. At other times it may
take a more unusual activity to break up the patterns that are
supporting a continued problem. As a purely hypothetical example, a
consultant to Magic Mountain might ask the staff to begin each staff
meeting with a ritual in which each person in turn speaks of some way
in which he or she is different from everyone else. Nobody would be
allowed to respond or refer, either immediately or later, to anything
said during this time. Such an intervention would create a space in
which members could legitimately enunciate and honor their different
qualities and capabilities. The injunction against discussion of
statements made during the ritual would forestall their
disqualification by self or others. A further injunction to "not
change anything else just now" would minimize threat to the system and
maximize the discrepancy between the reality encapsulated in the
ritual and the one being lived out through the attempt to keep
everyone equal, and equally in charge of everything.

Working in favor of the consultant who chooses to employ a

strategic intervention such as this is the alternative school's view
of itself as experimental and unusual. The consultant might phrase
the task in those terms, even saying, "I know you people are trying to
operate in a non-traditional way, so I'm wondering if you're ready to
try an unusual experiment."

Whether or not an intervention such as either of the above
examples actually touched off systemic change, the results would be
illuminating, and the next contact with the client organization would
carry a higher potential for effecting change.

Conclusion

The author suggests that consultants to independent alternative
schools strongly consider the use of open-ended interventions, such as
the strategic family therapists use. Interventions that prescribe
what form change should take may prove to be out of keeping with the
experimental nature of these schools' organizational structures. By
allowing the creativity of the system to operate in the process of
changing the "stuck" patterns and the debilitating rules, we may allow
new and more satisfactory organizational structures to develop. The
consultant may hence be not only a pioneer in the field of systemic
organizational consulting, but midwife to the birth of important new
organizational forms.

The foregoing discussion is but a suggestion of the ways in which
a systemic consultant might intervene in an independent alternative
school. While the lead of the systemic family therapists may be

followed to some extent, practitioners in the field will need to bring their creativity to bear on the actualities of the organizations themselves in order to devise appropriate and effective interventions. The author hopes that the principles outlined in the body of this thesis, together with an understanding of the schools as organizational systems, will prove useful to such practioners.

Summary

This chapter has attempted to lay the foundations for systemic consultancy practice in independent alternative schools. Distilling the foregoing discussions in this chapter, the author offers the following propositions to guide systemic consulting in independent alternative schools.

1: **The Consultant**

1.1 A team will have advantages over an individual consultant in most cases.

   1.11 The team has a better chance of holding to a systemic stance.

   1.12 Involving several people in the same case will enhance the learning necessary to advance the field of systemic consulting.

1.2 The consulting team must establish a clear set of operating procedures for itself, including role definitions, division of responsibility, and the like.

1.21 In working with an organization, a presentation of the team
      as having a "leader" plus "assistants," or "team
      spokesperson" plus "colleagues" is recommended.

1.3 Consultants should preferably have a solid background in family
     therapy methodology and an ease with systemic hypothesizing.

1.4 Consultants should preferably have a background in education and
     in alternative organizational forms, with a bias in favor of
     helping such forms to develop and succeed.

2: <u>Contracting</u> <u>to</u> <u>Consult</u>

2.1 During the pre-contract period, the consultant body establishes a
     non-commital climate in which both client and consultant are
     deciding whether to work together or not, and no commitment is
     assumed.

2.2 The consultant body moves immediately to gather enough
     information to form an initial hypothesis about the system,
     before entering a contract to consult.

2.21 The consultant can use both formal meetings with holons in
      the school and informal observations in the setting to
      gather this information.

2.3 The contract should specify the problem the consultant is there
     to work on.

2.31 The "problem to be worked on" is distinct from the
      consultant's private hypothesis about the systemic problem.

2.32 The definition of the problem to be worked on should refer

to acknowledged difficulties in the system and be couched in the language and terminology of the system.

2.33 The definition of the problem to be worked on should leave the consultant free to work with all relevant holons.

2.34 The definition of the problem to be worked on should positively connote members' contributions while describing a trouble they share.

2.35 The definition of the problem to be worked on should not construe blame, take a moral stance, or point to inadequacies in members' behavior or intent.

2.4 The contract between the consultant body and the client organization should specify the logistics of the consultation process.

2.41 Decisions as to consulting logistics should be informed (a) by the definition of who the client is (usually the school as a whole), and (b) by a hypothesis as to the point in the system at which an intervention is likely to be most effective.

2.42 The members and groups of members who are to meet with the consultant body should be specified.

2.43 Visits for purposes of observing the school in process should be scheduled.

2.44 The frequency and number of contacts should be specified.

2.441 The degree of predictability or regularity of the contacts has interventional value.

2.442 Interventions take time to have full effect in the
system.

2.443 As a starting guide to planning the number of
sessions, five to twelve sessions are recommended.

2.45 To avoid suspicion of covert alliances and the like,
details of consulting logistics and rationale should be made
public within the organization.

2.5 The consultancy contract should specify the goal of the
consultation.

2.51 An achievable, concretely identifiable goal that will
signify important change should be defined.

2.52 The goal statement should be in the language of the system.

2.6 Any fees and the method of their payment should be specified in
the consultancy contract.

3: The Consultancy System

3.1 The aim of the consultancy system is to help the client system to
change.

3.2 The consultant body is responsible for influencing the structure
of the consultancy system so as to provide the rules and
resources with which to achieve the aims of the consultation.

3.3 The consultant body must "enter" or "join" the client system in
order to form the consultancy system.

3.31 Acceptance of the consultant body by the client system will
be enhanced by the consultant's knowledge of and sympathy

for the educational and social mission of the school.

3.32 Acceptance will be enhanced by the consultant's neutrality

and avoidance of any alliance or moral judgements.

3.321 The consultant can convey neutrality by positively

connoting each member's contributions and the work of

the school as a whole.

3.322 Neutrality will be maintained by a stance of open

curiosity and non-judgemental interest.

3.323 Neutrality will be maintained by speaking with

members of all factions and holons in turn.

3.33 Acceptance will be enhanced if the consultant takes a

"one-down" position on entry.

3.4 When joining with the client system, the consultant body must

beware of unwittingly entering into the client's patterns and

rules of interaction.

3.41 The team should agree ahead of time on whether such

interactions should be immediately interrupted, and if so

how.

4: Assessment Areas

4.1 The consultant must determine how the presenting problem fits as

an element in the system as a whole and how it "makes sense" for

the system to present this symptom, including the ways in which

symptom and system maintain one another.

4.2 The consultant seeks to understand the view of reality and the

self-image of the client system, including its perceived place in the community, "cherished beliefs," the language of the system, and members' view of the school's work with students and as a workplace for adults.

4.3 The consultant must ascertain the relationship of the school to its larger context, noting sources of support and of stress, the school's relationship to its client population, and its relationship to other organizations in the community.

4.4 The consultant must learn how the school has developed as an ogranization over time, including major developmental transitions already traversed and upcoming.

4.5 The consultant must assess the basic structure and structural strengths of the organization, including organizational design, rules and resources, patterns of interaction, and communication channels.

5: Assessment Methods

5.1 The consultant body can use itself as a "sensing organ" that generates interactions and observes the responses of the client system.

5.2 Phenomenological research methodology will be appropriate to collecting information about the school, in particular inobtrusive observation and various interviewing methods.

5.21 In interviews with smaller groups, techniques from systemic family therapy such as circular questioning, asking about

differences, and directing attention to specific behavior
will be appropriate.

5.3 Questionnaires or other quantitative instruments may have a
limited value, depending upon their intrinsic interventional and
message value.

6: Hypothesizing

6.1 From the first contact with the client, and through every
subsequent interchange, the consultant body must work to form and
refine a systemic hypothesis that explains how the presenting
problem "makes sense" inside the system.

6.2 The hypothesis must include every component in the system in
describing interactions that both support and are supported by
the existence of the presenting problem.

6.3 The hypothesis must be based on observed or observable behavior
and events.

6.4 The hypothesis sufficiently defines the deeper systemic patterns
and rules that need to change, but does not necessarily define
the outcome of such change.

6.41 Hypotheses based in a non-prescriptive "strategic" approach
will better suit the alternative school mileau than will
prescriptive hypotheses.

7: Intervening

7.1 Choices made in the overall design of the consultancy will have

interventional value.

7.2 Circular questioning during group interviews can (a) defuse cycles of symmetrical blame; (b) display systemic mutuality and complementarity; (c) reframe social reality.

7.3 Strategic and/or paradoxical opinions will be effective in independent alternative schools, as they are in family therapy.

   7.31 Opinions delivered to a critical holon will eventually affect the entire organization.

   7.32 Opinions may be delivered directly to the entire organization through its communication channels.

   7.33 The means of delivering an opinion itself has interventional value.

7.4 Structural and/or strategic tasks will be effective in independent alternative schools, as they are in families.

   7.41 Structural tasks can be constructed around the usual business of a school.

   7.42 Rituals and strategic and/or paradoxical tasks are not out of keeping with the self-image of independent alternative schools as being experimental and non-traditional.

7.5 Non-prescriptive interventions undertaken with an openness to the unique and creative forms that change may assume in any particular system are better suited to consulting in independent alternative schools than are prescriptive approaches.

P A R T   F I V E

THESIS CONCLUSION

C H A P T E R   X I V

REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This dissertation has ventured to make contributions in two seemingly disparate areas. The author's deep concern for the plight of independent alternative schools has led to an attempt to find more satisfactory ways to understand and help allay their troubles. These pages comprise a mere waystation on that quest, and not journey's end. Similarly, the author's work with concepts of human systems has been an unfolding journey, and one also not nearly ended.

As this dissertation evolved, the proper balance between the two components--theory, and field of application--came more than once into question. Is this a presentation of systemic theory with an illustrative application, or a dissertation on alternative schools, with a theory to help understand and alleviate their problems?

In the end, the choice was made by not making it, as can be seen from the outline presented in the introductory chapter. In truth, the relationship between the two components is appropriately reflexive, such that the reader may punctuate it either way. The theory is meant

to help alternative school consultants to understand and interact with a school as a human system. The in-depth views of schools as systems are meant to help readers of theory to better grasp the concepts.

Accordingly, this dissertation has required two tasks of synthesis. One task involved independent alternative schools; the other involved systemic theory.

An exhaustive review of literature on the organizational designs and the organizational problems of alternative schools was not to be found at the time of this writing. In addition to compiling such a review, the author attempted to generalize from the literature to the limited extent possible, particularly in order to provide the essential chapter on the life cycles of these schools. This latter exercise has shown that recognizable patterns in alternative schools' development might exist, but the evidence is inconclusive as to details. It is hoped that the presentation of information from the existing literature about the schools (their aims and populations, their organizational structures and their development over time) will be of use to alternative school people, whether or not they embrace the systemic theoretical framework.

The other main task was to present various related ideas synthesized from different sources in working toward a set of concepts and an accompanying methodology for systemic change in such settings. It is similarly hoped that the reader whose interest lies mainly with the building of theory and methodology for systemic organizational consulting, or perhaps even with other applications of this theory and

methodology, will benefit as well as the alternative school person.

The particular conjunction of ideas from various sources as presented herein is, I believe, unique to this dissertation, although many of the authors cited here are increasingly being seen as comprising a sort of "movement" and their collective thinking as a "paradigm shift." It is hoped that the bringing together of these concepts in these pages has helped to clarify some of the implications of this paradigm shift.

This final chapter offers a critical discussion of the contributions made by the dissertation to both worlds, and provides recommendations for future work.

Critique of the Work

Systemic social theory has much to say about the process of building social theory. Social theory has reflexive influence on the phenomena that the theory is meant to explain. Social theory is also a product of the phenomena that the theory is meant to explain. The process of building theory is thus legitimately a reflexive and cyclical process, involving an endless cycle of theory and praxis. The individual theoretician may "begin" in either mode. In either case her work is informed by the other. In neither case is the work complete without cycling through the other mode.

This dissertation arises primarily from the theoretical mode. However, the work begun here is not nearly complete. Glaringly absent

is the work of the practitioner in the field.

The theory presented in these pages is only as good as it is applicable to actual social situations. According to the theory itself, "validity" in social theory is measured in terms of "applicability." That is to say, the understanding engendered by the theory should increase one's effectiveness in the area of application. One's experience with the phenomena that the theory is meant to explain should bear out the theoretical explanation. If this does not happen (and probably it won't, exactly), the theory needs adjusting.

This has been a "thought experiment." The author hopes it will pave the way for new praxis to emerge from future research. Except in the field of family therapy, much system theory has been remarkably (and purposely) content free. The intent of those theoreticians has been to set out theory universally applicable in broad fields such as social science or biology. This dissertation has taken a different route, attempting to ground the theory in one small area of applicability, with later possibilities for its extension into others. Thus, if the ideas and methodology suggested here are found effective in helping troubled independent alternative schools to change, it may with methodological modification be used with other kinds of organizations, and finally maybe even other kinds of social systems. This is an alternative way of doing theory, working from the specific to the general, rather than the other way around.

This work has presented both theory and methodology, with some demonstration of the links between the two. That the relationship

between theory and methodology must be mutually reflexive will by now be obvious to the reader. Each informs and changes the other. The link between the two is of course the human being who is thinking of the world according to the theory and behaving in the world according to the methodology. The process whereby thought translates into action and theory into methodology is elusive and ineffable. Yet, if the methodology is to be teachable, some heuristic guide to this translation is necessary. Practitioners in systemic family therapy, and I myself in constructing examples in these pages, will affirm that the theory is essential to the methodology. "You have to think this way," systemic practitioners say, "in order to work this way." However, reading about the theory, the frame for seeing reality, does not guarantee ease in implementing the methodology. For this reason, "guiding questions" have been offered at critical points in these pages. The hope is that this will in some measure help the reader to form the link between theory and methodology.

Teachability is a major question with regard to the uses of systemic consulting approaches. The early trials (Hirschhorn & Gilmore, 1980, for example) suggest that effective use of the theory and methodology may take considerable study and practice. The purpose here is not to teach people in organizations how to "think systemically," however, but to provide outside help. It seems not unreasonable, if the systemic approach does prove effective in terms of alleviating human suffering and organizational failure, and in terms of cost in time and dollars, to expect consultants, like

therapists, to invest time in studying and serving an apprenticeship in order to learn the approach. That this would be necessary appears to this author to be patently clear.

This approach is predicated on the influence of an outsider to effect change in the system. To be sure, human systems do have certain self-transformational capacities, but a long-troubled alternative school may transform itself out of existence instead of into a more viable structure, if left to its own devices.

Alternative schools are usually fiscally poor. They cannot afford to pay experts to come and mend their woes. What degree of help to alternative schools can realistically be expected to stem from this approach when (a) the help has to come from someone outside the school who happens to have studied and practiced a new and little-known methodology; and (b) the school cannot pay? The alternative school person, reading this, must be very discouraged.

Two consoling comments can be offered. One is that systemic family therapists are becoming increasingly interested in testing the applicability of their theory and methodology to other human systems. The other is that alternative schools, which (I submit) provide a perfect laboratory for this endeavor, may not need to pay, or only nominally. I suggest that alternative school people who are interested in whether this dissertation may have implications for their own schools seek out systemic family therapists, some of whom may be only too glad for a chance to test their talents in helping such a school.

Meanwhile, it can be reported that the use of the theoretical frame in the author's own practice of problem formulation, presented in this dissertation, produced significant results. The problem formulations offered in the cases of Metro, ASPE, and Magic Mountain are as close as the author could come within these pages to an actual application of the methodology. With apologies to all three schools for the inaccuracies inevitable in her Monday-morning armchair quarter-backing, the author nonetheless found significant differences in the "reality" about each school presented by the systemic view, and that provided through other ways of viewing them. The case of Magic Mountain is particularly poignant, since the author spent several years as a teacher there during that school's early life. Hoping that a personal testimonial is not unseemly, the author offers the following:

As long as I was at Magic Mountain, and beyond, the staff was highly troubled. We were a dedicated group, and we believed deeply that we were carrying out two important experiments at once. The first was educational: Put very simply, we were developing new ways to attend to the holistic growth of the child. The second was organizational: We were trying to administer the school, in the broadest sense, according to the same humanistic values that underlay our educational experiment. After five years we had to admit that we were doing much better with the first experiment than with the second.

We never could seem to get a handle on what the problems were, much less fix them. Midway through its sixth year I left the school,

still puzzled and disturbed at the level of pain that seemed to persist. Yet I loved the school and many of the people in it, and still believed deeply in the values that we struggled to actuate.

The school has since survived two changes in leadership and has indeed become something of an "institution," after thirteen years in its community. Yet from all accounts, the troubles and pain that beset the staff (and especially the full-time core staff) during my years there persisted in much the same form for quite some time. People in the school, myself included, have given various accountings of what "the problem" was. Speaking for myself, I was never fully satisfied that I understood what was wrong. The trail I followed in trying to understand leads directly to this very page.

I still do not know if I understand "accurately" what was "really" the problem at Magic Mountain. A systemic consultant carrying out a full cycle of hypothesizing, intervening, and rehypothesizing probably would not have made the same formulation I have. One's formulation of one's own situation can never be as free of one's personal punctuation as is an outsider's; and in this case my personal punctuation has certainly reshaped my memory of events, as well as my interpretation of those events.

Nonetheless, the significant finding for me personally was that when I sat down to write a systemic formulation of the problem at Magic Mountain I found myself making some kind of sense of the situation for the first time. I found myself in a meta-position vis a vis the school, from which I could look down on my own interactive

behavior together with that of others and perceive a pattern that we were all caught up in and that we were also all helping to create. I was curiously distant, emotionally, and saw my own punctuation, together with that of other members, as each only a part of a whole pattern.

For such a perception I have waited many years now. What I saw from my new vantage point bore no resemblance to any other thoughts I'd had before about what the trouble was, or to what others had said about it. Harvey (1974) identifies as a school theme the query "Who's in charge?" but she still sees its troubles as owing to the unique and chance confluence of all our personal biographies into a psychodynamic unity. Yet changes in personnel did not halt the trouble, nor alter its character. That for the first time I could see how it was only logical for us to be troubled as we were is poignant evidence for the applicability of the systemic approach to problem formulation in an independent alternative school.

Recommendations for the Future

The need for field-based research is implicit in this entire work. The author recommends that phenomenological research methodology, which is theoretically consistent with the work of the systemic consultant, best befits future trials in the field. Statistical analytic methodology is unlikely to include the capacity to handle the kind of data and make the kinds of multifaceted and

reflexive connections among events that systemic methodology requires, and will thus prove indadequate to the study of a systemic consultant's work.

The intervention process in action, a topic covered in hypothetical mode in the previous chapter, is the area most in need of careful and creative study and refinement. Further work in other areas, such as refining concepts of structure, of self-transformation, of the organizational life cycle, and even problem formulation, will be beneficially informed by phenomenological studies of systemic intervention strategies. The methodology for systemic intervention practice in alternative schools, or in other organizational settings, is still in an embryonic stage. Much trial (and error) is needed to bring the art of systemic consultation to maturity.

An area in particular need of both field research and further theoretical development, in the view of the author, pertains to the self-transformational development, or evolution over time, of alternatives and other organizations. Systemic theory, one feels, inadequately accounts for the phenomenon of developmental patterns observed to hold for different organizations. Evidence that such patterns exist in the case of organizations is indeed still too scant to be convincing to some, but is sufficient to be highly suggestive. Assuming there are such patterns, how to account for them? Systemic theory expressly rules out a universal "law of systems" external to the reflexive operation of the system itself, to account for such a

phenomenon.

Human systems (and all living systems, according to Maturana, 1980) are autopoietic, or self-producing and self-reproducing. One approach to investigating the existence and nature of developmental patterns characteristic of organizational systems might look to factors in the individual members of the system and their autopoietic capicity as holons. Family theorists do so in seeing the family life cycle as heavily influenced by the growth and development and changing needs of individual family members. For organizations this hardly pertains as clearly, however. Is there perhaps an explanation stemming from a sort of inner growth in human relationships, in some sense, rather than the inner growth of individuals? In other words, can patterns of interaction in some way be said to "mature" in patterned ways, thus accounting for patterns of development? An alternative approach that is entirely in keeping with systemic theory is to look to the larger context. The phenomenon of similar life cycles in similar kinds of human system may be found to "make sense" in terms of the contextual social system in which they all exist. In any event, a deeper treatment of this area is certainly needed, and both phenomenological and theoretical treatments are warranted.

One other area in particular need of theoretical elucidation has to do with individual insight. Systemic family therapists are not concerned with providing clients with insight into their situations, and are sometimes heard to make statements that appear to deny insight

any role whatever in the change process. At heart, these statements
are expressions of the systemic concern with the whole system rather
than with individiual members. A methodology based on providing
insight would necessarily be focussing on individuals, since only an
individual human being, as far as we know, can have "insight." In
addition, having "insight" implies coming closer to "the truth" about
a situation, and to system theorists there is no one "truth."

The area is an interesting one, nonetheless. What is insight,
anyway? Surely it is linked to consciousness, and human consciousness
is the great self-reflexive operator in the systemic methodology. How
does insight relate to Bateson's (1977, 1979) notion that "news of
difference" is an epistemological requirement for new knowledge, which
is to say a new view of reality? Insight is not deemed necessary to
the initiation of systemic change. However, it is quite possible that
insight of some sort typically occurs as a part of the change process
and may even have some role to play there. Systemic theory might
benefit from an examination of these possibilities.

Another area for further theoretical scrutiny concerns the
"tightness" of systems. The systemic theory advanced in these pages
departs from early general system theory by focussing on relationships
among members and on members' concepts about their relationships,
rather than on the material parts or members themselves. In
application to families an assumption is made that family
relationships are produced and reproduced through a large number of

highly repetative interactions. That is to say, the patterns of interaction in a family group are vivid, producing tightly defined relationships in which members' concepts of how they are constrained to behave pertain in almost all, if not all, interactive situations.

Much is made of the question of whether organizations, in which members are free to leave as they are not in families, will be amenable to a similar theoretical treatment, much less a similar methodology for change. The author believes this question is at root a question about "tightness." In a system where members more easily come and go, the interactive patterns may not as tightly define the rules and resources, and vice versa. Since it is individual interactive behaviors that ultimately make up the patterns that create (and follow) the rules, a fluid exchange of membership could easily mean a more fluid structure. Although the basic theory is equipped to deal with fluidity and continual change, the specific principles of problem formulation and of intervention are premised on the existence of discernable patterns that to some degree constrain and make predictable the interactive behavior of members at any point in time. The theory so far has not addressed the question of whether patterns of interactive behavior may vary between "vivid" and "blurred;" or whether rules may be followed more tightly or loosely in some systems than in others; and if there are such differences, what the implications are for intervention practice.

Cronen, Pearce and Tomm (in press) hint at such a possibility when they say that "some systems are so poorly formed that it is

impossible to identify failures [of myths or social constructs]. Such social systems are much harder to change." One wishes for a further development of this idea. What defines a system as "poorly formed"? Are organizations likely to be more "poorly formed" than families? If so, will they be harder to change? Why or why not? Citing Godel (1934) these authors point out that "in a chaotic system it is impossible to perceive the existence of paradox" (Cronen et al., in press). Is a poorly formed system a chaotic one, presumably meaning without vivid patterns or highly predictive rules? Where, in a theory predicated on a high degree of relational order, does chaos fit in?

Summary

Several areas emerge as seeming potentially fruitful and interesting ones to investigate further. In the field, the author suggests phenomenological research into systemic intervention methodology, studying it in use with alternative schools, or extended and adapted to other organizations. Further research and theoretical work is suggested regarding the self-transformational capacities of organizations, and the corollary area of general developmental patterns found in different human systems of the same type. The author also proposes that theorists look more closely at the phenomenon of "insight" and how it is (or is not) involved in the process of systemic change. Theoretical treatment of the question of the relative "tightness" of systemic structure is also needed, bearing as it does on the question of how various system types may differ in

their capacity to respond to a given intervention methodology. Finally, the author wonders what, if anything, systemic theory has to say about the concept of chaos.

Final Reflections

The building of theory about human systems is a reflexive process, a back-and-forward and tangential-going process. However, a dissertation is a linear thing, and while the dissertation-writing process shares the reflexive and cyclical features of theory building, the final product--the dissertation--must have a very different form.

The medium in the present case is not the message. The ideas presented are connected to one another, not linearly, but in a mutually reflexive manner. They are not discrete entities, these ideas, but all depend upon one another and take part in one another's definition.

Just as the linear movement of this dissertation from word to word and page to page is not isomorphic with the process of its creation, it is to be expected that the reader, in making sense of this work in its entirety, will not proceed in linear fashion, even if the words and pages are read sequentially. The experience of the reader who becomes involved in a back-and-forward and tangential-going process of making sense is isomorphic to the original process of theory building and dissertation writing.

The author hopes that the reader, in recreating a personal

understanding of these concepts, also transforms them. Thus does the

conceptual system imitate, in its capacity for self-change and

improvement, the human reality that it proposes to explain.

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