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**Regional Development in Health and Social
Services in the U.K.: 'Edge effects' and
sustainable change in welfare organisations**

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'Edge effects' and sustainable change in welfare organisations

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Introduction

The North Western Training and Development Team is a team of 2.5 people from different disciplines, and an administrator. Its brief has been to work in whatever ways possible towards better futures for people with learning disabilities (mental retardation) living in North West England, an area which has a population pool of approximately 8 million (NWTDT, 1991).

The context in which the Team works, and the methods it uses to contribute to and create principled organisational development and change in the lives of people with learning disabilities will be described. Particular attention will be drawn to the ideological climate within which the Team works and to which it contributes; the organisational eco-systems with which the Team works; the elements that combine to form the work of the Team and the different functions they perform; and the natural resources that are harnessed in the course of its work. Climate, eco-systems, elements and functions, and use of natural resources are all critical components of analyses of sustainable ecological development (Mollison, 1991), and analogies will be drawn with natural ecology throughout the discussion (Trist, 1976). The concept of 'edge' effects (see, for example, Odum, 1971), which are highlighted by the permaculture movement in the design of **sustainable** ecological development, will be explored, in order to demonstrate how such a small resource as the North West Training and Development Team can be an effective agent in principled and sustainable development of welfare organisations.

Principled Development

In the North West of England, the direction of organisational change and development has been agreed by all the major organisational stakeholders. Of paramount concern is the quality of life of people with learning disabilities who use the services offered. The purpose of all organisational policies and practices is to support improvements in the

quality of life of those using services. Four different dimensions of organisational capability (namely knowledge and training, management, availability and comprehensiveness) support improvements in the quality of life of people with learning disabilities.

Ideological Climate

Welfare organisations operate in the midst of a web of different, often conflicting ideologies that at different points in time create a climate of uncertainty and turbulence. The last decade in Britain has seen particular ideologies gain a stranglehold on many different sectors of social life. The ideologies of the 'new right', which stress anti-egalitarian individualism and autonomy, and traditional family values (within which are enshrined patriarchal ideologies of work and of caring wherein men work as the major breadwinners, and women do the caring), have contributed to the strengthening of those ideologies which underpin self-help in contrast to state welfare. At the same time greater centralised power has undermined the autonomy of locally determined welfare provision. However, there are apparent contradictions within these ideologies (Fawcett and Featherstone, 1994). Along with individualism and autonomy go the ideologies of consumerism - choice, consumer demand, and user participation in determining both client need and service responses to need. Along with the centralisation of power, goes a concern with quality, efficiency, effectiveness, and budgetary control. In the welfare field these ideologies enmesh the policy and legislation of 'Care in the Community' within which organisations serving people with learning disabilities operate.

The very contradictions within the ideological web present possibilities for change (Levick, 1992). Progress is possible within organisations for people with learning disabilities as different hegemonic coalitions form, uniting the interests of different

stakeholders in the futures of people with learning disabilities (Burton, 1994; Gramsci, 1971; Kagan and Lewis, 1993; 1994). Thus hospital managers who have to reduce their costs may ally with social workers who want to help people with learning disabilities realise their potential, and with family members who fear they will be asked to continue to care for adult sons and daughters with limited resources, and with self advocacy groups who are concerned that people with learning disabilities realise their full social rights.

The current ideological climate can be used by the Team in two main ways. Firstly the Team is able to help build and sustain internal coalitions, within and between organisations. Secondly it is able to catalyse the formation of coalitions between the organisations (both statutory and voluntary) and external interest groups who can be empowered in the process of cohering in a hegemonic coalition (Burton and Kagan, 1995 forthcoming). In some of the work of the Team, this process can be seen in action (Kagan and Lewis, 1994; Kagan, 1993, a,b). Ideological turbulence and contradiction need not lead to organisational stagnation. Instead, it can be the foundation of progressive organisational responses to change for service users and for staff working within the organisations. Much of the Team's work is forming, facilitating and helping to sustain the coalitions that lead to principled organisational development and thereby better futures for people with learning disabilities. These coalitions have boundaries other than those of the organisation(s).

Organisational Eco-systems

The Team's work has few organisational boundaries. It works with statutory agencies (health, social services, education, employment, leisure and recreation) and with voluntary organisations. It also works with families, people with learning disabilities themselves and ordinary citizens with an interest in bettering the futures of people with

learning disabilities. It is able to work at all levels of organisations, from Chief Executives, Senior managers, middle and first line managers, contact staff, consumers and their friends and relatives. Team members determine at which levels to work. Thus, some organisational development issues may best be tackled horizontally within the system, whilst others require vertical integration of the work. Care is taken to negotiate a brief and follow up any work with a developmental process that assures those that are in the position to make change happen are able to do so. For system development it is necessary for Team members to have a thorough understanding of how the different organisations, as well as the whole system of inter-linked organisations of welfare provision, function, and they must have access to all parts of the system. In part, the funding, strategic work planning, and reporting procedures help the Team maintain its access. In addition, the professional standing of Team members, and ability to ensure development takes place, contribute to access.

The Team does not work in isolation. Within organisations, use will often be made of existing practitioners and managers in the developmental change process. Between organisations, experienced and knowledgeable people will be linked, in order to maximise developmental possibilities. When new organisational strategies are introduced, practitioners and managers who will be in a position to create change will be involved. The ability to work with the service system as a whole, or with parts of it means that different areas of the work can be targeted in different ways (NWDT, 1991).

Elements and Functions of the Work

The work of the team can be described in terms of the different elements involved: each element focuses of different aspects (or combinations of aspects) of organisational development. The activities undertaken, and organisational development functions served, include:

Elements of Activity

- visits/series of visits to local services
- discussions
- information exchanges
- group reviews of services
- evaluations
- seminars/workshops
- interviews and observations
- talks
- advice and organisational advocacy
- negotiation and consultation
- group work and networking
- training
- membership of policy and strategy groups
- research
- training

Functions

- personal interpersonal and organisational capability
- decision making
- policy development
- implementation of change
- resource allocation
- resource co-ordination
- thinking and understanding
- strengthening good practice
- enabling progressive compromise
- introducing best practice
- service design
- user participation
- enhancing skills

Natural Resources Used

As far as possible those resources that are already available in the work of the Team are used. Organisational processes that lead to good outcomes for people with learning disabilities are picked up and the practices are made known to others. Those practitioners, managers, people with learning disabilities and citizens who have direct experience of innovative practice are used to help disseminate information to others via a series of different kinds of publications - newsletters, formal reports, briefing papers - and workshops. The Team works with local services and parts of services in their own localities in order to help them develop from where they are now. It responds to local requests for assistance and encourages local organisations to identify their own development potentials and requirements. The Team will often catalyse (speed up) processes that are happening anyway. Thus one locality may have the beginning of an employment service and we will facilitate the growth of this, whereas another organisation may be concerned with providing a different kind of residential service and the Team will work with them on this. No attempt will be made to make the first

organisation address residential issues and the second employment issues. Across such a wide geographical area and complex organisational system, existing expertise in one area can usually be mobilised in order to help organisations in another area develop. Where this is not possible, outside expertise may be called on or local expertise may be created. In ecological terms the Team is interested in sustainable development and this will be best achieved by addressing local conditions and working with existing practice. Where additional resources are artificially injected, this is done in a way that is short term and will lead to the development of local resources (Mollison, 1991) - much of the Team's work is analogous to 'do nothing farming' (Fukuoka, 1971).

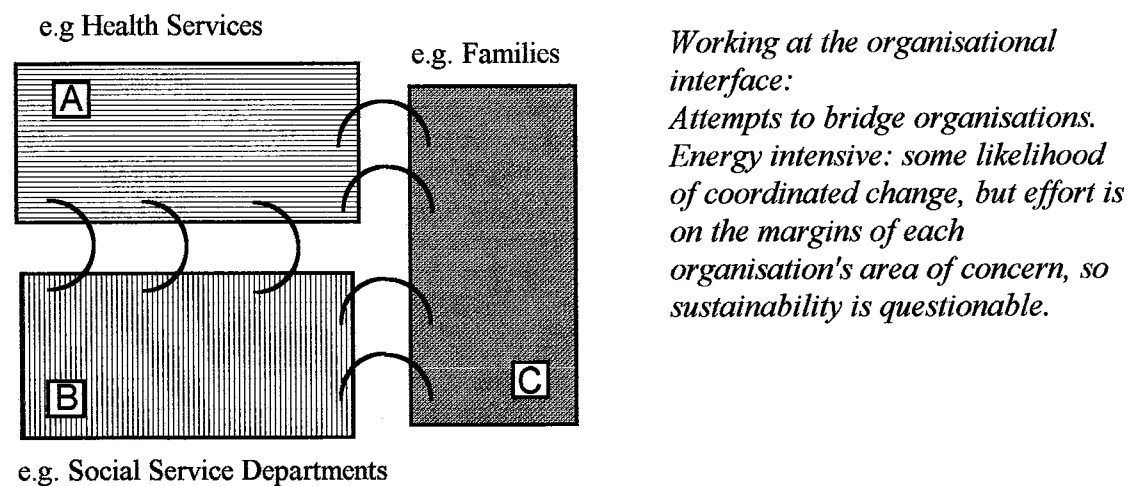
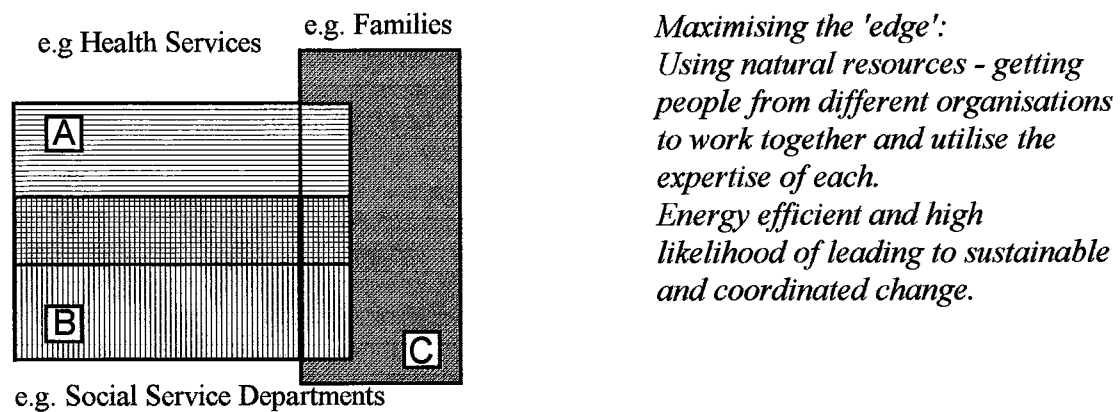
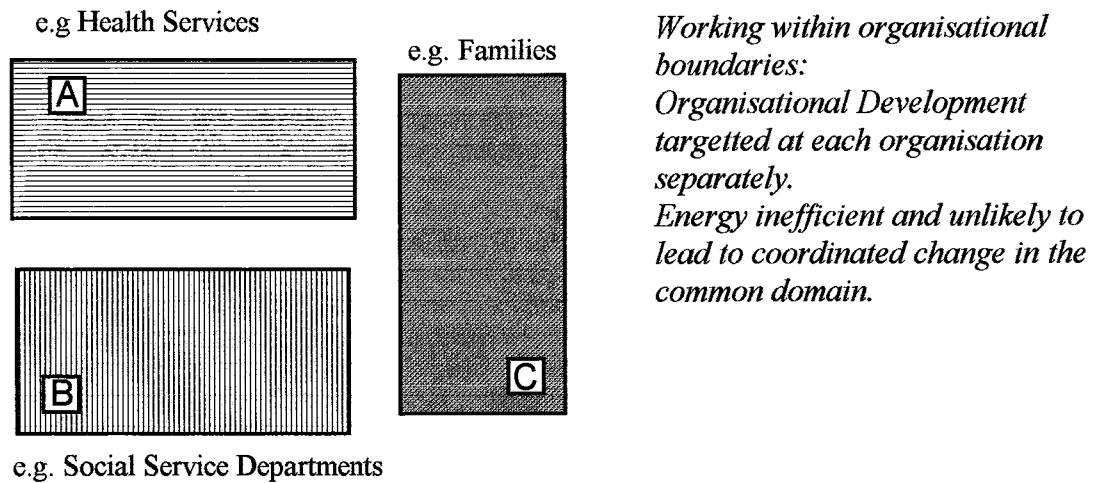
'Edge' Effects and Energy Efficiency

The breadth of the organisational and geographical remit, and complexity of the organisational system with which the Team works, means that the different elements of our work and the resources available, have to be focused carefully if any coherent organisational development is to be achieved that is of benefit to those using the services and working within them. One way of thinking about the work is to see everything that is done as being at the interface of at least two different organisational eco-systems (or parts of them). For example, the Team may work at the transition of existing practice and better practice; of statutory organisations and non-statutory organisations; of health and social services; of residential, day, employment and leisure services; of legislative requirements and guidelines and user rights and needs; of users, families and services; of welfare organisations and local communities. The transition between two or more diverse ecological communities is known as the ecotone (Odum, 1991). At such junctions, the variety and diversity of species and thus the productivity of the ecotone is usually greater than the sum of each of the adjoining communities. Not only do species from each community share the ecotone, some species are only found there. Furthermore, the junction between communities often acts as a kind of net or sieve for resources - they accumulate at the boundary.

The increased variety, resources and productivity of the ecotone is known as the 'edge' effect. Mollison (1991) highlights the importance of the 'edge' for sustainable development: the economies of at least two different environments can be combined and the natural benefits of each environment can be preserved. The same may be true of sustainable organisational development. By working at the 'edge', the combined resources of adjoining eco-systems can be used. Just as it is possible, through the design of sustainable systems of ecological development, to increase the relative contribution of the 'edge' to each adjoining community, so it is possible to create a larger edge effect in organisational development and thereby maximise its benefit to the organisational eco-system as a whole. This is, in effect what the Development Team does. Figure 1 illustrates this developmental process.

It is therefore possible to maximise the energies and resources available to the organisational development process, and be energy efficient, whilst contributing to sustainable change. With such a small human resource facing such a large and complex organisational development task, it is essential that the work is carried out in sustainable and energy efficient ways.

Figure 1: Maximising 'Edge' Effects for Sustainable Organisational Development



Conclusion

Some concepts borrowed from sustainable ecological development help in the understanding of the contribution that a small interdisciplinary team can make to principled, large scale, geographically spread organisational development in the welfare field. Climatic turbulence can enable the formation of hegemonic coalitions. Access to both horizontal and vertical zoning of the organisational eco-system can help target activities appropriately so that beneficial development is most likely. The work of the team is made up of a diverse range of elements with different functions and combinations of functions, to fit local conditions and different historical requirements. Existing natural resources and developmental processes are used to maximise the chances that developments will be sustainable. Most usefully, the team works at the 'edge' - the transition between two or more ecological communities. In working to increase the edge and with the edge, the Team is able to maximise the amount and variety of resources available to it; to preserve the best features of adjoining systems and to enhance the likelihood that developments will be sustainable ones. Whilst the 'edge' is usually enriched by the adjoining communities, with bad stewardship it can become barren and impoverished, supporting little of environmental benefit. Working at the 'edge' therefore has responsibilities to preserve the very best of all adjoining communities and this is, in sum, the challenge for the Team in the future.

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