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THE MAGIC OF PERCEPTION:
A STUDY OF WORLD VIEWS IN A CONSULTING INTERVENTION

A Dissertation Presented

By

JANE A. TEDDER

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

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

May 1986

Education

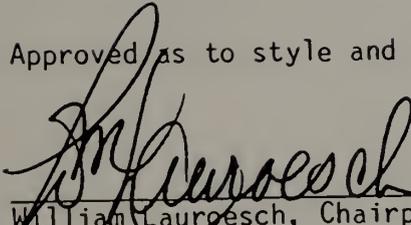
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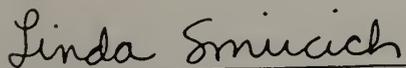
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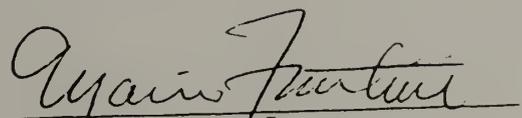
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Without the consistent and committed assistance of several important persons this study could never have been completed. Foremost among them is Dr. William Lauroesch. It is due in large part to his confidence, tenacity, and good counsel that I persisted in my doctoral activities. From the bottom of my heart I thank him for his interest and persistence.

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Thanks go to my work colleagues, especially Roberta Pawloski, Priscilla Boivin, and Jim Harrison. By doing more than their share, they made the double chore of working and studying possible. I must acknowledge, as well, the unflagging support of my family and close friends who have shown their concern and interest throughout the process.

Finally I thank my husband, Dick Tedder. I hope he can understand how grateful I am for the sacrifices he has made and the encouragement he has given. Mere words will never be enough to let him know.

ABSTRACT

The Magic of Perception:

A Study of World Views in a Consulting Intervention

(May 1986)

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The purpose of this study was to examine a consulting interaction between a private management consulting firm and a state department of education to (1) understand if the decision-makers from both organizations had differing world views of the situation and whether the differences contributed to problems experienced during the intervention, and (2) suggest where change might occur in a future intervention to make the client/consultant relationship more effective. The inquiry is based on acceptance of Vickers' concept of the "multi-valued choice" and the assumption that the unique background of norms and values which a participant brings to a situation determines how the participant will perceive the situation and act within it. Literature prior to the study included theories of organizing, including the concept of world view, systems thinking, and differences between public and private organizations.

The inquiry is an action research project which takes a retrospective look at the intervention from the perspective of five major

participants, three consultants and two department of education managers. The methodology is adapted from Checkland's "soft systems methodology" and uses structured interviews, an exercise in building root definitions, and a group discussion procedure. It was designed to elicit the actors' individual perceptions of the intervention and promote awareness among them of where their perceptions and expectations of the consulting endeavor were similar or dissimilar.

Analysis of the data indicates that there were substantial differences in understanding among the participants regarding the purpose of the intervention, the roles of the actors, and the views the participants had of their own and the others' organization. The data further suggest that these differences emerged as a result of differences in the participants' unconscious assumptions (world views) about how to make organizational reality meaningful.

The study supports the literature concerning the importance of meaning in organizational behavior. A strong implication of the outcome is that consulting firms would be advised to explore their own and their client's world views before undertaking a consulting assignment. The study also provides further awareness of the complexity of action in even small organizational contexts.

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C H A P T E R I

INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Study

Overview of the problem

Management consultants are usually concerned with other people's problems. They are called into organizations to help solve difficulties, clarify issues, and make changes that the groups or their members cannot accomplish by themselves. Sometimes the activity is successful; the client is pleased with the result, and the consultants, having collected their fee and enhanced their reputation, move on to other tasks. Sometimes, however, the process is not so smooth. In some way or ways the consulting assignment goes awry, and the client, the consultants, or both become dissatisfied with the process or the product.

This outcome, particularly if the consultation is an important one, presents an uncomfortable scenario for the consultants. Their financial and professional success depends on a mutually satisfactory intervention. At such a time the consultants may become concerned about their own organizational problems and feel compelled to examine how they work with clients and what the consulting experience ought to be in a given situation. As Kubr has pointed out: "The history of consulting has seen thousands of assignments whose reports have been buried in managers' desks or which have caused a complete misunderstanding in the client organizations because the complementary roles of consultant and client

were not defined or relations became distorted in the course of the assignment" (1977, p. 21). The success of the intervention, as well as the future of the consulting firm, may depend on its ability to understand and manage the broader context which it and the client share.

The need for such consideration was felt by members of a large management consulting company which had, a short time prior to this study, concluded a contract with a state department of education. The consultants, who enjoyed a national reputation in accounting and general management techniques, had been hired to assist the agency in preparing a strategic plan for adult education services in the state. It was the first time the department had involved a private sector consulting firm in a major policymaking activity, and the first time the local office of the firm had won a strategic planning contract from a governmental organization. To all outward appearances the consulting activity had been successful. Completed and submitted in advance of the deadline, the plan received praise from the state board of education and positive attention from the media. The consultants also received direct inquiries about repeating the process from several other state education agencies.

Despite the acceptable product and attractive publicity, however, the consulting firm was not entirely satisfied with the results of its first public-sector strategic planning assignment. The intervention had not proceeded according to the methodology they themselves had imposed. In addition, the firm had seriously underestimated the amount of consultant time necessary to complete the task, and the job had proven

much more costly than estimated in the contract. The consultants were determined not to repeat that financial error in similar endeavors.

Yet the consultants were interested, as well, in a problem more ambiguous than profit or loss. Although the report gave the appearance of a satisfactory outcome to the interrelationship, both the consultants and the department decision makers engaged in the endeavor had experienced frustration with events which had not proceeded according to their respective expectations. The sense of dissatisfaction was acute and frequent enough to suggest that there were more than procedural breakdowns at the root of the problem. Perhaps both parties had undertaken the effort with dissimilar understandings of what the planning process was supposed to have been and what part each was supposed to have played in it.

The consulting company had taken the contract because it wanted to form an on-going business connection with the state education agency and enter the public education market. It also wanted the experience of applying its planning methodology, designed for use in for-profit organizations, to public policy issues. Therefore, the consultants felt there were lessons for the future in looking back at aspects of the intervention. They were willing to consider whether their methodology and the assumptions behind it needed retooling in order for the firm to be more effective working with public agencies on policy development. In effect, the consulting firm sensed the need for organizational learning on its own behalf.

Purpose of the study

Argyris and Schön (1978), Wacker (1981), and Checkland (1981) have noted that one way organizations may learn about themselves is by reflecting on past events and activities. The general intent of this inquiry was to explore the consultants' situation above to understand how a private consulting organization might better manage a consultant/client relationship with a public agency. In this regard the study is a retrospective one. While the client/consultant relationship presented an organizational situation laden with ambiguities, looking at it in retrospect offered the the opportunity to reflect on how the consultant interacted with a client, why it did so, and how that interaction contributed to the outcome of the collaboration. Equipped with the knowledge generated from such exploration, the firm might become more effective in succeeding interventions.

To realize this intent, the researcher wished to examine the interaction among the major participants from the consulting firm and from the public agency client in order to

- (a.) understand if the decision-makers from both organizations had differing world views of the situation and whether the differences contributed to the difficulties experienced in the intervention, and
- (b.) in the context of the above, suggest reasons why the consultation did not evolve as anticipated.

Ideally the investigation would yield recommendations about where, in the case of future interface between the firm and the client, change might occur to make the relationship more effective.

The study was conducted using an approach adapted from the "soft systems methodology" (SSM) developed by Peter Checkland and associates in the United Kingdom. Like the SSM, the methodology employed here attempts to deal with problems that arise in social systems where goals are often obscure due to the multiplicity of viewpoints and the ambiguity of the issues. A more complete description of the methodology appears in Chapter III.

Frame of reference

Assumptions about world view

The inquiry is based on acceptance of Vickers' concept of the "multi-valued choice." According to that notion, there are different ways of seeing the same situation, and each way emerges from the unique background of values, experience, and norms which the observer brings to that situation (1968). It is those differing perceptions or world views which predetermine how that situation will be understood and acted upon by the observers.

A second assumption follows that each perception derives its meaning from the particular mental framework by which every individual unconsciously views and interprets the stream of activity which is the outer world. This world view or Weltanschauung supplies a definition of

the situation that "influences what problems are perceived, how these problems are interpreted, and what learning ultimately results" (Hedberg, 1981, p. 8). A corollary assumption is that, since organizations are composed of individuals, organizations also may be said to have world views. In fact everything in the realm of human activity organizes experience and communicates it through a world-view filter.

There is the final assumption that the origins of these world views in individuals, as well as in organizations, derive not only from accumulation of lessons learned through experience, but through the ways humans choose to explore philosophically the nature and limits of reality and human knowledge. Their theories of the social world are the taken-for-granted foundations of how they understand meaning and analyze activity within that world.

Perspective for the study

Given the above assumptions regarding the nature and omnipresence of a world view in any analysis of a social situation, it is essential to make explicit the perspective from which this inquiry has been conducted. Some justification for the viewpoint is also relevant.

This is a study about organizational behavior. Most of the literature regarding organizations and how they work is written from a viewpoint which seeks a rational explanation of social affairs. From this perspective, an organization is seen as an objective reality directed towards some end and instrumentally related to its environment. It is understood in terms of how it functions to control itself and the

environment in order to accomplish its objective. An organization may be said to learn if it modifies task performance to meet its objective or to respond to a perceived environmental need.

In contrast, the frame of reference for this inquiry is interpretive rather than goal directed. Generally the interpretive world view seeks to understand the social world as it is seen or experienced by the participant. The interpretive perspective sees organizations, not as predictable systems in an engineering sense, but as human activity systems whose reality is drawn from the network of meanings and symbols constantly being created or "enacted" (Weick, 1979) by the members. From this perspective organizations are never static; they are always in process as members are constantly negotiating and renegotiating patterns of meanings and subsequent action. Action is seen as the achievement of shared meanings from a context of multiple interpretations, and organizational learning is the metaphor which describes the restructuring norms and assumptions so that action is realizable.

Like others within the interpretive perspective, Vickers concentrated on the importance of perception, but he informed it with the idea of "appreciation." Appreciation is the state in which the elaboration of reality, what actually is, proceeds together with one's value system. Accordingly, facts have relevance only to a standard of value, and values can only be identified when applied to some configuration of facts. One's capacity to make choices depends on one's current state of readiness to see and value things one way rather than another (Vickers, 1968, p. 147). As will be demonstrated, the world

views explored in this study reflected the "appreciative systems" sustained by the individuals involved in the intervention.

The decision to adopt the "soft systems" methodology for the study was based on the desire to use a methodological approach compatible with the philosophical implications of the interpretive perspective. The assumptions of that world view of organizational behavior suggest that research should aim "to make explicit the knowledge (often taken for granted, but untested) by which organization members construe their situation and to explore the multiple, often competing, systems of knowledge existing within a situation" (Smircich, 1983, p. 27). Thus it would seem that any methodology chosen to undertake the exploration must in effect operationalize that paradigm. It must be concerned not so much with solutions and goals as with understanding.

Furthermore the understanding must be reflected, not from the perspective of the external observer, but from the point of view of the participants. Checkland claims many "parallels between the soft systems methodology and the philosophical/sociological tradition of interpretive social science" (1981, p. 279). While he refers to the methodology as a systems-based approach for "tackling real world problems" (Checkland, 1981, p. 318), he concedes primacy to the mental processes of observers rather than to a posited external reality.

Significance of the Study

This study has an obvious practical justification in that it seeks to identify some actions whereby consulting firms could manage their client/consultant relationships with public sector organizations more meaningfully. Learning more about itself in relation to a client could have significant financial impact on a company hoping to expand its business.

In a theoretical context the inquiry also offers the potential to learn about how meanings and experiences are negotiated in an interaction between two groups where one of the two may seek to impose its perceptions on the other without either side questioning the values governing them. The client/consultant relationship represents one such interaction, but most literature about it focuses on the effect of the consultant's world view on the client rather than on the mutuality of impact.

This inquiry, on the other hand, looks at that implicit aspect of the client/consultant interface where the taken-for-granted assumptions held by both sides affected the organizational reality they mutually enacted. It explored what the client/consultant relationship was as it existed in the minds of the participants and where differences in understanding emerged from the same shared experience. Given the pragmatic and theoretical components of the investigation, it should interest both practitioners (consultants and potential clients) and

students of organizational learning, systems thinking, and public administration.

Delimitations of the Study

As a piece of qualitative research conducted from the interpretive perspective, this investigation has focused on a very small field of inquiry. Because it considers a problem situation unique in its population and configuration, the outcomes of the inquiry cannot be generalizable. In the sense that the data used to promote the learning are always gathered from ways that participants interpret their world, no absolute statements about the truth or precision of reality can be made. All that can be expressed is understanding about a particular organizational construct and subjective perceptions of it. As Checkland notes, "every statement about a human activity system must be a statement about the system plus a particular W [Weltanschauung] associated with it" (1981, p. 220).

Other limitations are attributable to the difficulties of action research. Schon observed that, in studies such as the one described here, "in addition to the problem of reflecting systemically on a process in which we are engaged (a problem we may learn to solve through practice), there is also the danger of influencing the phenomena we are observing" (1983, p. 127). In this case, the researcher was both an active participant in the organizational episode under study as well as a generator of contexts during the execution of the inquiry. Accounting

for the difficulties of being both participant and participant-observer was a further justification for modifying the "soft systems" methodology for the investigation. It allowed for the possibility that the problem solver may be a "concerned actor" in the situation.

Preview of the Contents

The purpose of the study to be described here was to understand why a consultative intervention did not evolve as anticipated and to determine if differing world views contributed to the problem. Chapter I has set both the scope and the framework of the inquiry. The remaining five chapters will relate the details of the current study and set it in a context of previous research and thinking done in related areas.

Chapter II provides a review of literature concerning organizations and organizational learning, systems thinking, and public and private organizations. The intent of this chapter is to align the current study with fields of inquiry relevant to the problem being considered.

Having related this investigation to other pertinent studies, the work proceeds in Chapter III to explain the research design. This section includes a listing of the critical questions posed at the onset of the project. In addition, it describes the "soft systems" methodology and the manner in which it was adapted for this particular effort.

Chapters IV and V then discuss the results of the completed inquiry. Chapter IV concentrates on the section of the study which analyzes structural elements of the intervention process. In particular it

reviews the results of the interviews with the five participants concerning their perceptions of the relationship between clients and consultants. Chapter V continues the analysis in systems terms. It describes the development and exploration of the systems definitions which the participants generated to characterize the relationship. Since a main purpose of the study was to understand the client/consultant situation from the participants' point of view, both chapters depend extensively on direct participant comments made in the course of the study's activities.

As the final chapter, Chapter VI draws some conclusions concerning the results of the analysis. It discusses the world views of the situation as they emerge, suggests some implications for the consulting firm which arise from the study, and presents some directions for future research based on the findings.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Overview

As indicated in Chapter I, the purpose of this study is to inquire why a consultive intervention did not evolve as anticipated and to determine if differing world views contributed to the problem situation between client and consultant. The literature reviewed in this chapter places this inquiry in the context of organizational analysis to date, gives broader understanding to the concept of "world view" and its implications for organizational action, and underscores the suitability of the chosen methodology as the vehicle for the study. The literature concerns perspectives on organizations and organizational learning, systems thinking, and the differences between public and private organizations.

The literature on organizational perspectives provides background on influential theories and assumptions about the formation of organizations, organizational world views, and the implications for action, such as strategic planning and organizational learning, that follow. The section on systems thinking traces the evolution of the soft systems methodology and puts it in the context of organizational behavior already discussed. Finally, the literature on public and private organizations distinguishes one type of organization from the other.

This differentiation has relevance since the intervention under study represents a public/private interface.

Organizations and Organizational Learning

Theorists have offered numerous frameworks to explain the structure and operation of organizations. Some of them, such as the garbage can image of March and Olsen (1977), or the organism metaphor detailed by Miller (1972), have become classics in the literature. Others serve scholars as pragmatic means of analyzing information relevant to organizational behavior (Quinn & Hall, 1983; Ullrich & Wieland, 1980; Handy, 1976).

Each outlook represents an idea of organization based on sets of assumptions about how the world is ordered and how knowledge is gained. Burrell and Morgan provide a useful analysis of how these assumption vary in their book Sociological Paradigms and Organizational Analysis: Elements of Sociology in Corporate Life (1979). They have suggested that all theories of organization fall within one of four mutually exclusive paradigms. Based upon a theory of society and a philosophy of science, each paradigm represents an overarching perspective regarding the ontological status of the social world. Depending on (1) whether one assumes a subjectivist or an objectivist approach to social science, and (2) whether one assumes a sociology of radical change or one of regulation, one's view of organizations will be typified by one of the four paradigms.

Functional paradigm

Most organizational theories cluster within the functionalist paradigm. This paradigm assumes an approach to social science which accepts an external objective reality. Those seeking to describe social phenomena, including organizations, from this perspective do so in terms of what is and how human affairs are regulated. It is characterized by assumptions about organizations as purposive goal-seeking enterprises which have a problem-oriented rationality. Organizational survival and adaptation to environmental pressures are key concerns. The theories and research emerging from the functional paradigm provide the basis for much of the practice, language, and analytical models current in organizational management (Smircich, 1982).

In their review of the major organizational theories based on the assumptions of this paradigm, Burrell and Morgan identify four principal theoretical strands: social system theory and objectivism, action frame of reference, theories of bureaucratic disfunctions, and pluralist theory (1979, pp. 119-226). The vast majority of writers on organizational issues adopt the social system perspective. The following discussion highlights some significant contributions to organizational thinking from this perspective.

One of the main premises is that the humans are rational. March and Simon (1963) discuss the concept of "boundaries of rationality" in order to help the decision maker demarcate the differences between the organization and the social environment. The concept of purposive

rationality, which they examined in terms of the individual decision makers, supported the presumption of an objective or detached analyst. It has remained important with regard to the notion of organizational goals, but has been integrated into the open systems approach to analyzing and managing organizations (Hodgkinson, 1978; Tanner & Williams, 1981; Amara, 1983).

Based on their research Emery and Trist suggested that organizations are open systems whose social and technological components are interdependent. The organization is rational, not only to accomplish the goals of the organization, but also to react to the environment in which the organization operates (1981). They have attempted to explain this position in terms of "causal texturing." This concept describes the interdependencies within the environment which affect the organization as system although they are unconnected with it.

Perhaps the most significant contribution to the open system approach to the study of organizations came with the publication of The Social Psychology of Organizations by Katz and Kahn in the mid-sixties. Here Katz and Kahn used a biological metaphor to demonstrate how open system theory can emphasize two aspects of social behavior patterns in organizations: "(1) their system character, so that movement in one part leads in predictable fashion to movement in other parts, and (2) their openness to environmental inputs, so that they are continually in a state of flux" (1978, p. 3). While Katz and Kahn recognized the contingent nature of social systems, their prime emphasis was on the processual character of systems interrelationships, on "identifying and mapping the

repeated cycles of input, transformation, output, and renewed input which comprise the organizational pattern" (p. 33).

A modification of the open systems approach made prominent by Katz and Kahn is the contingency model for organizational analysis. Popularized by Lawrence and Lorsch (1967), among others, it uses the biologic image of open systems, but suggests that different organizational principles are necessary for different environmental circumstances or for different systems within the same organization. It assumes that the organization's survival depends upon its ability to achieve congruence between the environmental characteristics and its internal states. While subsequent research has not led to articulation of a fully developed contingency theory of organizations (Katz and Kahn, p. 135; Burrell and Morgan, p. 167), it continues to provide a contemporary framework for managing social systems (Tichy, 1983; Mintzberg, 1983; Quinn & Hall, 1983; Ansoff, 1984).

Strategic planning. Strategic planning methodologies, such as that offered by the consulting firm in this study, are pragmatic management activities based on contingency thinking (Ullrich & Weiland, 1980; Freeman, 1984). Ansoff called contingency thinking part of the epistemological underpinnings for those who consider strategic planning and management necessary to an organization "in tune with critical success factors and the turbulence level in the environment" (1984, p. 457).

In this regard, the key issues of strategic planning are managing resources and making direction setting choices based on the presumption

that an organization can control its future. Keller has pointed out that the word "strategy" comes from the Greek verb stratego, which means to plan to defeat one's enemies through effective use of resources (1983, p. 74). Grant and King noted that strategic planning is founded on a systematic and logical base. They even referred to a strategic planning system which addresses the decision making process in an "integrated, internally consistent and timely fashion" (1982, p. 4).

Despite variations among strategic planning techniques and models, they generally retain the same fundamental components, as described by Freeman in the following definition: "The concept of strategic planning is inherently connected with setting some direction for the organization, based on an analysis of organization capabilities and environmental opportunities and threats. Thus, adequate information about the environment, past and future changes and emerging strategic issues and problems is vital to an effective corporate planning or policy making process" (1984, p. 34). Similar descriptions have been given by Lorange, 1980; Grant & King, 1982; and Ansoff, 1984. They all indicated that strategic planning is a procedure for selection from among known options and consequences. A useful concept is Ozbekhan's distinction, noted by McAleer, between strategic planning, or planning about what can be done, and normative planning, or planning about what ought to be done (McAleer, 1982).

Although strategic planning is originally and primarily a private sector management technique, the literature indicates that it is now being adapted to non-profit or public arenas. Although Steiner suggested

that there are more differences than similarities between the private and the not-for-profit sector, he provided some "overarching lessons" of private sector planning applicable to not-for-profit organizations (Steiner, 1979). Steil (1982) also highlighted special issues for the public sector to consider when undertaking a strategic plan. Although he focused on the necessary political dimension of public activity, he, nonetheless, emphasized that strategic planning, in whatever sector, is a process of resource allocation in view of environmental constraints. Keller discussed case studies in which traditional strategic planning approaches applied to institutions of higher education (1983). In each instance the author stressed the usefulness of strategic planning to accomplishing the objectives of the organization despite environmental concerns.

Organizational learning. Those who deal with organizations from the perspective of the functional paradigm, see them in an instrumental relationship with the environment. For them, organizations do not so much learn as they adapt or change in response to external factors. The change or adaptation may be a managerial phenomenon designed to gain tighter control of an uncertain environment or to achieve organizational goals with heightened effectiveness. For the manager operating from the functional perspective "the primary strategic task [italics mine] of an organization in a highly uncertain and turbulent environment may be regarded as being to facilitate organizational learning and adaptation to change" (Burrell & Morgan, p. 173).

The implication here is that learning, like the organization, is itself controllable, goal-oriented, and normally designed to overcome an external, often threatening, stimulus. Also the learning activity seldom questions the assumptions underlying the organization. As Nystrom and Starbuck have noted, "organizations learn. Then they encase their learning in programs and standard operating procedures that members execute routinely. These programs and procedures generate inertia, and the inertia increases when organizations socialize new members and reward conformity to prescribed roles. As their successes accumulate, organizations emphasize efficiency, grow complacent, and learn too little" (1984, p. 53).

In this context, strategic planning techniques may be considered organizational learning activities. Ansoff speaks of a "strategic learning approach" in his work on organizational management (1984). Similarly model building exercises based on cybernetic principles (Strank, 1983) or socio-technical systems (Susman, 1983) are designed to project changes needed to enhance organizational capability. The focus in these efforts is on improving the outcomes of the organization; the activities are prescriptive and designed to increase control over environmental factors. Even organizational development activities which attempt to help members of the organization acquire new attitudes or values reflect the functional perspective (Golembiewski, 1969). Luthans indicates that an overriding goal for organizational development programs is "to integrate individual and organizational objectives" (1977, p. 534). They also are aimed at modifying the human components of the organization

in order to make the organization function more effectively (McLean, Sims, Mangham, & Tuffield, 1982; French & Bell, 1984).

While the open systems model remains the dominant metaphor for describing and managing organizations, organizational theorists and practitioners have observed that the frameworks formed by the boundaries of the functional perspective delimit one's understanding about how an organization behaves. Even prior to the open systems metaphor assuming currency in the literature of organizational management, Lindblom suggested that the presumption of a rational solution to organizational problems should be questioned: "Limits on human intellectual capacities and on available information set definite limits on man's capacity to be comprehensive. In actual fact, therefore, no one can practice the rational-comprehensive method for really complex problems" (1959, p. 84).

Gadalla and Cooper are more explicit. They have stated that the human element is not easily accommodated within the functional models, although the major organizational perspectives in the literature of organizational theory advocate regulation as the essential orientation to management (1978, p. 368). However, regulative management as a "system of control centred [sic] on specifically organized means for the attainment of specific goals" (1978, p. 366), while essentially functional, is constricting. The focus is on tasks and the organization is reified. According to them the leading approaches "do not consider the organization as a system which 'appreciates' (that is, cognizes and evaluates) its environment. There is no place in these theories for the human being who acts as an intelligent perceiver behind the organized

means for goal attainment" (1978, p. 369). Similar sentiments were voiced by Pondy and Mitroff (1979) and Smircich (1983) as they suggested finding new models by which to analyze organizations.

Interpretive paradigm

While the interpretive perspective is a less well-known way of viewing organizational activity than the rational functional paradigm, it has prompted thinking about reality which suggests the need for different approaches to management and organizational change. The assumptions underlying the interpretive paradigm reject the absolute objective reality of social structures. Rather, the paradigm emphasizes a view that the "social world is no more than the subjective construction of individual human beings who, through out the development and use of common language and the interactions of everyday life, may create and sustain a social world of intersubjectively shared meaning. The social world is thus of an essentially intangible nature and is in a continuous process of reaffirmation or change" (Burrell & Morgan, 1979, p. 262).

Sociologists and organizational theorists working within this paradigm have been concerned with understanding the world as it is experienced by those within it. Although they are like those working from the functional perspective in that they want to learn about ways social reality is ordered, the experts' principal frame of reference is the participant rather than the objective outside observer. They acknowledge Alfred Shutz's work in existential phenomenology as a main influence in the development of the paradigm (Burrell & Morgan, 1979;

Sanders, 1982; Clegg, 1983). Reality is seen as the network of assumptions and shared meanings created by individuals. Since the concept of organization is a way by which people continually attempt to make sense of their world, it is seen from this perspective as an essentially processual social construct.

Two of the leading thinkers in this vein have been Weick and Vickers. According to Weick, one organizes the continuous stream of experience in a meaningful way by bracketing a portion of it and selecting a set of interpretations to fit the bracketed portion (1969, 1979). When one takes action based upon the processes of bracketing and selection, one may be said to be enacting one's environment. The environment thus does not exist objectively. It is constituted by the actions of independent actors. Organizations thus consist of the "mediated causal relationship" (1969) that exists between the relational processes. As the stream of experience is constantly changing, the interpretations placed upon it are in constant flux as well. Therefore, the organization is constantly being reaccomplished and redefined by the actors involved.

Weick visualizes organizations as evolutionary systems, but his imagery is not that of the open systems model from the functional paradigm (1979). Instead he suggests that, as the environment is constantly being enacted by interdependent human actors, the relationships between the enactments are also constantly changing in new and creative ways. Because the processes are the organization, one manages it by managing the relationships rather than the actors.

Geoffrey Vickers also uses the systems image, but like Weick his view of systems is an interpretive one. Also like Weick he sees organizing as sets of social relationships. For him systems are "tools of understanding devised by human minds for understanding situation, including situations in which human beings appear as constituents" (1983, p. 7). Social systems exist as sets of "on-going relations between persons and organizations" (1968, p. 73). He has disputed the notion of objective reality and proposed instead an "appreciated world" in which facts are filtered through a screen of values. In his view what we "know" is only revealed to us by virtue of our "readiness" to note certain aspects of our situation. Since one's readiness is dependent upon one's interests, expectations, and standards and since the viewpoints which reflect the states of readiness are constantly changing, an appreciative system is an inexhaustible composite (1972, p. 99).

Weick's "enacted environment" and Vickers' "appreciated world" are similar images of organizational reality. They carry behind them the assumption that social reality only has meaning when being placed in a framework formed from the individual's values, norms, and experience. From this perspective, organizations represent, not one concrete objective reality, but multiple realities continually in the process of being negotiated and renegotiated.

In a shift from his earlier thinking about the importance of rationality, March explored these notions in association with his Scandinavian colleague Johan Olsen. March and Olsen are explicitly indebted to the earlier work of Vickers and Weick in the development of

the garbage can decision processes conceived to accommodate the "ambiguity" which they see in all organizations (1977, p. 22). Because organizations, like individuals, develop myths and legends and, in turn develop conflicts over them, March and Olsen call for "models of the development of belief which do not assume necessary domination by events of 'objective reality'" (1977, p. 18).

The consequences of looking at organizations from an interpretive perspective result in emerging models which focus on organizations as ambiguous, ill-structured, fuzzy, and complex social entities. Several investigations are outstanding in this regard. Kanter, for instance, undertook to study the "complex social reality" of a major corporation in order to understand how "processes and cycles were set in motion which bounded and limited people's options" (1977, p. 291). Harris and Cronen used a rules-based approach to learn how individuals communicated the master concepts of the organization's culture to other organization members (1981). Schall also sought to describe an organization's culture through a research project focusing on culture as communication (1983). Using a jazz orchestra as the focus, Bougon, Weick, and Binkhorst explored the patterns of causality that exist in the complicated network of relationships that characterize organizations (1977).

Other researchers and organizational analysts working within the paradigm have sought to describe organizational behavior by means of imaginative metaphors. The metaphors are designed to evoke the importance of values, beliefs, and norms in helping the organizations discover new options for self-awareness. Manning, for example, uses

drama to describe a police department (1979); Baldrige, the saga for the university (1972); and Meyer and Brown, the metaphor of myth to analyze American schools (1977). In each illustration the investigators' efforts aimed at better understanding of the collective systems of meaning by which those within the organization enacted their environment.

The interpretive view sees the role of the manager very differently from the functional perspective. Smircich's typifications of the interpretive manager are compatible with Gadalla and Cooper's description of "appreciative management" as the "management of dialectic and paradox" (1978, p. 363). Where the functional manager's role is that of "decision maker, analyzer, controller of contingencies of reinforcement," the interpretive manager may be seen as "framer of contexts, maker and shaper of interpretive schemes" (Smircich, 1982, p. 9). The interpretive manager controls action by "the achievement of shared meanings" and helps the organization achieve change by altering "the systems of knowledge that comprise the basis for organized action" (1982, p. 9).

Alteration of knowledge systems within the organization is at the base of what organizational learning implies for those who see organizations from the interpretive perspective. Weick's emphasis on the importance of looking for new metaphors stems from the belief that, with new ways of talking, new understandings about the organization will proliferate (1979). That new understandings may generate original solutions and options for change is an attractive prospect for those focused on pragmatic issues of organizational success (See Peters &

Waterman, 1982, Chap. 4). To the interpretivist, behavioral change must be rooted in epistemological change. It must not simply be the modification of behaviors designed to correct some discordance between the organization and its environment that hinders the achievement of goals. It must also be the continuous inquiry about what it fundamentally means to be an organization (Argyris & Schön, 1978; Schön, 1983).

In a similar vein Vickers suggests that humans do three kinds of learning (1968). The first two, learning how to do and learning what is represent the instrumental kinds of learning that functionalists see as necessary to organizational action. The third, learning of criteria, is what, according to him, precedes the other two. It is the most important element of organizational learning because it defines the problem which the regulative world has to solve (Vickers, 1968, p. 119). Without the norms, there is no context, and without a context there can be no problem.

Argyris and Schön's concept of double-loop learning addresses the same realization. According to this theory, an organization learns only when its members, through a process of collaborative inquiry, are able to change the way organizations actually behave. This change occurs, not only by modifying the strategies for effectiveness (the process which Argyris and Schön refer to as single-loop learning), but by weighing and restructuring the norms, and, most importantly, by having the results of the inquiry implanted in the organization's memory so that behavior is permanently changed (1978).

The learning process as they see it is difficult and complex because it is not in the nature of organizations to be reflective. Organizations, their leaders, and their members characteristically seek only to change strategies or behavior rather than the underlying norms. In this manner their actions compound the problem rather than encourage inquiry. Because the attention in a problem situation is so often on action, rather than on a recursive pattern of thought followed by action, the clamor for effectiveness reinforces old norms and values. With some irony Argyris has suggested that organizations therefore learn that they are not a place for learning (1982).

In an obvious effort to reconfigure the metaphor a bit, Hedberg (1981) and Nystrom and Starbuck (1984) argue that to learn, organizations must unlearn. Crises arise because an organization clings to inappropriate perceptions and beliefs. Unlearning is a "discarding activity" (Hedberg, 1981, p. 3) by means of which members of an organization may change its cognitive structures and establish beliefs while enacting new environments.

Several other researchers have also explored the idea of organizational learning from the interpretive paradigm. In these instances, however, the research efforts have been directed primarily at discovering ways of increasing self-awareness in organizations struggling with the complexities of ill-structured problems and diverse viewpoints (Mitroff & Emshoff, 1979; Wacker, 1981; Bartunek, Gordon, Weathersby, & Preszler, 1983; Torbert, 1983). The link between awareness and action either has not been addressed, or, as in Torbert's case, has

been dealt with only tangentially. While Torbert identifies some changes in the university faculty's approach to research projects as a result of his collaborative inquiry model, even he does not make any explicit connection between the self-study and the resulting behavior.

Systems Thinking

The image of system is pervasive in the literature of organizations. Yet, as was demonstrated in an earlier reference to Weick's use of the word, the word "system" can have varying meanings depending on the perspective one brings to it. In view of the fact that this inquiry adapted a systems methodology, it is relevant to trace the principle lines of systems thinking as they relate to organizations, and to attempt to locate the systems framework of this analysis within the larger paradigmatic framework discussed previously.

Development of the systems framework

Systems thinking has evolved as an attempt to deal with complexities of organization. Although concepts about "wholes" were current in the various physical and social sciences, it fell to the biologist Bertalanffy to consolidate these diverse notions into a generalized study of systems thinking.

As a scientist Bertalanffy looked for a coherence and order in the natural world (1968). According to his thinking, however, coherence was to be found not in the sundry categories of items in each scientific

field but in solving the "decisive problems found in the organization and order unifying them, resulting from dynamic interaction of parts, and making the behavior of parts different when studied in isolation or within the whole" (1968, p. 31). In other words, a system as a unit exceeds the sum of all its parts, but each part within the system operates in a consistent fashion designed to maintain the integrity of the whole.

Bertalanffy also first differentiated between the closed and the open system. A closed system is characterized as one in which the interactions only occur among components of the system and the result is a state of equilibrium. In contrast, the open system is one which maintains a steady state of exchanges between the system and the environment. The exchange involves communication of information to and from the system.

The open system regulates itself according to varying inputs from the environment. As noted in the section on the functional paradigm, the concept of the open system has become the base for most organizational thinking in social science including the pragmatic disciplines of management and education. A specific illustration is the proceedings of the Silver Anniversary International Meeting of the Society for General Systems Research (Ericson, 1979). Following the conference theme of "Improving the Human Condition: Quality and Stability in Social Systems," most of the researchers who presented papers assumed that a social system was an open system and pursued the research from that point.

These core notions of wholeness and of the distinction between open and closed systems have dominated most systems thinking. While there has not been much progress towards the formulation of a concise general systems theory, the consequences of thinking holistically have made their mark in most areas of organized thought. Ackoff believed that the systems paradigm was so pervasive that we have, since the 1940's, been living in the Systems Age characterized by a "synthetic (or systems) mode of thought" (1974, p. 12). Miller suggested that all organized entities from the cell to General Motors could be understood as hierarchies of open systems and sub-systems each fulfilling required regulatory, communication, or processing functions: "reproducer, ingestor, decider, encoder," and the like (1978). He used the analogy of a living organism to describe the relationships necessary among the subsystems to help the organization survive in the environment.

Miller's biologic metaphor is consistent with the scientific perspective. Churchman, however, indicated that this approach, which presumed a positivist posture in looking at a system, was only one of many ways to think about systems. Calling the systems approach a "way of thinking," he offered three other ways: the efficiency approach, the humanists approach, and the anti-planners approach (Churchman, 1968, p. 11). Weinberg defined a system as a "way of looking at the world" (1975, p. 52), and dismissed the notion of "superobserver" as an "explicit fiction" (p. 77). In this awareness he is consistent with social scientists who study organizations from the interpretive perspective.

By referring to the umpire at a baseball game who confidently refuses to acknowledge that a pitch hurled by a pitcher has any absolute reality--"They ain't nothin' til I call them," Weinberg vividly illustrated the fact that a crucial part of systems thinking is understanding the connection between the phenomenon and its observer/definer. The observer is the one who, by means of language or other symbols, identifies the wholes which will be called systems. Based on the choices which are made about the principles of coherence, the system will assume a meaningful identity distinct from the environment: "By recognizing emergence as a relationship between the observer and what he observes, we understand that properties will 'emerge' when we put together more and more complex systems" (1975, p. 60).

A summary of the basics of systems thinking includes the following: the existence of an observer who gives a description of the world, or part of it, as it appears to him, using systems terms; the purpose of the described system; the entities within the system and the principle by which they make a whole; and the mechanisms by which they maintain the integrity from other systems. These concepts are generally expressed in systems language such as "inputs, outputs, boundaries, and feedback."

Given the above fundamentals of systems thinking, many attempts have been made to classify systems either generically and or in terms of specific disciplines (Blalock & Blalock, 1973). The most common classifications indicate a binary approach to the systems movement:

natural/manmade; open/closed; simple/intricate (Campbell, 1977). Boulding has offered a more complex categorization by suggesting a nine-step hierarchy of systems, Step 8 of which--social organizations--represented the systems created by organizing man (Boulding, 1968, pp. 7-8). Jordan's taxonomy (cited in Checkland, 1981) proposes eight cells of systems. Cell 6, "functional, purposive, and organismic," would represent social systems in the Jordan scheme. Checkland has suggested that systems could be mapped into four class of reality: natural, designed physical, designed abstract, and human activity. He argues that social systems are a "mixture of a rational assembly of linked activities (a human activity system) and a set of relationships such as occur in a community (i.e., a natural system)" (1981, p. 121).

Some systems applications

Generally the systems approach is the application of systems thinking to problems in the real world. Given the fact that much of the critical early thinking about systems came from scientists and mathematicians, the dominant applications of systems principles have been in terms and metaphors relevant to the rational deterministic perspective. One specific systems approach is systems engineering which involves the identifying, designing, and executing of man-made systems. It has its roots in the mathematical theory of communication developed by Shannon and his engineering colleagues in the Bell Telephone laboratories (Weaver, 1949, p. 6). It has been used principally by engineers to help design and execute the projects which advance technology.

Where systems engineering comprises the set of activities involved in the creation or operation of a man-made entity, systems analysis is the set of decision-making activities associated with the comprehending implications of meeting the system's requirements. Developed primarily at the RAND Corporation in the 1950s where it was used to do elaborate cost-benefit analyses for Department of Defense projects, its World War II origins come from the precise quantitative model-making activities of Operations Research (Churchman et al., 1957). Educators as well as business managers have adopted systems analysis and its accompanying techniques for management and control of information and resources (PPBS and MBO) in an attempt to improve accountability in education decision making (Hartley, 1968; Brewin and Sisson, 1971; Hostrop, 1975; Benathy, 1979).

Checkland refers to systems analysis and systems engineering as "hard" systems thinking (1981). This is a perspective which proceeds from the assumptions that the need for the system may be objectively stated and that its ends can be efficiently attained. They give justification to a world view in which the main concerns are deciding on the "whats" and the "hows" of the system and its outcomes. Other essential elements include (1) the selection of alternative ways by which the objective may be reached, (2) identification of the resources required by each alternative, (3) quantitative models of the systems and the environmental impact, and (4) the criteria of performance by which each alternative may be measured. The language and techniques of hard systems analysis are seductive for those who respond to the pressures for

efficiency and logic in operations (Rosenbloom and Russell, 1971; Bushnell and Rappaport, 1971; Jenkins, 1981), since the goal-directedness of the approaches would seem to make the complexities of organizational problems manageable.

Despite the appeal which these approaches have had for managers in all fields, they have not been without detractors. This fact is true particularly where these hard systems approaches have attempted to solve unquantifiable problems in areas of organizational behavior or public policy. In a paper entitled "Planning and Policy Making" (1968), Vickers argued against the use of RAND techniques of systems analysis on the basis that they could not handle multi-valued choices or issues which were not measurable. He believed they promoted rigidity and decreased innovation. In his analysis of the Polaris missile program, Sapolsky objected to the "myth" of rationality and control that such systems techniques presume in a project (1972).

One of the most outspoken critics of the use of systems analysis in dealing with issues of public policy has been Hoos. In referring to efforts to apply hard systems thinking to policy and management problems in several state government agencies in California, she inveighed against the transference of systems analysis used for military and scientific problems to civil-systems concerns. She argued that the strong theoretical framework and jargon of hard systems analysis encouraged a kind of semantic solution to social problems:

Systems analysis has provided a language that talks of total embrace of social processes and dynamics, but delivers methods that reduce wholes to their arbitrary and often least important common denominators. . . . Carried to logical extremes, emphasis on quantification could so limit and bias perspectives as . . . to distort and violate the essential nature of social problems by forcing them into a tractable soluble state (Hoos, 1972, pp. 214-242.)

Soft systems thinking

Hard systems thinking is a consequence of seeing the world from a functionalist perspective. Because of its emphasis on rationality, it assumes that everyone can come to see the same set of circumstances in the same fashion. However, in a real-world situation, the main problem in social systems is precisely the fact that there is no agreement on those aspects of the system which the hard approach takes for granted: the objectives, the criteria for performance, or the boundaries, for example. The lack of agreement may be due to one of two possibilities: that there is incompatibility in ways of viewing the situation or that the focus is on the concrete aspects of the problem rather than on the relationships (Checkland, 1972). Where the goals are obscure for one or both of these reasons and the problems within the system are 'fuzzy, the system is soft.

Checkland's initial thinking on the differences between soft and

hard systems, as well as on appropriate methods for analyzing each, arose from early experiences in an action research project begun at the University of Lancaster in the mid-1960s (Checkland, 1972 and 1981). The project was the result of thinking by G. M. Jenkins that one could explore systems concepts by entering into an actual problem situation with a team of researchers. Jenkins' concerns in applying his systems concepts were directed from "hard" systems approaches in which the objectives had been predetermined so "that the individual sub-systems making up the overall system can be designed, fitted together, checked and operated so as to achieve the overall objective in the most efficient way" (1981, p. 142).

While Checkland applauded the team concept of systems research instituted by Jenkins, he perceived inadequacies in the hard systems attempts to solve problems within human activity systems. He found Vickers' ideas of appreciative systems, with the emphasis on relationships rather than ends and means, a more appropriate systems model for real world human situations: "I take this concept of an appreciative system to be the most useful description of the context of 'problems' in the real-world, and one we must seek to use in spite of the greater simplicities of the goal-seeking model" (1972, p. 66).

In early descriptions of the development of soft systems thinking and the emerging methodology, Checkland strove to reconcile his acceptance of Vickers' meaning-driven idea of system with the functional goal-directed strategies of the Jenkins' approach. In the initial applications of the methodology to systems projects in a textile firm, an

engineering company, and a publishing house, Checkland and his associates attempted to engineer solutions to systems problems. While his analyses drove him to question "the fundamental nature of (notional) systems which from the analysis phase seem relevant to the problem" (1972, pp. 70-71), his queries were driven by the functional desire to make improvements in the system under investigation. The operating assumption was the existence of an external goal which the system could attain more efficiently.

By 1976, however, the experience of numerous applications of the methodology had caused him to modify the ultimate purpose of the soft systems methodology. Where previously Checkland had sought to use the methodology "to find a structure in, and hence solve, real-world problems of a 'soft' or ill-structured kind" (1975, p. 278), his research had focussed progressively more on the implications of meaning and the importance of the Weltanschauung in any system: "Indeed, the aim of the methodology is to expose and debate the different world-images which will exist in any real-world problem situation" (1976, p. 83).

The evolution of soft systems thinking continued as Checkland became influenced not only by Vickers but by Churchman's idea of the systems approach as the "design of an inquiring system" (Churchman, 1979, p. 147). In analyzing what he perceived as the failure of management science, Checkland explicitly declared that, in contrast to the hard systems basis, the philosophical foundation of soft systems thinking is phenomenological rather than positivist. The methodology is concerned not with optimization but with learning, and the learning derives from

the elucidation of the meanings which concerned actors attribute to what they observe.

In this context elucidation is a concept similar to Argyris and Schön's double-loop learning: "A decade of experience suggests that only the paradigm of phenomenology can underpin a management science which would grapple with the multi-faceted, ill-structured never-solved problems of managers in the real world" (Checkland, 1979a, p. 569). By 1981 Checkland had come to contrast soft systems thinking as the "learning paradigm" with hard systems thinking called the "optimization paradigm" (p. 258). He argued that the model of social reality implied by soft systems thinking is located in the philosophical/ sociological tradition of interpretive social science.

Soft systems methodology. The following figure outlines the methodology as Checkland presents it:

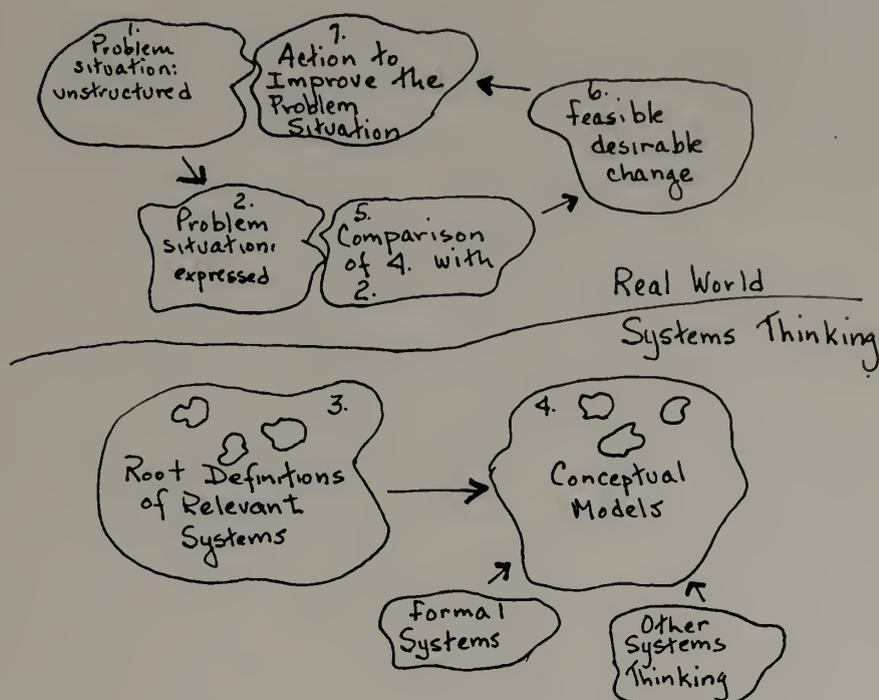


Figure 1. A Summary of Soft Systems Methodology

As Checkland has used it (1972, 1975, 1979, 1981), the methodology attempts to resolve problem situations in what he refers to as "human activity systems." By this phrase he means the phenomenon of purposeful human behavior which is infused with meaning by a human observer. The methodology generally proceeds through seven stages moving from a perceived problem, through acquisition of knowledge via systems activities, into action that resolves the problem and sets the stage for the next problem situation. However, a concept critical to the methodology in its system-thinking stages is that the system being defined, referred to, or modeled has no objective reality. It takes its reality from the perspective of the describer and reveals only those elements of reality which the describer selects as relevant to his or her

appreciated world. In a formalized fashion the perception of a problem situation is recorded and analyzed by the researcher in Stages 1 and 2. Root definitions (see below) and conceptual models use systems ideas to predicate selected features of the problem in Stages 3 and 4. These predications, in the form of systems models, are then compared with the perceived realities of the problem situation itself. This comparison is normally done in Stage 5 where the object is to generate a discussion (debate, as Checkland calls it) about possible changes which might be introduced to relieve the problem (Stage 6). Stage 7 of the methodology allows the actors to implement the changes suggested.

Root definitions. Since "root definition" is a concept crucial both to Checkland's methodology and to this study, it is essential to elaborate briefly upon it. Root definitions most usefully express conflicting world views and set the stage for them to be compared and contrasted among themselves and with the real world observed in Stage 2 (Smyth & Checkland, 1976; Checkland, 1981). Formation of the definitions represents the conceptual crossing over from the real world into systems thinking.

At the end of Stage 2 in the methodology, one should be able to answer the question—"What are the names of the conceptual systems which seem relevant from the analysis phase?" The answers to that question are referred to, in soft systems terms, as the root definitions of the relevant system. The systems defined do not usually correspond to preestablished organizational groupings such as units or divisions. Nonetheless, they should be carefully formulated to articulate a

particular view of the reality presented. Because each choice represents a singular outlook on the problem situation, the purpose of naming the system carefully is to make that outlook explicit and to establish a base from which the implications of taking that view may be developed .

Smyth and Checkland generated guidelines composed of six elements by which root definitions may be created (1976). According to their analyses, the core of the definition must be the transformation process (T) by which defined inputs are converted into defined outputs. This T includes the direct object of the main activity verbs used to describe the system. The agency having prime concern for the system, and ultimate power over it, is known as the ownership (O). The agents within the system which carry out the main activities of the system are the actors (A). The customers (C) identify the beneficiaries or victims, within or without the system, of the system's activities. The fifth aspect involves the environment (E) which includes features of the wider systems interacting with the one being defined.

While the above five elements should be explicit in any good root definition, the sixth item, although always present, is usually implicit. This is the Weltanschauung (W) which gives meaning to the definition. Given the nature of human activity systems which are dependent upon the multiplicity of values, norms, and experiences, there will always be multiple Ws possible. For coherent systems thinking, there should, therefore, be a separate definition for each W expressed by either the analyst or the people in the problem situation. By using these six elements which form the mnemonic CATWOE, one should be able to develop

concise verbal descriptions of the essential nature of a system according to a particular world view.

It is useful to give an illustration of a root definition. The following is an example offer by Smyth and Checkland as a definition of a national mail service containing all six of the CATWOE characteristics:

A partly-monopolistic government instrumentality to transport mail accepted from the public from its point of posting to its point of delivery at an acceptable quality of service with maximum efficiency, having regard to the reasonable expectations of labour (1976, p. 81).

One may extract from this somewhat wordy sentence the CATWOE elements in the following manner:

- C. the public
- A. (by implication) government workers
- T. transport mail
- W. public service with an eye to private business concerns for performance as indicated by the combined phrases "acceptable quality" and "maximum efficiency."
- O. national government
- E. a partly monopolistic endeavor having to consider the expectations of the workers in its operations.

Although it contains no objective reality, this root definition could be used in the Checkland sense as the base for one competing version of what a national mail system is.

Observations on the soft systems methodology. The observations of others on Checkland's notions of soft systems thinking and the methodology have to a certain extent paralleled the progression of Checkland's own thinking. Prevost argued that Checkland had moved away from the applied science tradition characterized by systems engineers and into the social sciences, and explicitly into the analytic tradition of functionalism (1976). Naughton suggested that, while there appeared to be a "whiff of functionalism" about the soft systems methodology, Prevost had failed to establish a case for placing Checkland in the functionalist paradigm (1979). Naughton's emphasis was placed primarily on the notion of stability which he saw evident in Checkland's notions. In 1980 Mingers explored the similarities and differences which he perceived between the soft systems methodology and the critical theory tradition of Habermas. The underlying assumption of the article is that both critical theory and soft systems methodology are situated within the interpretive paradigm. A major difference between the two concerns Mingers' observation that, while Habermas is a political radical, the reality of the soft systems methodology is that it tends to preserve the world-view of authority. In this respect Mingers and Naughton appear to agree that the Checkland approach belongs in the regulative section of the paradigm.

More recently, Jackson (1982 and 1983) stated his opinion that Checkland's work falls in the subjectivist/regulative quadrant of the paradigmatic structure established by Burrell and Morgan. He argued that Checkland, despite arguments to the contrary, must be located there: "Soft systems thinking is most suitable for the kind of social

engineering that ensures the continued survival, by adaptation, of existing social elites. It is not authoritarian like systems analysis or systems engineering, but it is conservative-reformist" (1982, p. 28). In response to Jackson, Checkland claimed that his methodology is neither radical nor reactionary but neutral in itself. As an inquiry system it has the capacity to both attack and defend the status-quo. Because it is a methodology for finding out about the social world, the actors contribute to their perceptions as discussion unfolds. Those perceptions may or may not be radical according to the readiness of the participants involved (Checkland, 1982).

Public and Private Organizations

Most of the literature on organizational theory and management has, regardless of its perspective, derived from consideration of private, particularly large, profit-making firms. There is, however, growing interest in looking at public organizations, although most concern stems from efforts to improve management techniques in public agencies, rather than from interest in understanding them as organizations.

Some experts maintain that there is no essential difference between public and private organizations. Bozeman and Straussman clearly argue that "organizations, including not only business but also government, public service, and not-for-profit organizations seek stable growth, decision-making autonomy, and control. The mission of the organization

is less important than these basic motivations, and these motivations are only minimally affected by the presence or absence of a profit motive" (1983, p. 76). By advocating the use of analytical or management techniques refined in the private sector for application in public agencies, others imply indirectly that the difference is slight. Examples of this position have been cited in the previous discussions on the paradigms and systems thinking; others include Rosenbloom and Russell, 1971; Stokey and Zeckhauser, 1978; Friend, 1981; McAleer, 1982; Ilchman & Uphoff, 1983.

There are those, however, who see basic dissimilarities between public and private organizations. Rainey, Backoff, and Levine compared them by reviewing the literature then current (1976). They examined sixty-one publications and sorted their findings into three categories: environmental factors, organization-environment transactions, and internal structures and processes. They concluded that differences do exist between public and private organizations, and that, given the more complex set of influences in the the public sector, those differences have implications for management training and practice. Rainey updated that review in a subsequent article defining and clarifying the distinctions between public agencies and private firms in areas of incentive structures and individual roles (1983).

Fottler supported the conclusions of Rainey et al. by attempting to answer the question "Is management really generic?" Although he wondered whether some of the differences are more perceptual than real, he found significant institutional variations in values, incentives, and

constraints. According to his analyses, there "appear to be some differences in how the processes of management are carried out" (1981, p. 10) between the public and the private sectors.

The above-mentioned studies were all conducted from the functional point of view and reflect the traditional bias of private, for-profit organizations. The differences which the research highlights between public and private organizations are seen primarily in terms of control and goal attainment. The private organization is assumed to have those traits which make it amenable to control. The public organization is, in contrast, less controllable due to the multiplicity of norms and values given voice in the generation of its plans, rules, and programs. The diversity means that public organizations may fail to achieve firm measures of accountability. This possibility may lead to the unstated but implied conclusion that the public organization is overall less satisfactory than the private one because it cannot address effectiveness in a quantifiable sense.

Adams (1984) and Goodsell (1983) identify similar functional differences; however, they address them from a viewpoint sympathetic to the public organization. They defend public agencies against negative public attitudes. In fact, Goodsell calls his analysis of public administration a "polemic" designed to expose the myth of poor governmental performance.

The above cited references describe the differences between public and private organization as instrumental in nature. They refer to the problems of getting the goals of the organization met and evaluated.

Those who see the organizations from the interpretivist perspective attempt to understand the public organization by means of less easily quantified dimensions of values, norms, and point of view. For example, the paradoxical culture of public sector agencies is a concept explored by Whorton and Worthley (1981). They argued that management in the public sector is a more complicated endeavor than in the private sector. The paradox of the public sector is contained in its being given enormous powers to provide desired public services while at the same time experiencing the distrust and disdain of the community at large. The public sector employee is an agent of social good as well as an incipient wrongdoer. "In this culture, restraints on individual behavior take on important symbolic and methodological meaning by being elevated to institutional status. Where the controls are institutionalized, they cease being negative statements about self-worth and become, instead, devices easily viewed by managers as limiting their ability to manage" (1981, p. 359).

While Whorton and Worthley directed their attention to the management implications of public agencies, Vickers addressed the nature of the public agency itself as an organization responsible for setting governing norms or relations rather than for setting goals or objectives. The establishing of the norms is a what he refers to as a "multi-valued choice" which cannot be made using models of efficiency: "The solution to any multi-valued choice is a work of art combining in a unique way the regulation of the various relations involved. The problem of the policy maker is to choose between such solutions" (Vickers, 1968, p. 89). The

public agency is for Vickers an organization constantly engaged in unfolding its own reality as a multi-valued organization while, at the same time, it engages in the process of inventing the construct that is the governing norm for society.

For those who concur with Vickers' image of public organizations, the reality of public agencies as repositories and inventors of social norms requires a point of view which acknowledges the importance and power of multiple realities and a commitment to action that is consistent with that viewpoint. In her rejection of reliance in governmental agencies on rigid models of information analysis, Hoos cited Churchman's admonition that there are no facts independent of the purposes of the user and that, moreover, there may be no such thing as accurate and objective information, especially in the context of social policy (1972, p. 198). Mitroff and Pondy suggested that the nature of public policy development requires new ways of thinking about and solving public agency problems and that the new inquiry systems will require organizations that are radically different from traditional organization structures (1974). Scott and Hart advocated this same posture, but chose an ethical, rather than intellectual, justification (1973). Their position was that public administrators, given their function of moral leadership, need to depart from "pragmatically proximate" behaviors which separate fact from value and adopt actions which engage in philosophical inquiries. A shift by the administrative elite away from the "paradigms of technological and economic rationality" would at once

change the behaviors of the administrators and their organizations as well as influence society at large.

Education

Schools, universities, and other educational agencies are often viewed in ways analogous to public agencies. This perception arises, in part, because some educational organizations are also public organizations and in part because they demonstrate the kinds of diversity and complexity which also characterize public agencies. As in the case of other public organizations, understanding about the organizations themselves and how to manage them derive from the perspective of the analyst. Educators and others who are concerned about the effectiveness of educational institutions frequently adopt purposive language and techniques of corporate management to solve problem situations. The assumption is that the management framework is essentially suitable for all organizations including public education ones, since they are all concerned with goals, objectives, and efficiency.

Although examples of this approach have already been given in earlier sections, another illustration is the February 1984 issue of Educational Leadership. This journal, directed primarily at superintendents and principals of schools, normally contains articles related to aspects of school administration and ways to improve it. The February 1984 issue included several articles which suggested that the solution to school organizational problems lay in emulating corporate behavior. One article exhorted principals to be like "high performing

leaders in the private sector" (Manasse, p. 42). Another urged school professionals to excellence by taking some lessons from America's best run companies (Rogers, Talbot, and Cosgrove). Yet a third encouraged education administrators to use the notion of "control management" and to perform as a "management engineer" to make schools function more efficiently (Sergiovanni). The language makes clear that the authors were writing from a paradigm which sees the marketplace as the prime organizational metaphor.

The interpretivists seek other images to understand the organizations, images which at once serve as the transmitter of the norms of society and as the incorporation of those values and traditions. Meyer and Rowan described the structure of educational organizations as a social myth that is standardized and controlled by the "schooling rule:" "To a large degree, then, education is coordinated by shared social understandings that define the roles, topics, and contents of educational organizations" (1978, p. 94). Likewise, Cohen and Rosenberg found the images of ritual and fantasy useful to describe schools as organizations (1977). Illich, seeking to remake schools schools to meet human needs, argued that the current prevailing images of schooling result in an "institutionalization of values [which] leads inevitably to physical polarization, and psychological impotence: three dimensions in a process of global degradation and modernized misery" (1971, pp. 1-2). His alternative images of learning webs and networks seek to lay bare an understanding of educational organizations that would lead to new organizational behaviors.

The predominant attention to date in inquiries about educational organizations has been given to schools or institutions of higher education. Theorists have accorded little notice to state education agencies. What literature there is outlines what state education agencies could or should do, rather than describing what they are as organizations (Morphet & Jesser, 1970; Furse & Wright, 1968; Lake, 1980; Murphy, 1980; Campbell & Mazzoni, 1976). In part, this lack of organizational attention has been due to the fact that state level education agencies have not been very important in the spectrum of educational organizations. Bakalis cited a lack of state leadership and a dearth of major state initiated policies, priorities, and standards coming from state education agencies as the main cause of the inattention (1974).

The pragmatic reality of economics, however, has forced greater attention within the past few years to state educational agencies. As the state share of costs for education increases, so does the power of those agencies who disburse the funds. Between 1973 and 1983 the state share of public school education went up from 40.6% to 50.3%, while the local share dropped from 51.5% to 42.3%, and the federal portion went from 7.9% to 7.4% (Trends and Learning; 1894). With power comes attention to the organization wielding it, however, as Louis and Corwin pointed out, "much of the current discussion about how state agencies might better serve the educational needs of local schools is seriously flawed because SEAs [state education agencies] are not well understood as organizations" (1984, p. 165).

Consultants

As stated at the beginning of this study, consultants are called into organizations in order to assist in solving a problem or set of problems which have been identified. In many instances they are hired because they possess certain skills which the organization, usually the leadership, deems necessary. Given the previously stated reality that most organizations see themselves and the environment from the functional perspective, however, one of the attractions of retaining a consulting firm is that it may bring "objectivity" to the situation (Nielsen, 1981). Both the consultant and client assume that the consultant's impartial view of the organization will be advantageous in seeing a problem "in its true light" (Kubr, p. 9).

What needs to be made explicit, however, is the fact that there is no true light, only other ways of illuminating the problem situation. By virtue of being a social entity, a consulting firm possesses some set, conscious or unconscious, of norms and value judgments. Therefore, whatever the consultant sees in the organization or whatever data it collects on behalf of its client is always filtered through the preexistent value system. MacLean et al. deal with this issue by stating explicitly that one of the principal roles of external consultants is that of "provider of world views" (1982, p. 32). However, they pointed out that there is a danger of the client assuming the framework provided by the consultant, but being unable to use it once the consultant has

withdrawn because the underlying norms of the framework are either unknown or incompatible with the client's personal experience.

Kubr also cautions against applying the concept of objectivity when referring to consultants. However, he only considers how the consultants' attitudes, which have been "moulded by their life experience" (1977, p. 46), have an effect on the choice of solutions for the client's problem. He does not explore the issue of how compatible those attitudes are with those of the client. McLean et al. cite illustrations of consultants who consciously manipulate meaning and world views in order to attract clients or to assist them in continuing organization development activities internally. In these examples the consultants' views of organizational reality represent what Argyris and Schön call an "espoused theory" of action. They do not pursue the normative issue about how the consultants' values and images can affect the intervention with the client.

For consultants who apply the interpretive perspective to their activities the issue of consultant bias is as real as for those whose approaches are more functional. The consultant with the functional framework is likely to see what can be done to solve the client's problem, and thus sees the solution in terms of what is feasible according to his outside-the-organization norms. The interpretive consultant, on the other hand, is less concerned about what is done and more concerned about what is learned. The interpretivist "addresses the processes of reflection and critique" (Smircich, 1982, p. 26) in the client organization and among its members.

The interpretive consultant assists the client organization in exploring its own reality rather than imposing one from the outside. In their consulting assignments, Argyris and Schön, for instance, encourage organization members to write descriptions of how a problem situation appeared to distinct individuals involved in it so that the participants might see the multiple realities unfolding and explore the possibilities for change that the new awareness evokes (1978). Weick encourages awareness by having his clients use his preposition wheels to explore their own networks and new possibilities (1979). In these contexts the consultant offers no answer, only the expectation that the client can explore new areas of self-knowledge.

Summary of the Review

The problem situation under investigation concerns exploration of the extent to which differences in world views affect the ability of a representatives of a consulting firm and of a client organization to work together. The literature reviewed underscored repeatedly, and in various contexts, that world view is a serious organizational concept worthy of investigation. We see from the sections on organizations and systems thinking, especially, that world views emerge from the individual's combination of values, norms, and assumptions about how the world operates and what is meaningful in it. These world views then determine what one's idea is of organization and how one may analyze it, participate in it, or manage it.

The ways to see and understand organizations are multiple and distinctive enough to result in dramatically different outcomes when action is taken as a consequence of perceptions. Note especially the contrasting approaches to organizational learning proposed by theorists of the functional paradigm, such as Ansoff (1984) or Strank (1983), and by those from the interpretive perspective, such as Argyris and Schön (1978). Another relevant illustration of this point is the development of the specific how-to literature on strategic planning coming as a consequence of seeing the world through a framework shaped by the assumptions of the contingency approach to organizations.

Although there is some discrepancy in the literature, the main suggestion seems to be that there are normative differences between public and private organizations. The implication, therefore, to be drawn from the literature and applied to the study is that these differences might conceivably reveal themselves in differing world views evidenced by participants. Also, the literature on consultants states that most consultants do not question their own world views, let alone those of their clients. Since the literature further notes that problems frequently arise between consultant and client due to incompatibility between the client's framework and that of the consultant's, it would indicate that an inquiry on how the consultant's own perceptions affect the reality of interaction is pragmatically appropriate.

The extensive exploration of the distinctions between interpretive and functional perceptions of reality not only provide a base from which to develop a study in organizational behavior and learning, it also

serves as the point of departure for the methodology used in the study. Since the majority of the work done on or in organizations is informed by the assumptions of the functional perspective, it is clearly essential to understand the implications of that perspective. However, it is equally imperative to develop carefully the premises of the interpretive point of view and to demonstrate how and why the study took the shape that it did. The literature concerning the interpretive perspective itself, as well as that which cited interpretive views of systems and public and private organizations, set this inquiry in a specific context of organizational research. It is mentioned elsewhere that, since the topic of inquiry is world views, the methodology employed should reflect awareness of the appreciative world. Checkland's work regarding soft systems and the importance of world view in understanding them gave impetus to the design of the study and some of the procedures for data collection which are explained in the next chapter.

CHAPTER III

DESIGN OF THE STUDY

Critical Questions

The investigation was designed to explore and understand the organizational reality of a client/consultant relationship. To learn whether differing world views between client and consultant contributed to problems during the intervention, the questions below needed to be answered:

- What descriptions characterized the consultative relationship during the intervention?
- Were there differences in understanding the shared experience?
- Do the activities reveal differing norms, values, and assumptions among the participants?
- What definitions of the intervention accommodate the answers to the above questions?
- Are the definitions organizationally differentiated?
- What differences in world views are revealed by the responses?
- What implications for future action by the consultants are suggested by analysis of the differences?

Rationale for Adapting the Soft Systems Methodology

As a means of answering the above questions, the inquiry adapted the soft systems methodology (SSM) to take a retrospective look at actions that comprised the intervention. As mentioned previously SSM is a seven stage process which makes careful distinction between action in the real world and "the use of systems ideas to explore via systems models the implications of taking particular views of the problem situation" (Checkland, 1981, p. 241). In this study, the SSM was reshaped to focus on revealing the world views operating in a specific social system, rather than on extending the process to the problem solving stage as Checkland does.

The decision to modify the SSM for the inquiry made sense for several interrelated reasons. Most importantly, it is a methodology purposely designed to make explicit differing world views or Weltanschauungen. "The methodology emerges not as praxiology but as a learning system in which underlying Ws [Weltanschauungen or world views] are exposed and debated alongside alternatives" (Checkland, 1981, p. 219). Consistent with the interpretive perspective of social inquiry, it also proposes to analyze human activities in terms of the meanings attributed to them by the actors.

In this regard it is similar to the double-loop learning models of Argyris and Schön. Also like their approach, the SSM considers organizational learning to be a recursive process of problem solving in the sense that reflection on the problem generates the need for action

which, in turn, creates the need for further awareness, then further action, and so on. Unlike their model, however, SSM seems to offer a way by which the meanings and values underlying actions might be debated without injecting judgments regarding individual competence. Since the inquiry involved participants who were in subordinate/superior relationship to each other, this aspect of SSM had merit. The methodology offered the possibility that the participants could answer interview questions candidly without fearing that their answers might have repercussions on their professional lives.

Description of the Procedures

Overview

This section describes the design of the inquiry with respect to the consulting intervention. The methodology uses some SSM terminology but introduces numerous procedural variations so that it differs considerably from the generic SSM as developed by Checkland. It does, however, maintain the use of the phrase "problem situation," rather than employ the word "problem" since the study is examining an evolving relationship rather than a static event detachable from its context.

There are essentially five parts to the inquiry:

Part 1: Awareness of the problem situation

Part 2: Describing the problem situation

Part 3: Creating root definitions

Part 4: The debate

Part 5: Creating a shared definition.

The first two parts coincide with Stages 1 and 2 of the SSM. Part 1 defines the existence of a problem situation which needs to be explored. Part 2 describes the problem situation in as full a manner as possible. It involves an analysis of relevant printed materials, as well as interviews with the participants regarding their perceptions of certain aspects of the client/consultant relationship.

Parts 3 through 5 are where the inquiry moves into the systems phase, and where the shift from the SSM occurs. In Part 3 each participant developed five root definitions which he or she felt defined the "system" involving the client and the consultant. In Part 4 the participants were involved in discussing their own root definitions and those emerging from the interviews in order to make explicit the world views which colored their actions during the course of the consulting intervention. The last part, Part 5, required the participants to use the awareness gained from analyzing the multiple meanings and assumptions gleaned from the Part 4 debate to develop a shared definition of the client/consultant system. The following sections of this chapter explain the procedures followed in each part.

Part 1: Awareness of the problem situation

In effect, the problem overview and the purpose of the study as described previously in Chapter One represent the Part 1 aspect of this inquiry. Because of her involvement in the intervention, the researcher perceived the consultants' concern that their client/consultant interface had not proceeded as expected and she decided to use that issue as a focus for investigation of differing world views. The situation, which will be elaborated on in the opening section of Chapter IV, involved a private-sector management consulting firm. This firm had been hired by leaders of a state department of education to work with the department and a specially appointed citizen committee to develop a strategic plan for adult education.

Although the plan had been completed to the client's satisfaction, the consultants involved agreed with the researcher that unanticipated difficulties between those involved from the client's side and those involved from the consultant's side had surfaced during the organizational processes of getting the plan done. Consequently they stated a willingness to reflect on the investigation in order to examine some aspects of why the difficulties existed. However, they stipulated that neither they nor the consulting firm itself be identified. To honor their requests for anonymity, all personal references have been deleted from the study.

Part 2: Describing the problem situation

Having determined that a problem situation existed, the researcher attempted to get the "richest possible picture" (Checkland, 1981, p. 163) by collecting descriptions of it from multiple sources including available official documents, researcher recollection, and participant interviews. The aim was to assemble in Part 2 the sequence of activities that characterized the intervention, as well as to investigate the network of values and norms that informed the participants' perceptions of those activities and of the reasons for them.

To develop the sequence of activities framework, the researcher reviewed and analyzed available written materials including the following:

- the request for proposal (RFP) disseminated by the state department of education to develop a strategic plan for adult education
- the response to the RFP from the consultants
- the contract between client and consultant outlining tasks and responsibilities of each in the course of the assignment.

From her own recollection she related the documents to the sequence of formal activities leading to the establishment of the client/consultant relationship. The connection of documents to events comprised the structural elements of the problem situation. Against these elements the interviews could be contextually understood.

The interviews. The principal part of Part 2 concerned the interviews with the major decision makers in the planning intervention.

The five persons questioned included three from the consulting firm: a managing partner (male), a project manager assigned to shepherd the intervention to completion (male), and a young staff person (female) assigned to do research and computer analyses. The two from the state department were the deputy commissioner for program and support services (female) and the department project manager for the strategic plan who was also the chief of the bureau of adult education (male).

While each participant responded to the same set of questions (see Appendix A), the taped open-ended interviews varied in length from thirty to sixty minutes. The sessions covered the following topics:

- the participant's role in the process
- the roles of specified others in the process
- the purposes of the study and the study committee
- a description of the planning process and methodology
- the reasons for the formation of the study committee
- the reasons for hiring the consulting firm
- the projected outcome of the activity
- the weaknesses and strengths of the intervention
- projections concerning the other side's (client's or consultant's) views on the above topics.

The intent was to gather enough data in the participants' own language to develop a description of the problem situation characterized by a range of possible view points.

Part 3: Creating root definitions

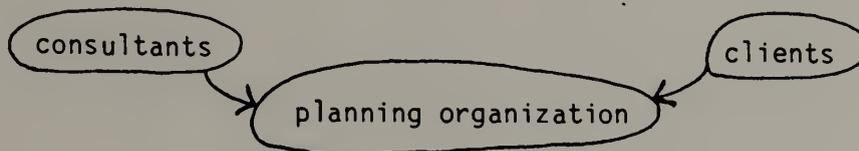
The next phase of the investigation moved from analyzing reality into what Checkland calls "systems thinking." As the final part of every interview session, each participant was asked to construct root definitions about the relationship. In the Checkland SSM, the activity of generating root definitions is undertaken by individuals not participating in the situation under analysis. For his purposes the definitions are a means to an end, the end being the creation of some conceptual systems against which the participants could compare and contrast the realities of the Stage 2 description of the problem. For Checkland any alternative ways of defining the systems are equally useful as long as they prompt models for comparison.

In contrast, the intent of this study was to evoke only those perceptions held by the actors in the organizational problem itself. The emphasis was to concentrate the participants' awareness of how multiple realities can be brought to a single sequence of events so that the meaning behind behavior, rather than the behavior itself, becomes the point of organizational focus. Because of the complexity of the concept of multiple-realities and the novelty of the root definition process for the participants, Part 3 was divided into two phases: training in definition construction and building the actual definitions.

Preparing the participants. To prepare the participant for constructing root definitions, the investigator gave a systems context for the exercise. Each participant was shown the sequence of statements

given below. Each statement was written in capital letters on a separate card:

- We are trying to learn more about the relationship between the management consultants and the state department of education in this particular planning assignment
- We are looking at the relationship as a system--a human activity system
- A system (1) has parts connected in an organized way, (2) has parts affected by being in the system, and (3) is identified by someone as being of special interest.
- How can we look at a system to solve any problems we have with it? By looking at the situation in a certain way with certain consequences.



How can we look at this system to solve any problems we have with it?

The cards were displayed in a prominent place to give the participant an on-going context for the definition-creating exercise to follow.

Each participant was then told that the goal of the exercise was to define the temporary system that resulted from the client and the consultant working together. He or she was also reminded again that, in the context of this inquiry, a system took its boundaries from the

choices made about it by someone with a particular view of the reality being considered.

As an example of how perspective might change the system view of the same reality, the researcher asked each participant to think about the unlikely illustration of a neighborhood bar or tavern. Participant and researcher then discussed how, depending on the norms and values through which the describer filtered the reality, the bar could alternatively be considered a legal beverage dispensing system, a neighborhood socialization system, an alcoholic producing system, or any number of other possibilities.

Then the participant was introduced to the parts of a system adapted from the root definition terminology of Smyth and Checkland (1976): Transformation, Owners, Actors, and Customers. Each received a "definition wheel" (see Appendix B). This was a device modeled after Weick's preposition wheels (1979, p. 252). It was composed of four sets of wheels, different sizes, all turning on the same hub. It was designed to represent some of the human activity systems which could describe the reality of a neighborhood bar. Each sub-wheel contained options for one of the four parts of a system. For example, the sub-wheel for Transformation contained options such as "sells liquor," "earns money," "gives a place to socialize," and the like. The Actor sub-wheel had "spouse," "owner," "bar keep," and "temperance worker" among the options. The participant was asked to manipulate the wheels in order to generate additional definitions of the neighborhood bar other than those already stated.

By turning the sub-wheel marked Owner, the participants could see how the same reality would become a different system depending on who "owned" the system, or, in effect, whose world view the system definition encompassed. The researcher then encouraged the participant to consider the implications of world views implicit in several definitions suggested by random turns of the wheels. For instance, the participant speculated on how the appreciative system of a bar-owner might vary from that of a bartender or a bar customer. He or she was then asked how the system would change if the Owner wheel were turned from bartender to customer while every other wheel remained stationary. The purpose of the exercise was to acquaint the participant with the specialized SSM terminology being employed while at the same time sensitizing him or her to the inseparable interrelationship between values and facts of any organized reality.

Building the definitions. Once the participant felt comfortable with both the terminology and the notion of root definition building, he or she was asked to generate at least five root definitions of the system that was the client/consultant relationship. The participant only had to select the Owner, the Transformation, the Actor(s), and the Customer(s) for each definition. The decision was made not to have the participants work with the remaining two elements of Smyth and Checkland's root definition mnemonic; that is, E for environment and W for Weltanschauung. The researcher believed that the E features of the problem situation would emerge prior to the definition building phase as a result of (1) the researcher's own knowledge of the events of the intervention, (2) the

analysis of the written materials, and (3) the individual participant interviews.

The W was not dealt with explicitly as it was crucial to the study that the implicit world views should reveal themselves in the course of the various steps in the inquiry. The assumption was that the participant would create five root definitions, each giving clues about the particular outlook from which the individual approached and participated in the organizational reality of the intervention (see Appendix C). After each exercise was finished, the researcher converted the phrases outlines into complete sentences to be used in the debate stage of the study.

Having completed the process of creating the formal definitions from each outline, the researcher next reviewed the transcripts of the Part 2 interviews. From the participant's direct responses regarding their perceptions of the client/consultant organization, the researcher constructed sixteen (16) additional definitions (see Appendix D). The assumption for this step was that the aspects of an individual's "appreciation" of a human activity system would be apt to be revealed in a language environment where one was not consciously manipulating an unfamiliar series of symbols. The participants' words were slightly edited to adjust to the four elements of the root definition process.

Part 4: The debate

In the SSM, as Checkland developed it, the investigator would normally proceed directly from building root definitions into Stage 4,

the making of conceptual models of the activities which the named system must perform in order to be that system. In this inquiry, however, the researcher adapted the SSM Stage 6 concept of generating a debate for inclusion as Part 4 activities. This shift was made in order to explore the world view implications of the root definitions which emerged from Parts 2 and 3.

Because, as Checkland pointed out, human activity systems "can be manifest only as perceptions by human actors who are free to attribute meaning to what they perceive" (Checkland, 1981, p. 14), it was useful to employ his concept of structuring a "dialectical debate" to tease out the implications behind the definitions. Checkland noted that the debate might reveal incompatible world views on which the actors in the human activity system base their actions and interpret those of others (1981, p. 17). By forcing participants to consider their own systems definitions in circumstances where they must explain and exchange the meanings behind their words, they would conceivably become more aware of the relation of their actions to their taken-for-granted perceptions.

The "debate" was set up as a meeting among the five participants and the investigator. Its activities were designed to explore the following:

- whether differences in world views became apparent during the discussion about root definitions
- whether exploration of root definitions of a shared human activity system could yield an increase in understanding among

the participants of their own implicit world views and those of the others

- whether increased understanding could enable the participants to construct a collective root definition of the human activity system which was the client/consultant relationship
- whether this kind of process would be useful in an actual organizational context to explore differences or resolve problems.

The planned time span for the debate was two hours. During that time the participants were involved in a series of separate but related activities. All discussion among participants was recorded for analysis at a later date.

The session opened with a the following quotation from Keillor's Lake Wobegon Days: "When you're around it all the time, you don't notice it so much" (1985, p. 6). The intent behind the citation was to remind participants that they would be examining competing views of reality, each shaped by implicit and taken-for-granted values and assumptions which needed to be articulated. Also at the beginning they received a rapid review of the events to that point, the relation of the interviews and the definition building to the debate, and the generic elements of the SSM root definition.

Following the overview all participants received copies of the sixteen definitions extracted from the interviews. The definitions had been randomly coded for reference purposes but contained no clues as to whose interview response had been the source of which definition. They

were asked to review the definitions silently and to select individually the one which most precisely defined the client/consultant system as that person perceived it. A number of the definitions appeared to be very similar but had significant differences in terms of the implications for world view.

Once the participants had selected their definitions, they were asked to respond to the following items on a coded answer sheet:

1. Of the definitions just read, choose the one that best describes what you thought the client/consultant temporary organization was designed to be. Put the code letter of the definition on this line. _____
2. Which definition do you think _____ chose?
The name inserted here was that of one of the participants from the other organization.
3. Which definition do you think he/she thinks you chose?
4. Which definition do you think _____ chose?
The name inserted here was that of a participant from the respondent's own organization.
5. Which definition do you think he/she thinks you chose?

The sheets were collected and the letters of the five individually selected definitions were shared with all participants without identifying who had selected which one. Next the participants considered each definition and discussed what the differences among them were. They were asked to see them as "competing views of reality" and to examine the implications of the differences and the similarities in terms of the

problems which had arisen in the client/consultant relationship. They were encouraged to explore the values and assumptions that governed each definition. This part of the exercise, which lasted for forty-five minutes, represented the "debate" in the Checkland sense of the term.

Part 5: Shared root definition

Once the participants had explored the selected definitions, they were asked to use the understandings gleaned from the discussion to construct a consensual root definition of the client/consultant relationship. To simplify matters, they together constructed the same kind of skeletal outline with the C, A, T, O elements as they had done individually. Their collective choice for each element was noted on a flip chart. Twenty minutes were allocated to this effort.

The next step in the debate state was to give each participant a copy of the five definitions which he or she had constructed earlier (see Appendix E). Participants compared their own definitions (as mentioned previously, the researcher had expanded them from the CATO outlines into complete sentences) with the ones selected and discussed during the debate and with the consensual root definition. The comparison completed, they received a coded response sheet which contained the following questions:

- Among the definitions discussed and the ones which you created in our interview, which definition most closely represents your viewpoint regarding the consultant/client relationship?

- If you are not happy with any definition, what would one contain that reflected your perspective/
- What is an organization?

Ten minutes were planned for this section.

In the final phase of the meeting, participants reflected on the activities of the study and responded orally to the question "Has this process been useful, and, if so, how?" As an ultimate step all five were asked to share one change that he or she would make if the intervention could be repeated.

Assembling the knowledge

The anticipated result of the study was that the data generated from the interviews, the root definitions, and the debate would represent a fruitful examination of why the intervention did not evolve as projected. Taken together they would yield responses to the first six questions posed at the outset of this chapter. The answer to the seventh, "What implications for future action by the consultants are suggested by analysis of the differences?," would, in turn, emerge from the interrelationship of the six previous answers. Collectively they should advance some understanding of the effect of world views.

C H A P T E R I V
DESCRIBING THE PROBLEM SITUATION: PART 2

Structural Elements

The educational context

To understand the complex problem situation as it unfolded in the interviews and the debate, one needs first to review the activities which lead to the enactment of the client/consultant relationship. The following information is drawn from the researcher's own participation in the intervention as a Department of Education staff member, as well as from the official documents which formalized the agreements between the client organization and the consultant organization. The material recapitulates some of the principal facts, events, and outcomes which were general knowledge among those concerned with the strategic plan and the client/consultant relationship.

The impetus to study adult education as a policy issue in this state department arose from a policy document prepared by the Commissioner and presented to the State Board of Education as their shared agenda for educational leadership in the state. Most of the recommendations concerned the education of children. The final one, however, recommended that a committee, composed of a cross section of representatives from public and private groups, study issues relevant to adult education and make its recommendations within 18 months.

The responsibility for carrying this task forward fell to the chief of the bureau of adult education. He responded positively to the assignment since he had been looking for a vehicle by which the subject of adult education and the efforts of his bureau would receive more attention than they had historically received from either top management in the department or the board of education itself. As a result of having seen a presentation on strategic planning sponsored by the management consulting firm, the chief suggested to the Deputy Commissioner and the Commissioner, that the department hire that firm to work with the required committee.

Prior to this suggestion, firms had been retained to undertake projects related to operations and finance, such as systems design, accounting procedures, and the like. Yet up to that time the department had no precedent for hiring private sector firms to assist in policy making endeavors. Furthermore, public regulations prohibited the direct contracting with the firm without a competitive bid process. Nonetheless the chief received permission to prepare and publicize a request for proposals from organizations interested in doing the adult education strategic plan. A staff member in his bureau prepared the request for proposal (RFP) so that the response from the consulting firm would be the most appropriate one. The scope of requested services closely paralleled the outcomes offered by the strategic planning methodology.

Request for proposal

In thinking about the relationship between private sector consultant and public sector client, it is useful to examine the documents that allowed it to develop. The language of the RFP (see Appendix F) indicated that the department of education would entertain proposals to "assist the study committee" and to "provide technical assistance to the study committee." As specified in the opening paragraph of the RFP, the assistance was to "develop a strategic plan to address the program of adult education." The purpose statement specified that whoever received the contract would "present a strategic plan which will include specific recommendations, to the study committee." The study committee, "representing a cross section of business, industry, education and community agencies" would be a blue-ribbon group assigned to look at the broad issues of adult education and, on the basis of the combined efforts of consulting and state department staff, submit a report regarding adult education to the State Board of Education.

The above phrases indicate that the successful applicant would be the agent responsible for the production of the proposed plan which would then go as the committee's report to the State Board. A different perspective appears in the "Scope" immediately following the purpose statement. In this section, the task, rather than to develop the plan, was to "assist the committee in the development of a specific plan." The assistance was to be provided by the contractor in the form of four separate undertakings, as follows:

- "a comprehensive study of the demographic, economic, and fiscal trends"
- "an analysis of the key issues with priority recommendations to the study committee"
- "identification of specific goals and objectives as they relate to the key issues"
- "recommendations to the study committee as to means for the State Department to implement the accepted plan".

In this section of the RFP, one could suggest that, while the contractor did not have to do the plan, the firm had to, in effect, prepare all the separate pieces so that they might be assembled by another group.

The language of the State Department of Education document was ambiguous. Yet, whatever the interpretation, the verbs which identified the areas of the contractor's responsibility were active and product-directed.

Response to the RFP

In its response to the RFP, the consulting firm offered its services in a less product driven context. While the response restated the purpose of the overall project "to be the development of a strategic plan," the firm indicated that its role in realizing that purpose was in "providing technical assistance to a study committee and Bureau staff specifically charged with reviewing the current status and future direction of the State's adult education program." It repeated the

following RFP language in describing the kinds of assistance the firm would provide:

- "study demographic, economic, and fiscal trends"
- "analyze the key issues"
- "identify specific goals and objectives"
- "present recommendations to the study committee."

Unlike the RFP, however, which, in certain sections, explicitly called for applicants who would present a developed plan to the committee for review, the consultant's proposal (see Appendix G) was unclear about the "doer" in the actual development of the plan. The following section in the proposal under "Plan Development" denoted what must be done to develop the plan, but not who was to do it:

The final plan development will result in the documentation of a Strategic Plan for Adult Education. It will include an assessment of the external and internal factors and issues. It will also summarize the objectives, goals and strategies the Bureau should undertake. A timetable for implementing the plan is also an important component of the report.

The soliciting proposal did not state in any section that the consulting firm actually proposed to present or prepare a completed plan to the committee or to the board.

When the decision makers at the department decided to hire the consulting firm to employ their strategic planning methodology, they made the agreement legal by means of a contract. The contract was a simple one. In the section required for "complete description of service," it

stated that the "contractor agrees to Perform [sic] the duties and activities in regards [sic] to strategic planning for Adult Education as listed in the attached proposal." The proposal exactly as submitted by the contractor then served as the legal description of what the client/consultant relationship was to be. It is equally important to note that the contractor indicated in the proposal that it would charge the State Department approximately one half of what it estimated the actual cost of the assignment to be. The firm was referring to its absorption of the remaining costs as its "investment in this project." This financial arrangement was also formalized by the contract to which the proposal was attached.

There was virtually no negotiation on either language or financial terms prior to the onset of the project. Nor was there written resolution of the ambiguity regarding the consultant's tasks. Additionally, the RFP had stated that among the criteria for evaluation of proposals was a review of "the proposed management approach and the degree to which it is compatible with state needs" (see Appendix F, p. 191). However, no such analysis was done and no further mention of this concern appeared in either the RFP or the final contract.

The unstructured problem

As the RFP process was taking place, the Commissioner's office was simultaneously inviting the selected individuals to participate on the study committee. The persons selected for membership generally represented the necessary variety of public and private groups who have a

stake in issues of educational policy. In all instances the individuals chosen were persons already known to the the Commissioner or respected members of his staff. By the time the contract between the firm of consultants and client was executed, the committee was in place. The consultants had no involvement with the process or resulting selection of committee members.

To begin work the client/consultant group met to establish itself as a project team and to set forth operational guidelines: meeting structure, dates, timelines and the like. The team was composed initially of the managing partner from the consulting firm, a project manager from the firm, the bureau chief from the department, the lead member of his adult education staff (the researcher), and a staff member from vocational education who also had experience in adult education. After the first meeting the chairman of the study committee also joined to give the study committee representation in discussions about its operations. The chairman was a superintendent of schools with a background in adult education. He was a friend and colleague of both the commissioner and the bureau chief. Shortly thereafter the team expanded once more to include a staff analyst from the consulting firm.

The study committee met about every four weeks from June 1984 to February 1985. The project team usually met as a group at least once prior to each meeting to establish agendas and meeting structures, and once after a meeting to set assignments and review the events of the committee sessions. As the need warranted, team members from the consultants and the department met to work jointly on tasks or to review

drafts of assignments. Periodically the bureau chief and/or the managing partner met with the deputy commissioner to report on activities or to discuss planning issues which might have surfaced,

In the course of the planning project, several events occurred which indicated the presence of, if not the reasons for, differences in viewpoint between client and consultant regarding the scope of activities, consultants' roles, and the expectations of the client organization. In an early instance both the bureau chief and the deputy commissioner indicated their displeasure that the consultants had not used any new data sources in their environmental scan. They both commented that the material collected was nothing more than what regular department staff could have gathered quicker and easier. They had clearly expected something other than what they received.

In another case the bureau chief requested that the consulting firm do certain financial analyses as part of the final plan document. The consultants complied, but indicated their belief that this was beyond the scope of their responsibilities and that they would only do it because they were committed to the successful completion of the strategic plan.

The project manager's opinion, as shared with the researcher midway through the process, was that the consultants were functioning much more as "doers" than as the coordinators they thought they had been hired to be. The managing partner participated, at the bureau chief's request early in the relationship, in nearly every phase of the project, rather than only in the negotiating phase. The project manager from the consulting firm consequently adopted another role. Rather than

exercising management responsibilities on behalf of the consulting firm, he was doing staff work: research, data analysis, and report writing. All three of the consulting personnel assigned to the project spent much more time than projected, and the firm had been required to use other personnel resources as well.

At the conclusion of the plan development, the consultants had spent twice as much money on the project as their original pro-bono estimate had allocated. They jokingly indicated to the researcher that they had learned a great deal from the intervention, mostly about what not to do in a similar client/consultant relationship.

The Interviews

Overview

Where the documents give evidence of minimal negotiation, the interviews reveal constant negotiation of the shared human activity system. As the first participant activity of this retrospective study, the materials were intended to generate understanding of the dynamic between client and consultant as it existed in the minds of the principal participants. The expectation was that their responses would accomplish three things: (1) reveal whether there were differences in how the participants viewed the relationship, (2) yield some understanding about the values, norms, and assumptions underlying the participants' actions during the intervention, and (3) provide some unconscious root definitions of the social system in which they functioned.

Discussion of the participant responses is organized in such a manner as to focus on the above three concerns. While there is some overlap among the questions, they have been grouped for discussion into three categories according to the kind of information their responses revealed: (1) problems experienced in the relationship as expressed by the participants, (2) similarities in understanding the client/consultant organization, and (3) dissimilarities in understanding the same construct.

Each of the participants was privately interviewed using the twenty questions indicated in Chapter Three and available in Appendix A. All were cooperative and their answers to the questions were for the most part lengthy and candid. Each person seemed interested in the process and willing to reflect on the intervention. Because the investigator had promised anonymity, the remarks each person made are attributed by abbreviated job title rather than by name. In effect, the title becomes the name. Thus Deputy refers to a comment by the Deputy Commissioner in the Department of Education, Chief to one by the Bureau Chief of Adult Education in the department, Partner to one by the Managing Partner of the consulting firm, Manager to one by the Project Manager of the consulting firm, and Staff to one by the staff analyst from the consulting firm.

Problem situation expressed

Eight questions generally elicited explicit statements of the problem situations which arose within the client/consultant relationship. They are as follows:

- #2 What kind of organization is the department of education?
- #11 Were there differences between what players were supposed to do and what they actually ended up doing?
- #15 What were the benefits of the planning procedure for the study?
- #17 What were the benefits of the client/consultant interface to the client?
- #19 What were the difficulties for the clients in the intervention?
- #20 What were the difficulties for the consultant in the intervention?
- #21 Where did the process agree with your expectations?
- #22 Where did it not agree with your expectations?

The responses to these questions indicate that the department of education's participants were comfortable with the enactment of the interplay among client and consultant participants. The consultants, on the other hand, had problems with roles they found themselves playing and with the way the intervention ultimately evolved. There also appeared to be discrepancy about the client's world in terms of how the participants saw it and how their views colored the enactment of the intervention. The succeeding discussion elaborates upon these generalized statements.

Question #2 immediately concerns the observations about the state department of education which is the client in the broadest sense. In contrast to Question #1 regarding the consulting organization, participants' responses to this question were disparate. Yet, there appeared to be a thread of consistency in the ways the consultants replied. Their perceptions all concentrated on the procedural character of the educational organization.

This similarity of observation may be observed by quoting portions of their comments:

Partner: A perceived sense of strangling hierarchical requirements within the department. I have the perception that people could not do things that needed to be done without going through steps.

Manager: It's also a highly organized organization designed to provide services, obviously, to the public and to be concerned with, I guess, more about what services should be provided rather than more realistic, not realistic but, pragmatic, things about what it's going to cost and something like that.

Staff: The department is more steadfast. I mean, there are ways of doing things with the department. [The Chief] because of his position--you [referring to the researcher who worked in the department] can't say things to [him] or rearrange the direction because that's the way it is. He

is always going to worry about what [the Deputy] is going to think.

The responses from the departmental participants, while not as explicit as the consultant's responses about their own organization, give evidence of a view distinct from those of the consultants. The Deputy's response is lengthy but revelatory; the Chief's requires some explication. They are as follows:

Deputy: We are a very large organization to which most of the members bring a relatively common set of values around education. However, it is not clear to me that our mission at this point is absolutely clearly defined despite the consensus of values that I think exist. We are an organization that right now is in flux. It is undergoing a great deal of change, and I think there is needed structure being imposed.

We are an organization that does not know whether it is your human service kind of organization or your much more structured data-management kind of organization. There is a kind of tension there, and doing it in the context of being a public agency. So we don't have a lot of resources. We are a very diverse organization.

I guess the best way that I would describe it in trying to get across a feeling of the organization is that we are an organization that is in transition in a lot of different ways including from having been an agency that

dealt on a more immediate level with traditional educational concerns to an agency that has had to deal with those same concerns and also manage large amounts of money and be accountable in that regard in a way that we did not used to be accountable in terms of educational policy matters.

Chief: You know how I feel having gone through the management study thing.

The Chief's response, which he declined to expand upon, referred to his disapproval of the way that senior management within the department had been both managing personnel and developing policy. The management study alluded to involved an outside organizational consultant who analyzed the organizational climate of the organization and found much anger and resentment among professional staff regarding the way they were being treated by management. The researcher and the Chief had both been present at an informal meeting at which the consultant had made some of his findings known. In a conversation which took place between that informal meeting and prior to the research interview, the Chief had told the researcher that he agreed with the opinions of the professional staff and that the department was poorly managed in a human-relations sense.

Answers to Question 11 revealed that the consultants had found themselves occupying roles and performing tasks they had not anticipated. The Partner stated that he had to participate much more than he had planned: "Initially the department of education felt that most, if not all, of the contacts with [the consulting firm] had to do with the

partner." His unanticipated involvement also was a problem for the other consulting members. The Manager believed that the Partner's role shift forced him into doing "all that analysis; it would have been spread between [Staff] and other people within the department of education." The Staff person encapsulated the problem for the consulting firm: "All of our roles were pushed down a little bit and [the Partner's] role expanded more than a partner normally has."

Where each of the three consultants identified the same problem situation with the issues of roles played, the two department members felt that each person had performed according to expectations. The Deputy thought that the "roles were essentially what [she] had expected." The Chief was also comfortable with the situation although he admitted to manipulating the situation somewhat: "[The Partner] functioned pretty much as I had anticipated. . . .I kind of pushed [the Partner] into a role that he, I believe, really didn't see himself in. He saw [the Manager] in that role."

Question #15 regarding any difficulties which the strategic planning methodology created for the intervention resulted in responses which were individualized and inconclusive. The Manager and the Staff person gave answers to indicate that any methodological difficulties were due to their inexperience with the methodology. The Manager noted a "major difficulty in the beginning and that was defining what some of those phases [in the environmental scan] were and what was supposed to be the product." Staff in talking about her lack of experience with the methodology, observed that "you don't know enough about where you are

going; it's hard to get an overall picture." The Partner directed his observations towards the difficulties which the planning methodology imposed "as most organizations are not very good at looking themselves objectively."

On the Department of Education side, the Deputy found no difficulties with the methodology ("I knew what I was looking for out of this."). The Chief's problem related to the fact that he had to surrender a policy option, state control of adult education, because it was not accepted by the committee. Otherwise he had no methodological problems.

Differences among the participants appeared in the responses to Question #17 which inquired about the benefits of the client/consultant relationship to the client. In this instance the department's participants seemed to value the same thing. As the following responses indicate, both of their responses centered around the concept of legitimacy:

Deputy: We bought legitimacy with both the committee and with the outside world in terms of the outside report. I would say those are the main benefits to this agency.

Chief: The consultant brought to the situation an expertise not only in strategic planning but in accounting and business procedures that's recognized by most people on the board, recognized by the commissioner and the front office. They are recognized as experts in the field and as people who would be believed. They brought credibility

to the situation. Unlike other vendors who may not have that kind of immediate recognition. So they would bring that credibility. That's a benefit to the client. They brought the structure.

Where the departmental participants were consistent with each other regarding the benefits to them and their organization, the consultants were less unanimous and offered different opinions on the benefits. Their comments show that they perceived the benefits primarily in terms of the accomplishment of getting the plan done, although the Manager seemed to have an idea of the perceived public relations issue of having outsiders involved in the report's preparation:

Partner: A benefit to the department was the ultimate measure that it was a report that was accepted by the board of education, seems to be strongly endorsed by the participants, so that the benefit was the objective that was initially set out that was to produce a plan, to be able to communicate it to the board of education and to receive approval so that there would be in place a plan for adult education. Certainly one benefit is that it worked. There were side benefits in that the department had exposure to an outside process.

Manager: I think it showed to someone, to the Department of Education, that there was some value in working with outside consultants, that kind of thing. And that it may, in fact, facilitate things in some of the things that the

department of education wants to do. I also think that one of the big benefits to the department was that it took some of the pressure off the department in terms of this study being a self-serving study for the department.

Staff: They got a lot more help than they paid for. We ran over a whole lot. We worked very hard to meet the needs, to deliver a good product, to bend over backwards to make sure that the product was good.

The comments coming from Question 19 indicated that all three of the consultants believed that the department had a problem dealing with "outside" or "non-educational" consultants. In contrast neither the Chief nor the Deputy felt that they encountered any major difficulties. Each participant, however, in response to Question #20 about the consultants' difficulties, perceived problems which the consultants had in understanding the human activity system in which they were working. Their responses to that question are abbreviated below:

Partner: One of difficulties was "working with and for the Department of Education with the committee as sort of a separate entity. . . . I'll mention one other. I don't want to make too much of it but I think initially the department perceived that the only wisdom came from the partner.

Manager: "The difficulty was not getting direction from the Department of Education. . . . Then again we couldn't expect you to know what that product should be either.

Staff: "We weren't sure what to expect and we weren't sure how we were being perceived. We felt at one point, 'Things aren't going too well.'"

Deputy: "It was probably difficult for them to deal with my impatience--"Why isn't this stuff in here?" It's perfectly reasonable for this group of outsiders to say, "Well, how are we supposed to know?" They're right; they're absolutely right. There was this perception that they were going to come in here and do this magic and it would all come out done at the other end.

Chief: "They would agree on the difficulty of obtaining information. . . . Because they come from a different perspective they would see the thing that I saw as very easy as being very difficult and very complex.

The final two questions were designed to encapsulate the participants' individual assessment of how the enactment of the intervention process concurred with each one's expectations. The responses to Question #21 about the process agreeing with expectations showed a division between client and consultant. Both the Deputy and the Chief felt that their expectations had been met throughout the process. The Deputy indicated that there was "a great symmetry between my personal expectations and what in fact happened." For the Chief, his expectations were met "pretty much all the way through."

Generally the consultants as a group did not find coincidence between their expectations and the intervention until the data collection

and analysis phase of the strategic planning methodology were completed. The Manager and the Staff explicitly referred to getting beyond the first stage. The Partner was less direct, but indicated that his expectations agreed with what was happening "when at the large committee meeting everyone was gathered and there were [sic] a combination of presentations, discussion, and some decision making. The process is well designed for that and our own relationship works very well there."

The consultants' notions about where the process did not meet expectations primarily concerned their having to cope with the reality of people, including themselves, acting in ways inconsistent with the behaviors projected by the strategic planning methodology. The Partner declared that the "relationship fell short" when the Chief blocked the consultant from direct contact with the Deputy Commissioner. The Manager and the Staff found that their expectations fell short when the consultants were required to do the data collection and writing which the pure methodology called for being done by other than the coordinating consultants. In the Manager's words, the "way the strategic plan should be done and work is that the project team and everyone works together and has a lot of input. Whereas I think there was a lot of burden on us to produce something that was really dramatic and meaningful."

Problem situation implied

The remaining questions in the interview phase of the study were intended to elicit evidence of implied difference or congruence in participant understanding about what the reality of the client/consultant

organization was. Analysis of the transcripts of the interviews indicate that responses to Question #10 regarding the lines of communication had to be discarded because the participants had difficulty in understanding the question. The researcher found herself leading the participants in the kind of response expected. The remainder of the responses divide themselves into ones which seem to indicate a shared understanding of the shared reality and ones which do not. The answers are analyzed below according to whether they appear to be similar or dissimilar. Most responses have been abbreviated to capture the essential answer to the question asked.

Similar understandings

The interviews revealed shared understandings among all participants in only five of the interview questions. Two of the five concerned identification of major players in the situation and had a limited number of possible responses. The other three questions concerned the motivation of the consulting firm. Although there are individual differences in expository style, the perceptions as seen by these responses are consistent about the identity of the firm and the rationale for participation in the intervention under study. The indications of shared understandings are organized by question as follows:

1. What kind of organization is the consulting firm?

Partner: [tape is very faint, unable to capture exact response, but he spoke of the concept of efficiency].

Manager: "Highly motivated, for the most part aggressive people. . . highly structured environment. . . entrepreneurs who want to be an expert in something."

Staff: "Very efficient. . .environment lends itself to being able to say things. . . . We are a business and there are those fees."

Deputy: "A structured organization with a very clear mission and the luxury of public endorsement. . . . having a clearly defined set of goals and being structured around those goals".

Chief: "Very efficient . . . very prideful . . . very well organized, respected in most quarters."

5. Why did the Department hire the particular firm it did?

Partner: Hopefully our proposal was the best of those that were submitted. I think that we had made a presentation to the department early on that showed our experience in the public sector using strategic planning which has really been a private sector type of technique.

Manager: We were hired because we had a process, but I think more realistically it was because we were known to some of the decision makers.

Staff: I'll guess that it was probably our expertise and our presentation. . . . Probably the presentation itself, the

way it was conducted, I'm sure it was [the firm's] standard quality which would be good.

Deputy: I would say it was a combination of the initial contact being there, our feeling some security in their having dealt with the public sector, our liking the product they showed us, and their clearly wanting entre to public sector work in the state.

Chief: Because they had the most experience in the area of strategic planning.

7. Who were the main players in the relationship?

All responses were the same with the exception of the fact that Partner, Manager, and Chief included the name of the original consulting partner who had had the early discussions with the Chief.

16. Who was the major influencer in the process?

All responses indicated that the major influencer was either the Chief or the chairman of the committee.

18. What were the benefits of the relationship to the consultant?

Partner: "In the long run we hope that that kind of exposure will result in more engagements for us."

Manager: "We knew we were getting a lot of visibility. That was a very important factor in why we did whatever we

thought we should do to make the thing work right because we see education as a very good market. . . . The other benefit was we really got to know, this is a major benefit really, we got a strategic planning project in the public sector done.

Staff: "We got a lot of exposure."

Deputy: "What they were buying was a large public sector project in this state that would give them entre to other agencies. . . . I think there was the honest challenge for the firm of doing something like this.

Chief: "This was their contribution to state government, not without some business motive. They would be the first to admit that. Sure they saw it as kind of a pro-bono service they wanted to render, but also, if they do this and do it well, it does open doors in, maybe, some other states or other sections of the country.

The answers shown in the quotations cited above suggest that the consulting firm projected a consistent image of itself both within and without its organization. Participants shared similar understandings of the entrepreneurial values which the consultants brought to the client/consultant relationship.

Misunderstandings

While there were similarities, the majority of the the responses, when taken together, demonstrate a lack of mutual understanding of issues

representing the crux of the interface. These matters include the purpose of the intervention, the various roles of the lead players and the committee, and the world in which the client organization operated.

The lack of consensus regarding the purpose of the intervention became evident in the responses to Question #3—the purpose of the study, #4—the reasons for hiring an outside consulting firm, #6—the description of what the consultant was hired to do, and Question #13—the purpose of the strategic planning methodology. Illustrations of the difficulties are evident in the following excerpts from the responses:

3. What were the purposes of the study?

Partner: To develop a plan that would enable the department to look at adult education perhaps in a new way but to look at it over the next ten to fifteen years.

Manager: To come up with an action plan for adult education based on what was going to be happening in the next several years.

Staff: To complete a strategic plan for the department of education and to gain experience, particularly within the [city] office, in strategic planning.

Deputy: To give us the information to set a context for something, quite frankly, that we wanted to do in any event. . . . We were testing our assumptions that this was an area in the educational arena that really needed attention.

Chief: To deliver a document to the state board of education to advise them regarding policy direction and direction for the adult education program that, and, this is probably the key piece, that would be believed.

4. Why did the department hire a private consultant?

Partner: My belief is that the outside party brought the process and it also gave credibility, and I believe those were the two things that were prime motivators.

Manager: To determine those things we needed to know and get some reaction to them.

Staff: For the expertise, to get someone else to come who had expertise in strategic planning, and to guide them along and help them in that process. Probably also because they didn't have the time to commit to it.

Deputy: Because in a very sad way as public servants we are used to a certain lack of credibility in terms of what it is we do. And again where the group came out was not a surprise to us. . . . We felt that the legitimacy of having a private concern involved would lend far greater credence, in particular to the background, but also to the recommendations that ultimately came forth.

Chief: So that it might be believed.

6. What was the consultant hired to do?

Partner: To coordinate and assist, and those are the verbs I'd like to use, in developing the plan. It was to be not necessarily the department's plan, and I must admit, that was not entirely clear at the beginning....In my view it was not our job to develop the plan to enable (we were an enabling force) the committee and the department to develop a plan.

Manager: We were hired to provide the framework by which the committee could operate. Also we were hired to provide some analysis, I guess from an objective point of view. What should have happened more was to coordinate analyses done by, not only the consultant, but by the department of education.

Staff: To guide the department through the strategic planning process, the methodology, how to do it, set the framework for it, and just kind of keep things going in the right direction.

Deputy: That's an interesting question. I knew why we were hiring them. I have less of a notion of what they would do. It was the imprimatur that I was looking for. . . . I thought they would do it much more efficiently than we

ever could. I also expected them to give us resources we don't have.

Chief: To develop a strategic plan based on the model that had been used in San Francisco [A year earlier the consulting firm had completed its first major public-sector strategic planning contract. It had developed a plan for the City of San Francisco. The process used then had become the model for its other public-sector planning jobs.].

13. What was the purpose of the strategic planning methodology?

Partner: To provide an organized, methodical, understood process for examining issues and being able to look at them from priority setting sense so that the committee and the department of education knew what was going to happen.

Manager: To go through a process that would pull out or weed out and subsequently reduce major issues so that we got to those that really had the most significant impact.

Staff: To guide things, to keep things on track so that people weren't all over the place with the way they were getting to the end.

Deputy: Again I perceived that in large measure as a legitimacy issue. It lent structure. It provides a more structured context for approaching the final recommendations. I don't think it makes the final

recommendations more legitimate; a lot of us would have come up with exactly the same suggestions, either intuitively or through experience.

Chief: Not only to give structure, but to touch the right bases and to bring in the right information, so that we wouldn't be accused later on of not doing a thorough in-depth analysis of the world.

14. What were the benefits of the procedure for the study?

Partner: It is difficult for people to look at their own internal strengths and weaknesses so that that methodology has as one of its pieces to look at strengths and weaknesses internally.

Manager: I think one of the things we thought strategic planning could do was help set some priorities.

Staff: You have a methodology, like sample documents, or sample checkpoints so that you know how you are doing. You get to a point and know what to do from there.

Deputy: You wind up with a more compelling product in that it is a package that people see as rational and not advocacy oriented; it seems more distant; it seems more thought through.

Chief: I think that getting at information, particularly internal information.

The comments which the participants made indicate that for the most part the consultants shared the same perception of the purpose of the intervention. It was, however, a perception that was at odds with that of the team members from the client's side. The answers from both the Deputy and the Chief indicate that the decision makers within the department saw themselves purchasing, not a process for going through a planning exercise, but a symbol of credibility and an extra work force to construct the symbol.

Judging from their responses, the consultants viewed their assignment as one in which they were the coordinating mechanism for activities which would reveal unknown elements in the future of adult education. They aimed for facts and data. In contrast the Department members felt they already knew what elements were there. Thus they did not want or expect new information; they wanted a means by which others would also find those elements compelling.

The incompatibility on views of the project is further demonstrated by the replies given when participants were asked to speculate on how those involved from the other group had answered questions #3-the purposes of the study, #4-why the department had hired an outside consultant, #5-why it had hired the firm it did, and #6-what the consultant was hired to do. In terms of question #5, as noted previously, all five participants had originally given similar answers about why the particular firm was hired and they all felt that the other side would give essentially the same response.

On the other questions, however, responses differed. The Deputy and the Chief believed that the consultants would respond as they had to those questions. Both justified their opinion by referring to previous communications with the consultants. The Chief believed that the consultants would respond "the same" or "substantially the same" to all three questions. He supported his view by observing that the consultants would answer question #6 as he had "probably because we had a contract." For her part the Deputy felt that the consultants and the clients were in accord on the purpose of the study "partly because we [the Commissioner, the Deputy, and the consulting team] discussed it. . . . I felt that what we were buying was legitimacy. but both of us were very up front about that with the consultants so I wouldn't imagine there is much distance there." Both client decision makers perceived that the consultants's main role as a legitimizer had been clearly understood and accepted by both sides. Yet only the Partner in his original response to Question #3 suggested that he understood the client's need.

On the other hand, when the consultants thought about how the client would answer the questions, they did not show any awareness of the importance of the credibility issue to the client participants. The Partner did identify a "secondary objective" for the Chief in his response to Question #3: "to raise adult education in the level of awareness with in the hierarchy within the Department of Education," but he classified it as "one individual's subagenda. . . not the overriding objective." Instead, all the consultants were very sensitive to the client's expectation for more work from them. Each of the three

suggested that the clients felt that the consultant had been hired to "do the report" rather than to coordinate activities. This perception they still felt was not consistent with what they perceived the organizational arrangement to be. In answer to how the clients would respond to Question #3 regarding the purpose of the study, Staff's answer was direct: "To have an outside consultant come in and complete a strategic plan, lead the committee through it, write it, develop it, and deliver it." Her response to Question #6 was similar. The Manager perceived that the clients would answer #6 by wanting more material and effort from the consultants. He felt the Deputy would have wanted the consultants "to do more of a lot of what we did do," while he believed the Chief would have demanded more information from the consultants: "You produce those things that are going to make it; you know, things we haven't thought of." The Partner underscored the Manager's belief when he commented on what the department believed the firm was hired to do: "I think the department has a history of hiring consultants to do things for them. In our case we were a little different. We were saying, 'We will work with you.'"

Roles

Individual roles. The interviews indicated throughout that the events of the intervention were punctuated by confused notions regarding the roles of the main players. Although the responses to Question #7 indicated near unanimity regarding identification of the main participants in the client/consultant relationship the following

questions, Question #8 --"What were their roles?" and Question #9--"What was your role?" yielded some major differences in the perceived roles of the Deputy and the Chief. For example, the Deputy saw herself in this temporary organization as a "sounding board" against which materials and data could be tested before moving on to the Commissioner and the Board. To the Partner and the Manager from the consulting team, she had a more assertive image. They saw her as a "champion" [Partner] or a "gatekeeper" [Manager] who was able to control the flow of information. The Chief, who was her subordinate in the department, mentioned no role at all for her in his response to Question #7.

Curiously the Deputy did not refer to a role for the Chief either. However, he did see himself as both an "internal convincer" and a "gatekeeper to make sure that what was happening was what [he] had as a vision." He seemed to have an image of himself which was actually the one which the consultants thought his boss had. The consultant leaders indicated that, while they saw the Chief's role as that of "communication link" with senior management, he did not fulfill it to their expectations. In discussing where the intervention did not agree with participants' expectations (Question #22), the Partner noted that the Chief was "very protective of any contact above him. While we respected that client relationship at all times, there were times I think it could have been more productive if there had been an opportunity to have talked about what needs [sic] to be done with [the Deputy]." The role confusion between these two department leaders is noteworthy especially since the Chief was identified as one of the two major influencers in the

intervention by the Manager, the Staff, and the Chief himself, and was the initiator of the contact between the Department and the consultants.

Participant difficulties. The consultants perceived that the Chief's role had impact on the the roles they played. Repeatedly all three noted that they had not operated according to their own preconceptions. As mentioned earlier, in discussion on Question #11, the Partner assumed a more visible role than he or the firm had projected. The role shifts among consultants apparently contributed to what they saw as the main difficulties for the consultants (Question #20) and were caused by what they viewed as the main difficulties for the client (Question #19).

Each attributed the client's difficulties to having never worked with private sector consultants before. Their main comments are as follows:

Partner: For the department to deal with non-educational consultants who didn't know very much about adult education [was hard.] So the difficulty was to inform and to bring [the consultants] up to a level of awareness so that they could be effective.

Manager: I think we had trouble getting across what this was going to do and how we thought it was going to shape up. I guess it was just difficult for the client to see where we were going.

Staff: Having never worked with an outside consultant. I don't think they knew what to expect from us: what type

of product we would be delivering; would we be delivering the actual report or are we delivering the methodology to help you develop the report. I think there was a real communications problem there or an understanding of what each was going to do at one point. Maybe that was the fault of our proposal.

The consultants' answers to Question #20 regarding their own difficulties linked the ambiguity they saw from the Department with their need to change pre-planned roles. The Partner identified the difficulties as (1) "to continually try to develop the best tailoring of the process for the committee and the department," and (2) "I don't want to make too much of it but initially the department perceived that the only wisdom in [the consulting firm] came from the partner." He was supported by the following comments from the Manager and the Staff on the same question:

Manager: It was difficult for us to go through the process without getting more reaction, positive or negative. It shouldn't have been about us, [the consultants], but about what was coming out of the project. It was just difficult to act spontaneously with a client. You know we have the steps you go through .

Staff: We found out as we got into it, we weren't sure what to expect and we weren't sure how we were being perceived. We felt at one point, 'Things aren't going too well, Maybe we have to change things a little bit.' That became kind

of a problem. The methodology wasn't working; that kind of thing.

The state department responses to the difficulties encountered by each group in the organization were different from those of the consultants. From a personal rather than an organizational or operational point of view, both the Deputy and the Chief addressed the issue of difficulties for the client, Question #19, as can be seen from their statements below:

Deputy: I think that it is difficult to know that you are capable of producing the substance but that it is not accepted because of who the producer is. I think that was tough to deal with. I think that was tough for me. . . . It bothered me personally that I was able to sit down with a pile of data with this group of people renown for their ability to compile data and analyze that data and say, 'The big things are missing; there are big gaps here.' It bothered me that the assumption was that we did not have that kind of expertise and it was because of that assumption that we had purchased the service.

Chief: Personally for me I think that getting off of arguing the merits of state control, that I really had to give up a lot to go with that committee.

While the Deputy's comments reveal that she found it hard to cope with her realization that the renowned outside consultant could not produce data as well as inside staff, neither she nor the Chief made any mention

of discomfort in the way they themselves or the consultants played out their roles in the organization.

Nonetheless, the interviews show that the Deputy and the Chief understood the consultants' uneasiness. The Deputy, in her answer to Question #20, indicated that she thought that the difficulties for the consultant came from not understanding the expectations of the client: "I think they probably know very well what they offer. It is sort of like doctors dealing with patients who expect them to fix it and expect them to be superhuman."

Perceptions about the study committee. Misunderstandings about roles also became apparent in responses related to the study committee. Among themselves the consultants showed differing views on the committee's role in the intervention. Their answers to Question #12 justify this observation. The excerpts below show that the Partner's expectations of the committee were very different from those of the Manager and the Staff:

Partner: My perception was that it was more of a department of education report with the committee acting as sort of a steering committee periodically to provide some direction. As it turned out, and it worked very well, the committee became more of an active doing role, not just a direction setting and guidance role but they became doers.

Manager: My perception of the role of the committee was that they would do a lot more work than they did. We ended up managing the committee, I think, and, this is being

honest, I know they attended a lot of meetings. I'm not sure that they did the kind of work that I envisioned them doing.

Staff: The committee was to make the decisions: Which way is strategic planning or the department of education going to go with adult education? I felt that they were going to go through with it and write the report. . . . I find it hard to figure out what the Department of Education felt their role was supposed to be.

The Department personnel, on the other hand, did not evidence much discrepancy in their responses to Question #12, but they saw the committee in ways different from the consultants' views. Both the Deputy and the Chief, in separate words, reiterated the notion of needing credibility from an outside body. Portions of their responses are as follows:

Deputy: The role of the committee was to raise a lot of the substance, a lot of the concerns. . . . The committee's role was also to give legitimacy to the discussion and honestly to get information.

Chief: Interestingly as you look at some prior activities of the Bureau and reports that have been written and the final report written by the committee and submitted to the board, they are almost identical. Not because we controlled any of them, but because reality is reality, and a need is a need. . . . If you read one document and

look at the other, they are almost similar, but not because the committee was manipulated, but because the truth is the the truth. The role of the committee was a very crucial role.

In view of these comments, one might suggest that, from the department's perspective, the roles of the committee and the consultants were alike. They were both needed to validate issues which the department could not make credible by its own efforts.

Summary of interviews

The purpose of the interviews as an activity in Part 2 of the study was to express the problem situation clearly so that a range of viewpoints might appear concerning the client/consultant relationship. The analysis demonstrates varied perceptions about how and why the participant interaction operated. Generally speaking there was consistency among the participants' responses to specifics of why the consultants were hired, what the benefits and problems were to the consultants, and what the roles were of the main influencers in the planning activity.

The interviews showed, however, a lack of mutual understanding in areas regarding the client, the purposes of the intervention, and the roles which the principal participants played in the intervention. The responses, especially those given to Questions #7, #8, #9, #12, #19, and #20, reveal numerous differences in perceptions of individual roles and client and consultant roles during the intervention. These confusions

reflect the inconsistencies apparent in the written documents on which the whole planning system was based.

Specifically the interviews indicated differing perceptions on the following matters:

- the purpose of the study
- the consultants' task
- the benefits and difficulties of the client/consultant interface for the client
- the role of the special committee
- the reasons for the client's seeking an outside consultant
- the role of each major participant in relation to the others.

The interviews gave repeated indication that the consultants themselves were uncertain during the intervention. They were uncomfortable in situations in which they were unsure of the next action or in which they found themselves playing unanticipated roles. Their responses indicated that each one saw the collective purpose of the intervention as the completion of the strategic plan and that they had keyed themselves to the functional achievement of that task.

In contrast, the responses of the Chief and the Deputy gave evidence that they approached the intervention differently. Repeated references to concern for credibility, believability, and legitimacy suggest that their concerns were more meaning than action driven. The Deputy's comments, especially, indicate that she saw the whole interface in

symbolically. In several instances she noted that the activities of the consultants and the study committee were relevant, not for the objective reality which they conveyed, but for the "imprimatur" of importance and substance they gave to adult education. With particular reference to the consultants and their relationship to the department, she alludes to their activities in Questions #19 and #20 as "magic," and "the magic has more to do with perception than reality."

The Chief also saw the consultants more in terms of their value-giving role than their fact-gathering role. Despite his statements that the consultants were hired for the task specific purpose of developing the plan, other statements seem to indicate that, for him, the real purpose of the planning intervention was to legitimize the adult education endeavor to which he was professionally tied. Responses such as that to the inquiry about his role in which he saw himself as "gatekeeper to make sure that what was happening was what [he] had as a vision," and that in which he regretted the loss on the state control issue (Question #19) demonstrated his desire to have truth as he perceived it be the outcome of the intervention. Where the Deputy took the broader perspective of building the credibility of an entire public-sector organization with a private-sector symbol, the Chief's comments suggest that he narrowed the focus until the intervention became a way of giving external worth to his own adult education activities.

CHAPTER V

SYSTEMS THINKING

Root Definitions: Part 3

Overview:

As described in Chapter III, the methodology used in this study was adapted from Checkland's soft systems methodology. Parts 1 and 2 in Chapter II revealed the problem situation as it was perceived through documents and participant observations. Chapter V approaches the client/consultant intervention from what Checkland refers to as "systems thinking." This chapter will describe the participant activities undertaken to tease out the conceptual implications of their observations. Part 3 concerns the building of root definitions of the social system generated by the clients and the consultants working together. Part 4 describes and analyzes the discussion among the participants of the meanings behind the definitions, and Part 5 relates the participants' efforts to develop a root definition of the relationship which will encompass all the actors' world views.

From the interviews

The interviews were designed to elicit multiple viewpoints on the client/consultant relationship. As such they contributed to richer expression of the situation as it existed. The study moved from this expression, oriented to real world thinking, into systems thinking with

the creation of sixteen root definitions from the interview responses. The definitions were developed by the researcher, but they represent descriptions of the social system that was the client/consultant relationship as it appeared in the comments of the participants. They were slightly modified in order to retain the six characteristics of root definitions described previously in Chapter II. However, they retain the viewpoints unconsciously revealed by the participants as they answered the interview questions. More than sixteen definitions could have been developed, but these capture the main body of competing views on the relationship that were expressed without being redundant.

Because they were designed for use in the "debate" phase of the inquiry and it was necessary to eliminate any indication of who originated which definition, the sixteen root definitions were randomly coded. They are listed with their assigned code letters in Appendix D on page 183.

Participants' definitions

The second aspect of root definition involved the participants' conscious building of their own root definitions of the client/consultant relationship. The definition building exercise occurred in the same session as the interview. With the exception of the Chief, all participants entered the process willingly and with some curiosity about working with an unfamiliar notion of the term "system." The Chief showed impatience with the training process and was reluctant to generate his own definitions. He attributed his discomfort to a dislike for analyzing

past activities. According to his explanation, once a project was completed, he wanted to "move on."

The brief training process was useful. As indicated in detail in Chapter III, the training activities included exercises in building five root definitions of a neighborhood bar as a social system. The process involved using a definition-wheel to make clear the meanings of the root definition terms of customer (C), actor (A), transformation (T), and owner (O). It gave the participants a familiarity with the terminology of the exercise, and also prepared them to deal with the definition as one view of reality rather than as a statement of objective truth.

The Manager was the only one unable to create five definitions. After the fourth attempt he stopped, although he noted that, if he used the wheel, he could create a number of other definitions. The researcher was reluctant to have him use the wheel since it would seem that the definitions were generated from a mechanical system, rather than from a base of experience. As indicated in the section on the design of the study, the participants generated skeletal definitions keyed to the Owner, Transformation, Actor, and Customer aspects of the root definition model. Their definitions appear in Appendix C beginning on page 177 of this work.

Analysis of the definitions indicates that for the most part the participants tended to view the client/consultant organization from a perspective encompassed by their parent organization. The Deputy and the Staff developed all five of their definitions by designating their agency

as system owner. The Partner built four of his five definitions from the consulting firm's point of view.

The range of diversity among the definitions comes primarily from the choice of transformations. The Deputy's definitions, in general, suggest that she focused on the client/consultant relationship as a value laden system rather than as one which would produce tangible outcomes. Although her first definition describes a system which is outcome driven, the remaining four all include a qualifying word or phrase which gives the definition a normative rather than functional cast. Words such as "professional-looking," "convincing and authoritative manner," and "credible" indicate a point of view which sees meanings rather than facts as the important element in this social system.

The Chief's definitions are not as consistent as the Deputy's. However, in those definitions in which he designates the department as the owner of the system, he also suggests that meaning is an important element for him in regard to the relationship. The most explicit normative statement comes in the identification of the system as a way to get said things which he wants to have said (Definition 4). He also indicates an ability to perceive others' reality by the choice of transformations which he selects to describe the relationship from the consultants' point of view.

In his two definitions in which the consulting firm is named as owner, his choice of transformations coincides with ones the consultants use in their definitions. In areas where consultants each identified the consulting firm as the owner of the social system which they defined,

they, like the Chief, most frequently chose transformations which were outcome-based (earn money, make a profit, educate members), rather than relationship driven. Two possible exceptions to this statement include the Partner's system to "continue commitment to the public good" and the Manager's inclination to name himself owner of one system definition to balance his personal and professional values.

As in the case of the departmental participants, the Manager and the Partner demonstrated an ability to understand others' perceptions of a problem situation. Their suggestions of "gain credibility" and "try to shape the future" as part of root definitions with the department as system owner have counterparts in root definitions offered by the Deputy and the Chief.

After all participants had developed their skeletal root definitions, the researcher expanded each four-segment item into a complete sentence for use in the "debate" portion of the study. The full sentences are presented in Appendix E.

The Debate: Part 4

As indicated in Chapter III, the intent of the debate in the inquiry was fourfold:

1. to see whether world views became apparent during discussion;
2. to see whether collective exploration of the root definitions yielded understanding about one's own and others implicit world views;

3. to see whether increased understanding enabled participants to construct a collective root definition of the client/consultant relationship;
4. to see whether this process had practical uses in other organizational problem situations.

To accomplish each intention; four major activities were undertaken during this phase of the study. To summarize, the first included reflection on the root definitions emerging from the participants' interviews about the problem situation. The second involved discussion about the definitions and the world views implicit behind them. The process of shared construction of a root definition of the client/consultant human activity system was the third phase. Finally, the participants responded to some questions about how their perceptions changed as a result of this inquiry.

Definitions from the Interviews

The first section of the debate required each participant to review the list of the sixteen root definitions created by the researcher, and then respond, in writing, to the following five questions:

1. Of the definitions just read, choose the one that best describes what you thought the client/consultant temporary organization was designed to be. Put the code letter of the definitions on this line. _____

2. Which definition do you think _____ chose? The name inserted here was that of one of the participants from the other organization.
3. Which definition do you think he/she thinks you chose?
4. Which definition do you think _____ chose? The name inserted here was that of one of the participants from the respondent's own organization.
5. Which definition do you think he/she thinks you chose?

The questions required thinking about the perceptions of colleagues from the same parent organization as well as about those from the other organization in the temporary system.

Analysis of the questions seems to indicate that the participants had dissimilar notions of what the client/consultant human activity system was. From the list of sixteen definitions, they selected four different definitions to describe their individual perceptions of what the organization was designed to be. (Two participants chose the same definition). The four selected were as follows:

- AI An organizing system developed by the consulting firm by which the outside consultants, with the aid of the department's staff, would assist the study committee in using the methodology to develop the plan.
- QA An operating framework designed by the consulting firm by which the committee could do its work and develop the plan for the state board.

- LB A framework designed by the consulting firm to enable the consultants to assist and coordinate the efforts of the study committee and the department in developing the plan.
- HS A temporary departmental system which, through the use of consulting personnel, brought credibility to an endeavor that would have been impossible for it to acquire on its own.

The table following summarizes the participants' responses to questions on the definitions from the interviews. The column numbers coincide with the numbers of the questions above. The names in parentheses in columns 2 and 4 refer to the name inserted on the questionnaire. Note that the name in parentheses in Column 2 applies also to Column 3 and the name in Column 4 also pertains in Column 5. Note as well that the Manager was asked to answer Questions 4 and 5 twice since there were an uneven number of actors.

Responder	1	2	3	4	5
Partner	LB	(Chief) QA	LB	(Manager) LB	OM
Manager	AI	(Deputy) AC	XS	(Partner) AI	AI
				(Staff) UT	AI
Staff	AI	(Chief) AC	LB	(Manager) AI	AI
Deputy	HS	(Manager) OM	AI	(Chief) LB	LB
Chief	QA	(Partner) UT	QA	(Deputy) UT	QA

An initial glance shows little consistency among the definitions selected. Only two consultant participants, Manager and Staff, chose the same one. Also only the Partner and the Staff correctly determined which definition another participant had chosen.

Closer analysis reveals that, while the consultants did not all choose the same definition, the ones they chose were similar in terms of the basic transformation and of the perception of the consultants as "assisters" to the study committee. For the most part each consultant also assumed that the consulting colleague had chosen the same definition and that the colleague would know which definition he or she had selected. However, with the exception of the Partner's correctly noting

which definition the Chief had chosen, however, the consultants were not accurate in relating to the system perceptions of the clients.

The client definitions were completely dissimilar. Furthermore, unlike the consultants, the Deputy and the Chief did not believe that the other had chosen the same definition. The Chief's definition, like those of the consultants, focused the system on the development of the plan and integrated the study committee into the problem situation. He assumed that the Deputy would see the client/consultant relationship in similar terms except with department staff doing the major part of the developing. Judging from the definition which she selected, the Deputy was the only one who saw the relationship as a process of managing meaning rather than creating a product. Her Column 4 responses, though, seem to indicate that she understood somewhat the functional norms of both her colleague, the Chief, and the outside consultants.

Discussion

The definitions plus the questions and responses about them served as the point of departure for the open-ended discussion. The conversation moved from consideration of the definitions chosen to exploration of the perceptions of the study committee's role and on to comparison and contrast of definitions AI, LB, and QA. Although everyone contributed, the Chief and the Partner were the most vocal during this forty-five minute portion of the "debate."

The researcher began discussion about the four separate definitions which had been selected and were displayed to the participants on a large

easel. She asked the participants to explore the differences among the definitions and to question what the implications behind the differences might be.

The study was initially designed so that participants could discuss the definitions without openly having to aver ownership of any particular one. The researcher had anticipated that the participants might be more candid about analyzing the implications and meanings behind each definition if they did not have to acknowledge which ones represented their individual views of the client/consultant reality. However, during the actual discussion, the participants showed no reticence about revealing their individual choices and justifying the selection.

The Partner opened the exchange by noting that his choice of LB was affected by the "initial perception or discussion that it was the committee's report and was not intended to be the department's report." In a later comment he expanded upon his rationale by voicing his notion of the relative organizational positions held by the consultants, the committee, and the department personnel. His comments were as follows:

It needed to be the committee's study, which meant that my interpretation was that the consultant needed to take a strong role in presenting the perception and the image to the committee that it was not the department. The department was there to assist, but it was the committee's working with the consultant. So it was to be a relationship between the committee and the consultant, with the department, not there on the sideline, but to be not as a full partner.

Following the Partner's initial statement, Chief also admitted that it was reference to the committee and the consultants which dictated his choice of definition. By his own admission he used "pretty much the same criteria" as the Partner, but he led himself to the different following conclusion:

I boiled it down to QA and UT. When I looked at UT, it was a system designed by the [consultant] by which the department staff would develop. I said, 'That's wrong.' It has to be the Committee, In my mind that's what we went into to this doing. So I went back to QA that said '[the consultant] by which the committee could do its work and develop the plan for the state board. And see, that was another element for me. To say that this was an outside. . . .It's your [to the Partner] ownership. We need it; the committee will do the work and the target is the state board of education. So I had to have all those elements to satisfy me.

The word "ownership" would seem to imply that, while Chief was looking for a definition which would allow him to include the committee and the consultants as important components, he saw their importance as due to the external validity they would present to the state board, not because they were the main actors in the intervention. This latter reality, however, seems to be at the base of the Partner's choice of LB.

The Deputy remarked that her choice was distinct from all others. In her discussion about the definitions, she rejected the issue of separation of department from the committee. Her view was that the system, in fact, represented "a different kind of support system for a

committee and the critical variable was being able to buy credibility with this type of support system as opposed to another."

In response to the Deputy's explanation, the Manager claimed that he did not perceive the validity issue as critical to the system. His words seem to indicate that he saw it as a by-product of the intervention, not as part of the normative underpinning of the client/consultant relationship. To him the issues on adult education were developed "objectively" and consequently acquired validity. In his words he "saw the committee doing the work with our [the consultant's] process assisted by the department staff. The validity came out later, I think, not as part of an initial reaction to what we were supposed to be doing in the project."

The Manager and the Staff chose the same definition, AI. Both had initial perceptions that their roles as consultants was to guide other people in the process of doing the planning work. The Staff declared that she viewed the whole planning organization as a system "owned by the state department of education. We came in with the methodology to kind of guide it." Where the Manager had a question of "who was doing the work," the Staff "didn't even think we [the consultants] were going to provide the data part of it." She had come into the relationship "with the theory that it was going to be a working committee." In this regard she seems to have had the same attitude as her boss, the Manager.

The purpose and position of the committee generated much discussion among all the participants. As has been mentioned perceptions of the committee's relationship to the client and the consultant played roles in

the choices of root definitions. The debate broadened from discussion of the choices to general exploration of views each had regarding the study committee itself. The staff member was jokingly chided by the Partner for not having a "jaded" view of committees. He acknowledged that he had initially expected that the role of the committee was going to be "in the worst sense, [a] rubber stamp." He had understood that the role of the committee was important but did not, at the outset of the intervention, understand what it was to do.

According to his continuing comments, when he realized that the committee would assume some active responsibility for the plan, "it was a refreshing change to have the committee do the work." While he had entered the relationship expecting little from the committee and was thus positively surprised, his subordinates on the consulting team had higher expectations of what the committee was supposed to do and were subsequently disappointed. They seemed to understand the term "working committee" to mean that the committee would be responsible for the data collection and analysis which they ultimately did themselves.

The Chief entered the discussion and followed upon the idea of the working committee by clarifying that for him having a working committee was one of the givens upon entering the client/consultant relationship. He explained that his understanding of the committee's work was to "buy in because if they did that they are (sic) going to become advocates for whatever they proposed and accepted." The work issue here is related less to the functional aspect of doing tasks as the consultants perceived it and more to the point of generating a commitment to a given set of

values and norms regarding adult education which would then be transmitted to the state board. The Chief here maintained that he stayed "completely detached from influencing that committee and let the committee move along and do what it would do."

The final major topic in the free flowing debate was concentrated on a comparison of definitions AI, LB, and QA. In general the participants agreed with the Partner's analysis that the obvious difference among them surfaced from distinct combinations of actor and transformation: in QA the committee was the principal actor, whereas in LB and AI the main actor was the consultant; in LB the consultant's role was a "doing" one and in AI it was an assisting one.

The differences in perceptions surfaced when the question of who the "owners" were of each of the three human activity systems defined. With the exception of the Staff member who did not contribute to this part of the discussion, each participant had a different point of view on the ownership issue. The Chief selected the State Board of Education on the grounds that it, through the department, hired the consultants and appointed the committee. The Manager disagreed and named the consulting firm the owner. He maintained that since the consultant had contributed the process and did much of the work that it should be the owner. He also believed that the risk of failure made the consultant the owner: "Certainly if the end result had not been as positive as it turned out, more of the burden of ownership would have been on [the consultants]." The Partner interpreted the notion of ownership to reflect who had, as the intervention began, responsibility for "getting it rolling, shaping

it, molding it." From this point of view he also chose the consultant as the owner of the systems described by the definitions. The Deputy noted that she saw the committee as the owner of all three systems defined. For that reason she had selected HS and named the department as the "owner" of the HS system. In debating the issues of ownership the participants openly drew upon the personal recollections of the relationship rather than referred to the systems as outlined in the three definitions.

Shared Root Definition: Part 5

Building the definition

In this final part of the inquiry, it was intended that the participants would use their growing awareness of their own implicit world views and those of their colleagues to generate a collective root definition of the client/consultant system they had enacted. In actual fact, they were reluctant to move away from the debate about the definitions and the perspectives informing them. However time constraints forced a shift into the collective definition process.

Rather than start from nothing to build a whole new definition, participant consensus was to adapt one of the definitions which had been selected earlier. In this part of the exercise, the Partner assumed the leadership position. He suggested that by "taking the pieces that were important to each of [them]," they could create one definition to accommodate all perspectives. After some tentative consideration of LB

as a possible definitional starting point, the Partner opted to use QA because of its emphasis on the committee as the primary actor and the consulting firm and department staff as assisting actors. The Manager supported this position by defining the consultants as the "prod, the catalyst, and the organizer" and the department's assistance as technical regarding adult education matters.

The Chief supported the idea of the committee and the consulting firm as lead actors, but he identified the state as the owner of the system. He saw the consulting firm taking the lead role but since that was the role the state hired them to take, then the state was the system's owner. The Deputy concurred with his position on ownership although she maintained that the association of verbs with the consulting firm in definition LB was critical to her. It represented the organizational arrangement she had envisaged; that is, the consultant in the lead actor role.

At this point the researcher asked the participants to recall the four-phase process of constructing root definitions which they had used previously and to state specifically who or what would be the owner (O) of the client/consultant system they were attempting to define. All participants quickly agreed that the O was the State Department of Education. In moving onto identification of the Transformation (T) of the definition, the Partner selected "develop a plan." He defended his suggestion with the comment, "Particularly with that owner, what the state department primarily wanted was a plan." He then recalled the Deputy's choice of definition at the beginning of the session (HS), and

suggested that "provide credibility" might also be included as a transformation.

For clarification, since others were not involved in the discussion, the researcher asked if they wanted 'credibility' to be part of a transformation or to be included as a qualifying word. Both the Deputy and the Chief immediately spoke for its being a transformation. The Deputy stated, "That was why we went with [the consulting firm]. I mean that was why we did this, as opposed to doing what we frequently do otherwise which is to hire somebody who basically works as staff."

Since the participants were satisfied with the two-part transformation (develop a plan and provide credibility), the researcher asked them to consider who the customer (C) of the transformation would be. The Partner quickly offered the committee as the customer with the following position statement: "It seems to me that the state department built the environment so that the committee could operate in the most efficient manner." The Manager observed that the word customer in this system framework could mean beneficiary. From that perspective he proposed that it was the state board of education which was the customer: "We always had to keep in the back of our mind as we were writing the thing, who was going to be reading it and deciding on it." The Chief and the Deputy agreed with him. The Deputy also mused briefly that for the credibility issue, the customer could also be the legislature or the public, but she herself then thought those groups were beyond the immediate system under consideration.

The skeletal root definition which appeared on the easel before the participants was outlined as follows:

Actor: consultants, committee, state department staff

Owner: State Department of Education

Transformation: develop a plan, provide credibility for the department

Customer: State Board of Education.

The participants agreed that the single definition captured the elements of what they each individually had perceived as the client/consultant human activity system. To correspond with the other root definitions, this one was randomly coded XZ.

Comparing the shared definition

The participants then individually selected, from among those extracted from the interviews and those which each person had created in the root definition exercise, the definition which most closely represented his or her personal viewpoint on the client/consultant relationship. All but the Chief chose the collective definition, XZ: The Chief wrote a new definition based upon one he had earlier created (YS). The new one read as follows: "A state department of education initiated organization composed of personnel from the consulting firm and the department that would enable the department to use the consulting firm methodology for its planning purposes in order present a plan to the state board of education as developed by the study committee." This definition appears to have all the elements of the collective definition

except the transformation "to provide credibility." It is unclear why he would so explicitly delete a major part of the definition which he had vocally expressed an interest in including in the collective root definition.

Reflective Practitioners

As a cue to move into the reflection phase of the debate the researcher displayed the following quotation from Thomas Carlyle: "Nothing is more terrible than activity without insight." She asked each participant to reflect on that sentence and name one thing they would do differently in the relationship as a result of participation in the research project. All but the Staff responded.

The Partner stated that, based on his new understanding of the varied viewpoints which had been present, he would suggest that a "memo of agreement" be signed by both parties which would clarify the role of the study committee. The Manager noted that he would spend more time initially training the client in the methodology so that the client would understand the limitations of the consultant's role. In his turn the Chief reflected that he should have spoken earlier in the relationship about the working role of the committee. Only the Deputy indicated that she would not change anything; for her the process had generated the credibility result she had wanted.

When then asked if she had found the process useful despite the fact that it did not prompt her to contemplate changes, she nodded vigorously.

She had found it "fascinating" to learn that, all the way through the organizational life of the small group, events or words which held precise meaning for her had had a totally different significance for the others. She was referring specifically to the credibility issue and to the consultants' data collection tasks, but also generalized it to other activities.

The Partner had the final word in the debate and thus in the Stage 3 activities. He recounted that this was the first time that the consultants had ever sat with a client after an intervention to review the events or analyze the relationship. Normally the consultants had debriefed informally among themselves. At that time they had reviewed events, but never questioned the meanings behind them. In contrast, the results of this process had been much more illuminating to them. They had learned, not only much more about this particular client from whom they hoped to have future contracts, but they had also realized a need to spend much more time with any client before beginning an assignment in order to explore, in the Partner's words, "the taken-for-granted items that cause problems along the way."

CHAPTER VI

REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

Overview

This final chapter reflects on the outcomes and awareness gathered from this exercise in understanding organizational behavior. In the inquiry, the researcher wanted (1) to examine whether the problems which arose between a consulting firm and its public organization client resulted from differing world views among the principal actors; and (2) to suggest ways in which the intervention might have been more effective. This chapter looks at the information related in Chapters IV and V and addresses it to the above concerns.

An essential finding of the study is that the participants did have different world views regarding the intervention and the organizational arrangement between client and consultant. The first of three sections in this chapter discusses the variations in perspective which emerged among the actors and the impact of their world views on the problem situation. The second section suggests some of the implications of the finding for the consultants. The third part reflects on future activities and research projects prompted by the events and outcomes of this particular investigation.

World Views

Context for discussion

As set forth at the onset of this work, world view is the screen or filter by which an observer interprets reality. The result of the amalgamation of individual values, norms, and experiences, the screen influences how new experiences are perceived and made meaningful. A single stream of experience presents as many realities as there are observers. The several activities in this study offer strong evidence that multiple realities were present among the participants of the planning intervention.

It has been observed elsewhere that the interview part of the process demonstrated broadly divergent interpretations of the interchange between client and consultant. Chapter IV described the differing perspectives concerning the purpose of the intervention, the benefits to the client, and the responsibilities of the actors involved. The results of the root definition exercises and the "debate" described in Chapter V support the indications of the interview section. It is significant that, of the sixteen definitions extracted from their interviews, the five actors should select for debate four different options for the definition which best defined the client/consultant relationship. Furthermore, the intensity of discussion during the debate revealed that each choice was rooted in an intricate set of expectations and experience that directed the actors' own behavior and shaped their interpretations of others.

In general, the research seems to indicate that the three consultants had a unified view of the problem situation. The client participants, on the other hand, differed, not only from the consultants, but from one another in how they viewed the reality of the intervention. The following sub-sections discuss the world views which emerge from these activities.

The Consultants

The three consultant participants, Partner, Manager, and Staff, gave evidence that their individual world views were compatible and consistent with the assumptions underlying the strategic planning methodology. Their perspective is based on the premise that an objective reality is obtainable and desirable, and characterized by the belief that organized behavior is purposive, task-oriented, and rational. One can see from their comments that the consultants were very concerned about getting the proper facts needed to plan and about doing so in a structured logical manner.

Each one repeatedly endorsed the planning technique in such a fashion as to make clear that he or she accepted as norms the principles informing it. Note how the following examples of strategic planning assumptions are given voice by the consultants in their comments: contingency between the environment and the organization--"an action plan for adult education plan based on what was going to be happening in the the next several years" (Manager); rationality--"an organized, methodical, understood process for examining issues and being able to

look at them from a priority sense" (Partner); goal-directedness--"to guide things . . . so that people weren't all over the place with the way they were getting to the end" (Staff).

Illustrations of how their collective point of view revealed itself are abundant throughout all parts of the inquiry. The Partner, for instance, suggested that the client might be having difficulties with the methodologies because the organization was not good at looking at itself "objectively." The Manager similarly remarked that the consultant could provide "an objective point of view" to the Department, while the Staff believed that the consultants could "keep things going in the right direction" towards finding the real adult education issues.

Added to the taken-for-granted assumptions of their contingency approach to organizational behavior, the consultants also collectively accepted and articulated the metaphor of the marketplace against which to measure their own and the client's behavior. The root definitions which the consultants generated to describe the client/consultant system appear to validate this observation. With the exception of the Partner's definition, which included the State Department of Education as owner, the remaining thirteen sets of phrases all defined the relationship in terms of entrepreneurial benefit to the consultant: "keep the firm's staff employed and earn a profit," "penetrate the education market," "educate members of the consulting staff," and the like. The defining images are direct and resultsoriented.

They are also consistent with the picture the consultants individually provided of their own organization. Both the Manager and

the Staff had alluded to the capitalistic orientation to the firm's activities and all three had characterized the consulting firm as efficient. Echoes of the desirability of "efficiency" recurred in the consultants' comments during the debate, where the Partner commended the Department's having "built the environment" for the Committee to operate "in a most efficient manner."

A third major contributor to the consultants' world view of the intervention was their presumption that the consultant was the purveyor of wisdom. This is a belief that arises probably more from the strong culture of their parent organization than from an unstated philosophical position about how the world is organized. Nonetheless, it adds to the combination of effects which result in the consultants' specific view of the intervention. Both implicitly and explicitly they revealed value judgments regarding the relative positive merit of the consultant/private sector topic or concern when contrasted with the client/public sector equivalent. Good illustrations of this perspective are found in the descriptions offered regarding the consulting firm and the client agency. The former one is positive and forceful; the latter almost damning with faint praise. Another indication appears in the consultants' repeated assertions that difficulties they encountered in the intervention had mostly to do with client failures rather than with their own misconceptions. For instance, the consultants observed that the clients did not know how to work with private-sector consultants; they made the Partner perform unexpected tasks, and they did not play out their own roles in conformity with the consultants' expectations.

A final subtle example of their shared notion of consultant superiority is the comparison of the definitions selected in the exercise summarized in Table 1 on page 124. Out of the sixteen definitions from which they could choose, each consultant actor selected one which had the firm as the owner of the client/consultant system, and each consultant presumed that his or her consulting colleagues would also make a similar selection. All of the definitions chosen put the consultant participants in the leadership role of assisting (in the sense of knowledge-imparting) or coordinating rather than doing. They saw themselves as managers rather than staffers of the planning effort.

Although the study strongly affirms the uniformity of the consultants' perceptions in accordance with the characteristics mentioned above, one interesting side point concerning the Partner is worth noting. Like his colleagues, the Partner approached the intervention from a functional marketplace perspective. His definitions and his language in the interview and the debate give ample illustration of that viewpoint. However, of the three he appeared the most sensitive to the perceptions of his client counterparts. Although he always viewed the credibility issue as secondary to the objective of a completed plan, he was the only consultant who seemed to understand its importance to the clients. He raised it in the interview, and he offered it as a transformation in his definitions. In fact, it was he who suggested its inclusion in the shared root definition. He also could accept with greater equanimity than either the Manager or the Staff the uncertainties of dealing with the Study Committee. One possible reason for his expanded awareness may

be that, as a Partner, he had had more experience in dealing with public-sector clients and their approach to problems.

The Clients

The clients saw the intervention somewhat differently than did the consultants. Also, where the consultants essentially shared a frame of reference, the Deputy and the Chief differed from each other significantly in their interpretation of the reality they were enacting with the consultant. Before analyzing what distinguished their viewpoints, however, it is useful to consider briefly how they coincided.

In the first place the study indicates that the Deputy and the Chief shared a set of norms and values evolving from their experience as public servants. Their interviews, and to a certain extent their root definitions, indicate that they accepted as a norm the kinds of "ambiguities" of process and planning which March and Olsen (1977) observed in public organizations, but which troubled the consultants enormously in the course of the planning assignment. Unlike their consulting colleagues, they were not bothered by procedural variations or shifts in roles. They accepted them easily and, in the Chief's case, even initiated them. Moreover, their comments indicate that they found the uncertainties of working with the Study Committee well within the realm of their expectations.

They likewise shared the crucial view that the work of private sector consultants would be seen by those in authority as being more

legitimate than similar efforts by State Department of Education staff. They both defined the client/consultant relationship in terms of this perception and words such as "credible" or "believable" recur in their comments throughout the inquiry. Related to this point was their assumption that the consultants would, in fact, do better work than would employees in their own organization. This point of view comes out not only in their explicit indications of surprise that the consultants should have failed to produce any better information than the Department staff had already generated, but in the implicit contrast between their direct descriptions of the consulting organization and the ambiguous ones they gave of the Department. The low expectations they have of the Department seem to be consistent with Rainey's findings (1983) regarding the negative perceptions public employees generally have of their organization's capabilities.

Another underlying value shaping the world views of both the Deputy and the Chief is their belief in symbols. Morgan, Frost, and Pondy have suggested that bureaucracies must deal with what is symbolically acceptable as evidence, since "bureaucratic modes of organization are not geared to deal with factual realities" (1983, p. 9). The clients seem to take this norm for granted. The Chief's root definition of the planning intervention as a way "to say things we want to say" or the Deputy's "to create a credible report" suggest that their frames of reference value the symbol for what it represents as much as for what it is in itself. In this way their views of the intervention vary considerably from those of the consultants for whom the goal was an objective reality.

The Deputy. The above elements helped distinguish the client perspective from the consultant perspective. In large measure those differences are probably attributable to the distinct experiences of working in public versus private or profit versus non-profit environments. Yet, in the case of the Deputy, the inquiry indicates that the differences between her perspective and that of the consultants go beyond the lessons of the workplace. Where the consultants saw the world in a functional way, the Deputy saw it through an interpretivist's eyes. Of the five participants, she was the only one who chose a definition for the debate that had nothing to do with the production of a plan. She saw the intervention as a means of shaping the perceptions and values of other decision makers regarding the importance of adult education and, to a certain extent, the professionalism of the Department.

As she reiterated throughout the inquiry, the intervention was from the beginning a symbol of credibility, an "imprimatur." The "critical variable" as she said during the debate was to "buy credibility." Yet credibility is a concept that only has reality when it is infused with values and norms. So the consulting firm became the embodiment of the private-sector, business-oriented values she wanted to transfer to the plan. The intervention was the enactment of a new reality in which client, as well as consultant, appeared to possess those values.

Clearly the Deputy perceived the intervention as an exercise in the management of meaning. She saw the client/consultant world through a filter that focused on meanings, rather than facts, as the conveyors of reality. Not only her perception of the events, but the language she

used indicated an awareness of "multi-valued choices." When she described her department, for example, she revealed an understanding of multiple realities operating in an organization that was in the process of redefining itself. Speaking of the "assumption" that the department did not have the sufficient expertise to do the plan, she used the metaphor of "magic" to denote her assessment of the importance of perception over objective notions of reality.

Furthermore, she carefully distinguished between concrete reality and the appearance of that reality. When referring to the benefits of the strategic planning methodology, for instance, she praised the document that came from the planning process, not because it conveyed absolute fact, but because "it is a package that people see [italics mine] as rational and not advocacy oriented; it seems more distant; it seems more thought through." For her the reality was the perception, and the perception the reality. As Table 1 notes, however, she was conscious that her interpretive view of the undertaking gave her a very different approach to the intervention than the Chief or the Manager had.

It is one of the ironies of the problem situation that, while the consultants saw the Deputy as the gatekeeper of the planning endeavor, they failed to comprehend how she interpreted it. In both the interview and the debate portions of the study, the Manager complained that he had felt the "burden on us to produce something dramatic and meaningful." What he and his colleagues misunderstood was the extent to which the Deputy believed that creating "something meaningful" was exactly what the consultants had been hired to do.

The Chief. Although the Chief's world view towards the intervention has surface similarities to the Deputy's, ontologically it has much more in common with that of the consultants. We can observe that his five root definitions all describe the client/consultant system in goal-oriented terms. Likewise the debate definition which he selected contains the means-ends transformation of "develop the plan," rather than the more reflective "brought credibility" of the Deputy's preference. It was mentioned above that both the Deputy and the Chief perceived the intervention as a symbolic legitimizing activity. However, where the Deputy saw the intervention as the medium through which new understandings could be enacted, the Chief seemed to view it as a symbol by which he could realize certain ends. He wanted "to touch the right bases and to bring in the right information."

He seemed to take what Morgan, Frost, and Pondy (1983) referred to as the functionalist approach to symbols. The intervention was the symbol which he could manipulate in order to highlight the adult education information he wanted given visibility. There is evidence in the study to indicate that despite his declaration that "the truth is the truth," his value system endorsed a personal concept of the word rather than an acceptance of an objective reality achieved by an external process. In this aspect, his world view shifted from that of the consultants whose norms accepted the attainability of an absolute impersonal truth.

The study suggests that his world view encompassed the consulting intervention as a symbol by which his set of adult education issues could

get recognized and validated both inside and outside the department. He was not especially interested in having new issues raised or other view points given credibility. There is evidence from the inquiry that he wanted to control the activity despite his avowal during the debate that he had remained "completely detached" from influencing the committee. The reader may recall, for example, his previously referred to definition of the system as a way to get an authoritative group "to say things we want to say." One can also point to his conscious maneuvering of the Partner, and to his self-stated role as gatekeeper in the process to make sure that it was his "vision" that prevailed.

Even accounting for his essentially functional world view, during the debate, the Chief also presented some contradictory signals about how he perceived the intervention. The just mentioned incongruity between his detachment comment and his own reported actions is one example. In another, the sequence of events leading up to the formalizing of the contract between the two parties indicated that he structured the process to assure the awarding of the job to the consulting firm. Yet in the debate he seriously stated that the RFP process was a truly competitive one. The others had difficulties dealing with the incompatibility of this statement with the perceived reality. That his comment was unbelievable is obvious from the the Deputy's retort: "Right, if we'd all been dead at that point, it could have easily gone to another."

A final illustration of his inconsistency is the most curious. Throughout the interviews, the definitions, and most of the debate, the Chief supported the importance of the legitimacy issue to the

client/consulting relationship. However, during the final activity in which each indicated privately which, of all the definitions, he or she preferred, he differed from his colleagues, rejected the shared definition, and chose one which made no mention of the importance of credibility to the client/consultant system. Why he took those contrary actions in the debate is not clear, nor is there sufficient evidence from the study to determine whether he was attempting to control the inquiry itself. The situation, nevertheless, raises questions about the influence of the four actors on the Chief and about how self-conscious he was while participating in this investigatory process.

Implications for the Consultants

Effects of differing world views

As we have seen, this study revealed some misunderstandings among the actors which had frustrating and costly consequences for the consultants. The results of the entire inquiry suggest that these confusions resulted largely from the convergence of differing and unquestioned world views on the same sequence of events. As a group, the consultants became frustrated by the apparent role conflicts, task reassignment, and communication barriers. Their responses to the problem situation were more intense than the clients'. Perhaps their reaction was due in part to the inadequacy of their shared assumption that they could plot out every step out in advance and thus minimize errors or problems. It could also be attributed to the consultants' general

insensitivity to even the possibility of the clients' having a view of the situation unlike that of the consultants. (Focused on the tasks they did not realize the importance of how those tasks were perceived by other observers.) They probably also viewed themselves as the "provider of world views" in the sense suggested by McLean et al. (1982).

Reasons aside, the study indicates that the clients were much more aware of multiple viewpoints than the consultants and were more at ease with the resulting ambiguity. Although the Partner showed some prior awareness of the clients' need for legitimacy as part of the intervention, neither he nor his colleagues seemed conscious of how that need might affect the organizational pattern they had envisioned for the intervention. The findings demonstrate that the consultants needed to expand their awareness of a situation to include the probability of other perceptions, including ones which did not reflect a contingency approach to the world, being brought to bear on the intervention.

Given the pressures of the marketplace economy and the competition for business, it would seem to have been pertinent for the consultants to have made efforts, prior to the planning activities, to draw out the client's perception of the problem and the ensuing client/consultant relationship. They needed to understand the ambiguous nature of the client organization. As March and Olsen pointed out, ambiguous organizations require an approach to change which accounts for "problematic planning, unclear technologies, and fluid participation" (1977, p. 25). In this case, if the consultants had understood the symbolic role the firm played in the client participants' continuum of

events, they might have reduced stress on themselves and minimized the extra costs incurred.

Although desirable, it was clearly difficult for the consultants in the study to undertake such action. The indications were that their firm's culture was strongly channeled in the functionalist mode of thought. A firm with a strong sense of mission structured around concepts of efficiency, aggressiveness, and profit would find it difficult to incorporate the kinds of reflective activities and relationships that encourage exploration of differing perspectives.

Possibilities for consultant learning

The comments at the conclusion of the debate portion of the study indicated that the consultants individually had attained an expanded awareness of the complexity of the intervention they were enacting with the client. They were able to include the transformation to "provide credibility" in the shared root definition and they were able to reflect on changed behavior as a result of participation in the inquiry. The Partner was even able to call to consciousness the "taken-for-granted" items in the intervention.

While there is evidence of some insight, there is no indication that the consultants truly understood that the problems in the intervention emerged from perceptual rather than procedural differences. When asked to name one thing each would do differently as a result of participation in the study, both the Partner and the Manager selected activities that reinforced instead of expanded the perspective from which they had been

working. Their suggested revised behaviors represent strong illustrations of "single-loop learning." Both a memo-of-agreement concerning the committee and further training in the methodology are activities which fit well in a context dominated by attention to the task rather than to the person. Choosing these modifications to their consulting strategy implies that, despite the emphasis throughout the inquiry on the concept of multiple meanings, the consultants had not modified their theory-in-use to accommodate that notion by the end of the study. Consequently, it would seem that the possibilities of organizational learning, in the sense that Argyris and Schön use the term, would be limited. There would be no "double-loop" learning because, although the strategies would change, the norms would remain the same.

The culture of the consulting firm, as observed from the consultants' language, behavior, and judgments, was powerful enough to counter the short-term learning activities experienced in this investigation. A change to norms which admitted the possibility of multiple realities as the basis for building consulting activities would be a major undertaking for a person whose professional life is immersed in a organization dealing with goals, facts, and belief in objectivity. Maintaining the change would be even more difficult given the resistance of organizations to learn from their members. Hedberg has noted that organizations exert tremendous pressure upon their members to perpetuate old knowledge and old behaviors, so that the new learnings of the members are often lost in the "sediments of past learning" (1981).

However, while circumstance would seem to indicate that the study had not been successful in changing the world views of any participants, especially the consultants, its outcomes could have some pragmatic benefit to the consultants or anyone in circumstances similar to theirs. Checkland noted that changes to a problem situation which are suggested by activities in the soft systems methodology should be both "feasible" and "desirable" (1981). For the consultants, although their world views may continue to be dominated by goal directed norms, it would be both feasible and desirable for them to commit themselves to understanding both their own and their clients' appreciative systems prior to entering into a consulting assignment. In their article, Gadalla and Cooper suggested that the management of appreciation should precede the management of goals or tasks (1978) so that the participants could understand the context in which they were performing. Translating their argument into the context of the client/consultant strategic planning situation, the results of the inquiry indicate that the consultants might have benefited from some initial exploration with the clients of the meanings underlying the words in their contract. As suggested previously, they could have drawn out the competing world views and made them explicit to both the client and themselves, so that the perspectives could have been incorporated into the shared enactment of the intervention.

Techniques such as the interview and root definition building activities used in this study would seem to have potential for teasing out the implicit meanings behind words and actions. They would

constitute appreciative management in the sense that Gadalla and Cooper meant it (1978). They would focus on eliciting the cognitive and evaluative elements within the participants so that they, the participants, might understand the context in which they behave as they carry out the consulting intervention. A format like the debate would allow for the discussion of competing realities before they are perceived as miscommunication, unmet expectations, or role conflicts, and result in costly attempts to resolve the difficulties in the middle of the intervention.

Implications for Future Investigation

The process and the outcomes of this inquiry suggest opportunities for further research along both conceptual and methodological lines. The inquiry lends support to the literature which differentiates between public and private organizations. It recalls particularly Vickers' observation that public agencies, as organizations engaged in the setting of norms and relations for themselves as well as for society, cannot make value choices using models of efficiency (1968). The root definitions and the debate underscore the value judgments implicit in the client's approach to the intervention. The entire study suggests that the literature of strategic planning in the public sector, which concentrates primarily on the functional notions of environmental issues and resources, misses a major element of organizational reality, since it does not investigate normative aspects of the organization. Under

conditions of ambiguity, choice should emanate, not from rational processes, but from "gently upsetting preconceptions" (March & Olsen, 1977, p. 80). This line of thought suggests that an ambiguous organization, such as that of the clients would seem to be, would need to reflect on the norms and assumptions from which its preconceptions emerge, and that any consulting group aiming to assist the client in planning should assume a similar posture of organizational inquiry.

Replication of the study with other public agencies would indicate whether the observations gathered here could be generalized beyond the single organization problem examined in this investigation. Further inquiries into the world views present in public organizations would advance understanding about how their realities differ from the private sector.

The outcomes of the inquiry suggest directions for future research about the organizational reality of consulting interventions. Since this inquiry revealed that the world views were made distinct partly due to the experiential differences between public and private work settings, it would also be useful to repeat it in a client/consultant context where both the client and the consultant operated in the private sector. In addition to learning more about the effect of world views generally on consulting assignments, studies such as this one should be able to offer added insight into the extent to which the unconscious world views of consultants impact on the success of a consulting assignment. In order to determine the extent to which unstated but conflicting world views were present, one might consider retrospective analysis of some of the

interventions which produced reports or recommendations which clients subsequently ignored.

The methodology itself also provides avenues for further research. It was noted in the section on implications for the consultants that aspects of the methodology had potential for helping the consultant set a context for the intervention with the client. Efforts could be undertaken to modify the study for this purpose. In designing such pragmatic activities, the investigator would need to be sensitive to time restrictions and to the prevalence of goal-directed perspectives.

Other methodological problems worthy of further scrutiny concern the discovery of ways in which methodological modifications might change the kinds of awareness evoked in the study. For instance, would inclusion in the debate part of a discussion about the information shown in Table 1 have enabled the consultants to understand better the perceptual discrepancies at hand? Would the building of conceptual models, as Checkland did in his methodology (1981), of the systems defined in the root definitions have elicited any additional understandings not gathered in the interviews, definition building, and debate portions of the methodology? Could the process be refined for organizations to use in self-analysis?

This one particular inquiry has generated some interesting insight into the intricacies of multiple realities converging in a situation. It has been possible to observe the effects of differing world views in a nearly microscopic context--five actors in a temporary organizational relationship--and draw conclusions and implications for further learning.

In her important work on organizational behavior, Kanter indicated that she set out to explore the "complex social reality" but in the context of a large corporation (1977, p. 289). While one might consider complexity a function of organizational size, the situation described here has demonstrated that complexity is an element of even the smallest social arrangement. It was characterized by a fascinating interplay among the five participants as they enacted organizational patterns colored by the magic of their perceptions. The activities and outcomes of this single examination of their intricacy allow one to reflect with greater understanding on how and why organizations of any size are controlled by the world views of those who observe them.

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APPENDIXES

Appendix A

Part 2 Interview Questions

1. What kind of organization is the consulting firm?
2. What kind of organization is the department of education?
3. What were the purposes of the study?
4. Why did the department hire a private consultant?
5. Why did the department hire the particular firm it did?
6. What was the consultant hired to do?
7. Who were the main players in the relationship?
8. What were their roles?
9. What was your role?
10. What were the lines of communication?
11. Speaking only in terms of role responsibilities, were there differences between what players were supposed to do and what they actually ended up doing?
12. What was the role of the study committee?
13. What was the purpose of the strategic planning methodology?
14. What were the benefits of the procedure for the study?
15. What were the difficulties of the procedure for the study?
16. Who was the major influencer in the process?
17. What were the benefits of the client/consultant interface to the client?
18. What were the benefits of the interface to the consultant?

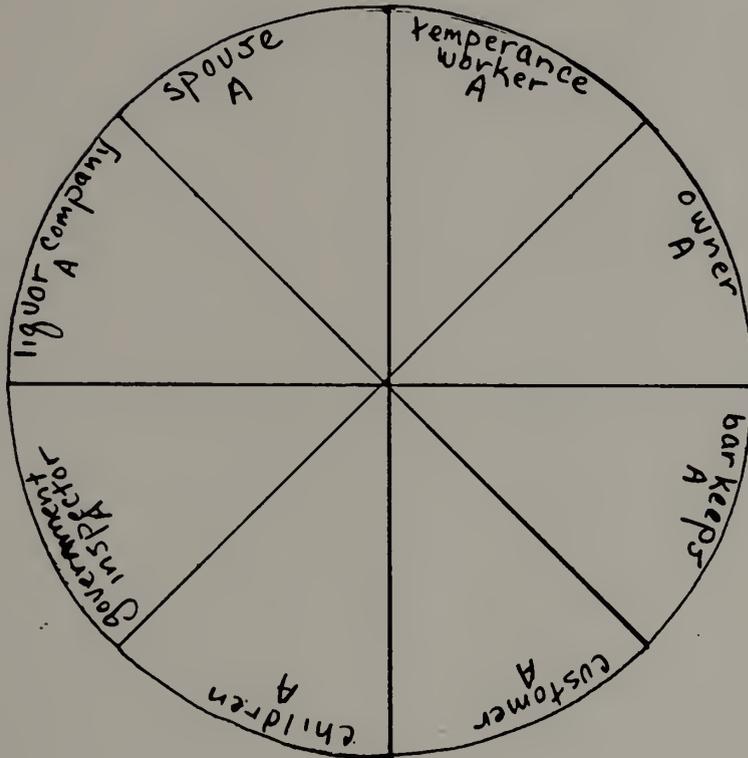
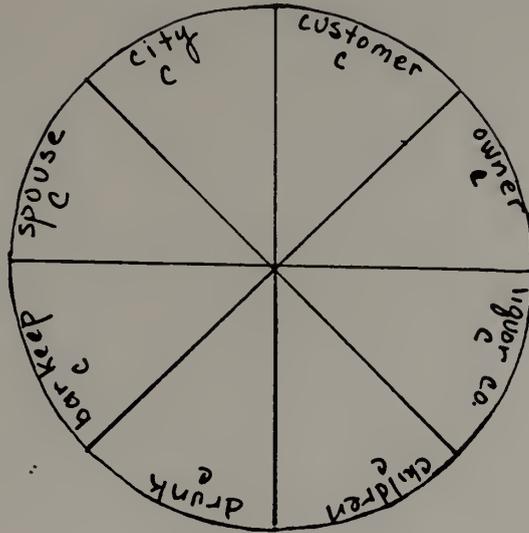
19. What were the difficulties for the client?
20. What were the difficulties for the consultant?
21. Where did the process agree with your expectations?
22. Where did it not agree with your expectations?
23. How would the participants from the other side answer the following questions: #3, #4, #5, #6?

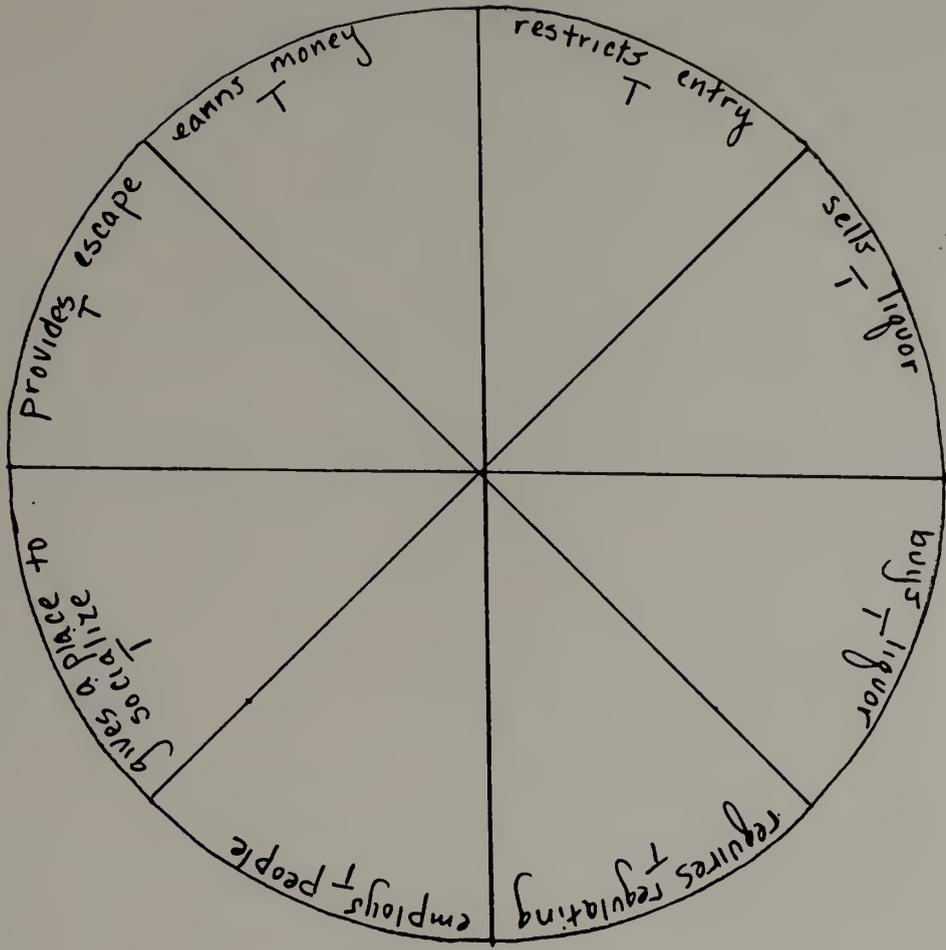
Appendix B
Model of Definition Wheel Used in Preparation
for Building Root Definitions

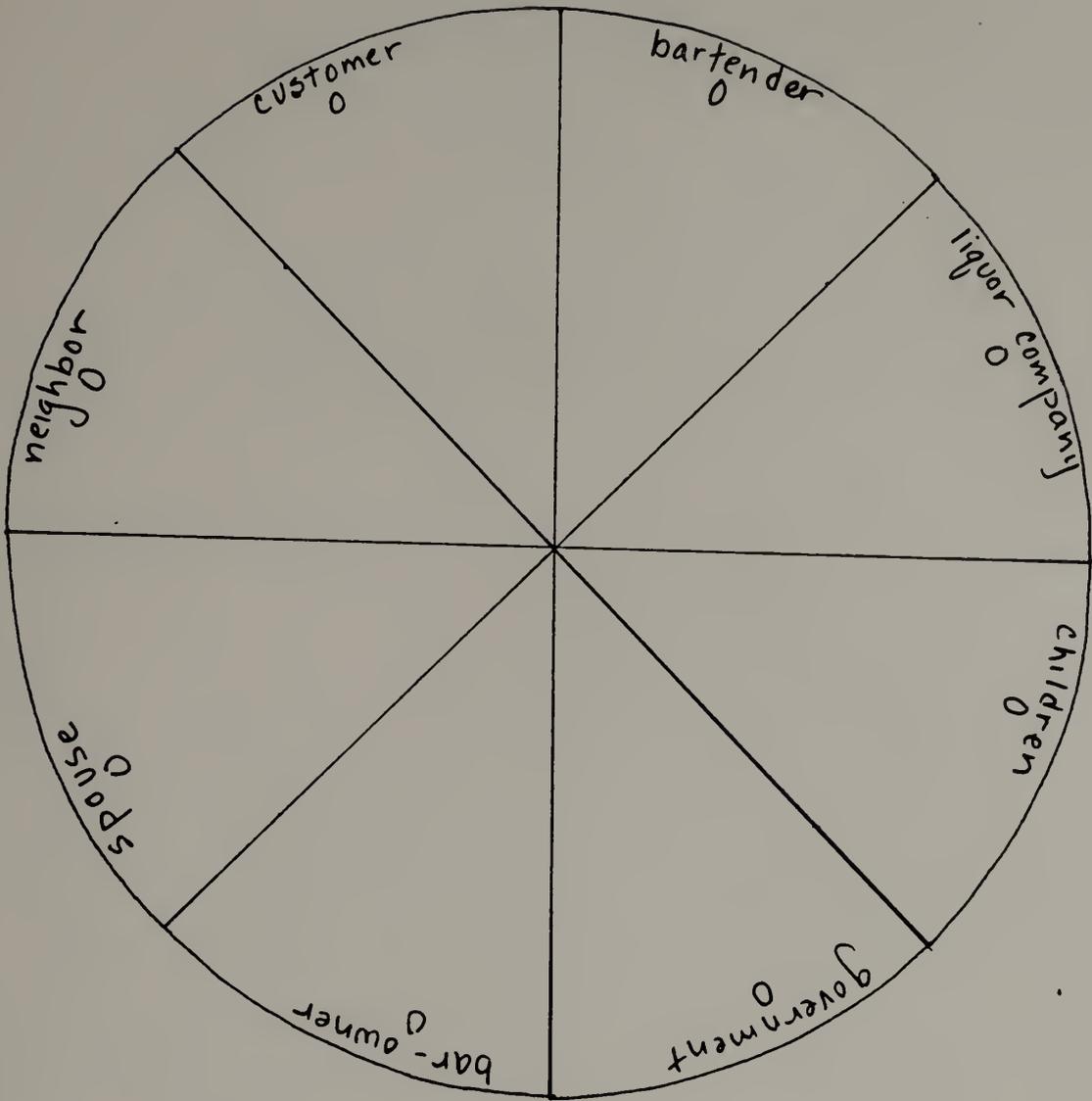
In order to prepare participants for building root definitions of the client/consultant organizational systems, the researcher took them through a brief exercise to familiarize them with the terminology and the concepts of the root definition process as described by Smyth and Checkland (1976). The researcher designed a wheel-like device comprising four concentric circles of increasing size which revolved around a single fixed center. Each circle represented one of the four parts of the root definition structure being used for this study: Customer (C), Actor (A), Transformation (T), and Owner (O).

The entire composite was supposed to represent a neighborhood bar. By moving the wheels in varying relationship to each other, the participants could see how different definitions of what the bar could be emerged. For instance, if the bar-owner were the Owner of the definition (O), he might see the bar as a system which earns money (T) for himself (C) by means of customer (C) purchases. However, the spouse (O) of someone who frequents the bar may define it as place or system that encourages excess drinking (T) on the part of the consumer (C) by being frequently served by the bartender (A). The participants were encouraged to create as many root definitions as possible of what the bar could be.

The following wheels represent the four sets of wheels used in the exercise:







Appendix C

Root Definitions Created by Participants

Partner

1. O: The consulting firm
T: Penetrate the education market
A: Client and firm staff
C: The consulting firm
2. O: The consulting firm
T: Demonstrate skills in a large organization, gain exposure, showcase staff and skills
A: The consulting firm staff
C: The study committee, the consulting firm
3. O: The consulting firm
T: Expand experience with strategic planning in the public sector
A: The consulting firm staff
C: (1) The consulting firm because they have new reference points; (2) the department of education staff because they can learn the methodology

4. O: The consulting firm
T: Continue commitment to public good
A: Client and consultant staff
C: Public
5. O: State department of education
T: Gain credibility for the report in terms of the committee and the board
A: Client and consultant staff
C: Public, state department, state board of education

Manager

1. O: The consulting firm
T: Keep the firm's staff employed and earn a profit
A: Client and firm staff
C: The consulting firm
2. O: The consulting firm's partner
T: Penetrate the education market
A: Client and firm staff
C: The consulting firm
3. O: The Manager
T: Work in the private sector doing public sector work
A: The Manager and the project team
C: The client and the Manager
4. O: State's educational system
T: Try to shape the future

A: Client and consultant staff

C: Student

Staff

1. O: The consulting firm
 T: Provide a methodology for strategic planning
 A: Personnel from the consulting firm and the department of education
 C: Board of education
2. O: The consulting firm
 T: Produce a quality realistic strategic plan
 A: Personnel from the consulting firm and the department of education
 C: The department and the board of education
3. O: The consulting firm
 T: Produce a profit
 A: Qualified members of the department, experiences and inexperienced members of the consulting staff
 C: The consulting firm
4. O: The consulting firm
 T: Educate members of the consulting staff in preparing strategic plans
 A: Key members of the department staff; inexperienced members of the consulting firm staff

- C: The consulting firm
5. O: The consulting firm
- T: Educate members of the department staff in preparing strategic plans
- A: Experiences and inexperienced members of the consulting staff
- C: The department of education

Deputy:

1. O: The department of education
- T: Develop a plan
- A: Department and consulting firm staff; chairman of the study committee
- C: Adults of the state
2. O: The department of education
- T: Produce a professional looking plan
- A: Department and consulting firm staff
- C: The state legislature
3. O: The department of education
- T: Organize and gather information in a convincing and authoritative manner

- A: Department and consulting firm staff
C: The department of education
4. O: The department of education
T: Organize and gather information in a convincing and authoritative manner
A: Department and consulting firm staff
C: The study committee
5. O: The Commissioner
T: Create a credible report
A: Outside consultants
C: The Commissioner

Chief:

1. O: The consulting firm and the department of education
T: Identify main issues and policy directions
A: Staff from the consulting firm and the department
C: The study committee and the board of education
2. O: The state department of education
T: Be licensed to use the consulting firm's strategic planning methodology

- A: Staff from the consulting firm and the department
C: The department of education
3. O: The consulting firm
T: Move into a national framework (market penetration)
A: Staff from the consulting firm and the department
C: The consulting firm
4. O: State department of education
T: Get a group appointed by authority to say things we
[department staff] want to say
A: The consulting firm
C: State department of education
5. O: The consulting firm
T: Earn money
A: The staff from the consulting firm and the department
C: The consulting firm.

Appendix D

Root Definitions Emerging from Participant Interviews in Part 2

The following definitions were derived from the comments made by the actors during the individual interviews. The code to the left of each definition was used during the debate for ease of reference. The letters carry no specific significance or code reference.

DEFINITIONS

- AC A departmental system for using consulting staff to identify new data sources and new issues and to prepare the strategic plan.
- AI An organizing system developed by the consulting firm by which the outside consultants, with the aid of the department's staff, would assist the study committee in using the methodology to develop the plan.
- BA A departmental system to hire outside consultants to help demonstrate to the public and the legislature that the department could perform in a business-like manner.
- EF A consultant planned system employing consultants, as well as departmental staff and the committee, to give the consultants experience in using the strategic planning methodology in the public sector.
- EG An organizing system initiated by the department to use outside consultants to gather and analyze data as back-up information

- for policy initiatives which the department already wanted to make.
- HQ A system initiated by the department by which it could, through the use of outside consultants and the committee, learn more about its roles and responsibilities.
- HS A temporary departmental system which, through the use of consulting personnel, brought credibility to an endeavor that would have been impossible for it to acquire on its own.
- KF A framework initiated by the department which used outside consultants and a representative committee structure to validate and give visibility to decisions it wanted to make.
- LB A framework designed by the consulting firm to enable the consultants to assist and coordinate the efforts of the study committee and the department in developing the plan.
- ME An organizing system initiated by the department by which staff from an outside consulting firm could develop a strategic plan for the study committee to present to the state board of education.
- OM A framework designed by the consultant to guide department staff and study committee members through the strategic planning process.
- PN A framework, developed by the consulting firm, by which the consultant could display its skills in the educational market and thus gain additional clients.

- QA An operating framework designed by the consulting firm by which the committee could do its work and develop the plan for the state board.
- TS An organizing system suggested by the consulting firm and adapted by personnel from the firm and the state department to give a departmental planning exercise the appearance of efficiency and of looking ahead.
- UT A system designed by the consulting firm by which the departmental staff, with the help of the consulting personnel and the committee, would develop a strategic plan for the state board.
- XS A framework initiated by the department by which outside consultants would give structure and timelines to a planning activity for which the department was responsible.

Appendix E

Completed Root Definitions Expanded from Participants

Original Definitions

Partner

- GE A consultant system which would use both consulting and department of education staff to complete the job and earn money.
- CH A consultant system which would use both consulting and departmental staff to do pro-bono work for the department.
- LA A consulting firm structure which would provide consulting staff the opportunity to demonstrate their skills to a large organization and to the study committee, to gain exposure, and to showcase individual consulting staff.
- EC A framework developed by the consulting firm to give their staff the opportunity to expand their experience in strategic planning while simultaneously allowing department of education staff the chance to gain similar experience.
- MA A consulting firm system which, through the combined efforts of the firm and the department staff to produce a product, would demonstrate the consultants' commitment to improve the public well-being.

- OL A department of education initiated system, staffed by consultants and department people, which would enable the plan to gain credibility for the department from the study committee and the state board of education.

Manager

- HR A framework designed by the consulting firm to keep its staff employed and to make the firm profitable.
- IA A consultant-designed framework that would use the department and consulting staff to penetrate the education market for the consulting firm.
- KT An organizing framework by which the educational system of the state, using a combination of private and public sector professionals, could shape its future with regard to the adults of the state.
- NC A system which would enable the manager, through his work with public agencies, to do public sector work from a private sector position.

Staff

- AR A consultant designed framework which would provide a methodology for strategic planning for the department using consulting and department staff.

- QU A consulting firm system which would use consulting and department personnel to provide a quality realistic strategic plan for the department of education and the state board of education.
- AB A consulting system which would use experienced and inexperienced consulting staff and qualified department staff to participate in job that would earn benefits for the consulting firm.
- NN A consulting firm planning system involving the consultants and department staff to educate [city]-based consulting staff in preparing public sector strategic plans.
- RC A consulting firm planning system by which the consultant staff would educate department personnel in preparing strategic plans.

Deputy

- UQ A system commissioned by the department of education in which the department and the consulting staff, as well as the committee chairman, would develop a plan for adult education to benefit the adults of the state.
- PO A system commissioned by the department of education in which department and consulting staff plus the committee chairman would produce a professional-looking plan designed to appeal to the legislature.

- DE A system initiated by the state department of education to enable consulting and department staff to organize and gather previously unavailable information in a convincing and authoritative manner for the department.
- FK A system initiated by the department to enable the consulting and department staff to organize previously unavailable information in a convincing and authoritative manner for the study committee.

Chief

- SS A jointly-initiated project term composed of consulting and department personnel which would identify main issues and policy directions regarding adult education for the study committee and the state board.
- YS A department-initiated organization composed of consulting and departmental personnel that would enable the department to use the consultants' methodology for its planning purposes.
- ST A framework designed by the consulting firm to enable it, by means of departmental and consulting staff work and materials, to give the consulting firm national visibility in the area of educational strategic planning.
- EM A system, initiated by the department and staffed by respected outside consultants, which would produce information familiar to selected department staff in such a manner as to generate respectability from other members of the department.

TP A system formed by the consulting firm and staffed by its personnel and department employees to enable it to complete its contract and earn its fee.

Appendix F

Request for Proposal for Strategic Plan from the [Anonymous] State Department of Education

REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL FOR PROVISION OF SERVICES TO THE STUDY COMMITTEE REVIEWING
THE STATUS OF ADULT EDUCATION IN THE STATE OF _____ INCLUDING THE
DEVELOPMENT OF A STRATEGIC PLAN WHICH WILL ADDRESS THE _____ STATE DEPARTMENT
OF ADULT EDUCATION PROGRAM THROUGH THE YEAR 2000

The State Department of Education is about to undertake a major study concerning the status of Adult Education in _____. A committee representing a cross section of business, industry, education, and community agencies will look at the educational needs of the adult population in the areas of basic literacy, skill training, and retraining. To assist the study committee, the State Department of Education hereby announces its interest in receiving proposals which will provide technical assistance to the study committee. The contractor will develop a strategic plan to address the program of adult education through the year 2000. The following information is provided to assist vendors in preparing proposals.

PURPOSE

To present a strategic plan which will include specific recommendations, to the study committee, concerning both program and funding matters relating to the delivery of adult education services as provided by the _____ State Board of Education through the year 2000.

SCOPE

Those submitting proposals should consider providing the following components which will assist the study committee in the development of a specific plan for increasing adult literacy and providing for skill training and retraining.

1. A comprehensive study of the demographic, economic, and fiscal trends for the State through the year 2000 and identification of the key issues which will impact the effective provision of education and training services to adults.
2. An analysis of the key issues with priority recommendations to the study committee. Those high priority recommendations should present factors which will impede or facilitate implementation by the State Department of Education.
3. Identification of specific goals and objectives as they relate to the key issues. Based on the factors identified above, the goals and objectives should present both short and long term strategies for implementation.

4. The final phase should contain recommendations to the study committee as to means for the State Department to implement the accepted plan and strategies to periodically assess the effectiveness of the plan.
5. The period of assessment for the project will be from 15 May 1984 to 30 May 1985.

INSTRUCTION TO VENDORS

1. Bidders conference will be held on 11 May 1984, at 9:00 a.m., room 307A, State Office Building, Any contractor with questions regarding this announcement may contact , Chief, Bureau of Community and Adult Education, after the bidders conference.
2. All contractors shall submit six (6) copies of proposals and be delivered no later than 25 May 1984, 12:00 noon, to
3. Contractors shall present a detailed itemization of costs as they relate to each phase of the program. Since the State is interested in the most cost effective quality proposal, failure to present a detailed explanation of project costs may be sufficient cause for rejection of the proposal.
4. The contractor shall agree and warrant that in the performance of the contract he/she will not discriminate or permit discrimination against any person or group of persons on the grounds of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, or physical disability, including, but not limited to, blindness unless it is shown by such contractor that such disability prevents performance of the work involved in any manner prohibited by the laws of the United States or the State of , and further agrees to provide the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities with such information requested by the Commission concerning the employment practices and procedures of the vendor as related to the provisions of this section.

EVALUATION OF PROPOSALS

Criteria:

Each proposal will be evaluated against the following criteria, to determine which contractor is most capable of implementing the State's requirements:

- . Contractor's ability to do the specified work.
- . Contractor's understanding of the project and its purpose and scope, as evidenced by the proposed approach and level of effort and the contractor's prior experience in providing a comprehensive study of municipal or state systems.
- . Contractor's commitment to complete the entire project by the earliest possible date.
- . The proposed management approach and the degree to which it is compatible with the State's needs.

- . Competitiveness of proposed cost.
- . Availability and experience of personnel.
- . Conformity with specifications contained herein.

Additional Information:

The State Department of Education reserves the right to accept or reject in whole or in part any or all proposals submitted and to request additional information from all proposers. All proposals in response to this Request for Proposal are to be the sole property of the Connecticut State Department of Education. Personnel assigned to the project must handle confidential information in compliance with the Security and Privacy Act of 1974. The awarding of this contract will be made to the contractor who in the opinion of the State Department of Education, is best qualified to perform the tasks requested and whose proposal will be most advantageous to the Department in terms of cost and services to be rendered. If there are two or more similar proposals in terms of cost and quality, oral interviews may be arranged to assist the Department in making the final selection. All proposals should recognize that this contract is subject to the availability of funds.

Appendix G

Response from Management Consulting Firm to the State Department of Education's Request for Proposal

Dear _____ :

We are pleased to submit this proposal to develop a strategic plan for Adult Education in the State of _____ . We believe we are qualified to develop this plan because of our extensive experience in strategic planning for government and educational institutions. A strong engagement team will be assembled to meet the demanding requirements of this project.

Purpose

We understand the purpose of the project to be the development of a strategic plan including specific recommendations addressing both program and funding matters relating to adult education services provided by the State Board of Education through the year 2000.

We understand the future of adult education is an area of major importance for the Bureau. In response to changing work environment and its growing adult population, the Bureau has expressed its concern for providing adults with the basic educational skills to function effectively in society, as well as the occupational skills necessary to become and remain gainfully employed.

.. Besides providing for the well being of individual citizens, the Bureau views adult education as vital to the State's economy by helping insure a stable and technically competent work force. In response to these concerns, we would be providing technical assistance to a study committee and Bureau staff specifically charged with reviewing the current status and future direction of the State's adult education program. We would assist the committee in analyzing the educational needs of the adult population in areas such as increased literacy, skill training and retraining.

Project Scope

To assist the study committee in developing a plan for increasing adult literacy and providing for skill training and retaining we would:

- . study demographic, economic and fiscal trends through the year 2000. This study would identify key issues which may impact future adult education and training services.
- . analyze the key issues and submit priority recommendations to the study committee. The recommendations would include factors which could impede or facilitate their implementation.
- . identify specific goals and objectives relating to the key issues. Short and long term strategies to achieve these goals and objectives would be presented.
- . present recommendations to the study committee to implement the plan and periodically assess its effectiveness.

We understand that the period of assessment for the project will be from May 1984 to May 1985.

Benefits to Strategic Planning

Strategic planning is a logical and systematic process that would enable a consensus to be reached on the bureau's future direction. We believe the major benefits of strategic planning for the Bureau can be summarized as follows:

- . Identifies the key issues and trends affecting the Bureau's Adult Education Programs. Issues would include:
 - . aging population
 - . changing technology
 - . funding sources
 - . public assistance levels
- . Integrates development of consistent objectives and goals among the many public interest groups such as:
 - . businesses and industry
 - . local education agencies
 - . human service agencies

- . Provides specific strategies for the Bureau such as:
 - . coordinating state, local and private programs
 - . increasing public awareness of programs
 - . improving access to programs
- . Provides a basis for ongoing discussion and cooperation among business, industry, education and community agencies with the Bureau.
- . Develops a plan consistent with the overall direction of the Department of Education. Because this plan could have Department-wide implications, it is important that the future direction of the Department be understood.

Approach

During this project we would use our proven strategic planning process. This process would be conducted in four phases:

- . Issue Identification and Forecast
- . Issue Analysis
- . Strategic Plan Development
- . Implementation

An overview of the strategic planning process is shown in Exhibit 1 on the next page. The four planning phases and the primary work performed in each are described in the following paragraphs. The approach described here encompasses the entire planning process.

Phase I: Issue Identification and Forecast

This initial phase will involve project organization, data collection, position assessment and identification of key issues facing Adult Education. The specific segments in this phase include:

A. Project Organization

In this segment we would organize the project team. We would work with the Bureau to identify personnel representing a cross section of views and interests, to finalize the project scope and objectives and to make preliminary task assignments. In this segment we would draw upon our experience with other government agencies in order to provide general principles and techniques for successfully guiding this project.

