

ORGANISATION THEORY AND DYNAMICS: PERIPHERAL KNOWLEDGE OR AN ESSENTIAL COMPONENT OF TREATMENT

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Introduction

Approaches to treatment in child adolescent and family health, are affected by organizational design and dynamics. The design and dynamics of organizations can act as barriers to effective service unless they are understood and managed in a manner which promotes effective service by clinicians and administrators. This is not a new situation it has been documented by writers such as Hasenfeld (1979), Martin (1985) Tierney (1985). In order to manage these organizational factors, approaches to treatment and intervention should be taught in the context of organizational theory and dynamics to assist in facilitating effective outcomes. Knowledge of organizational theory, design and dynamics is essential for clinicians who can no longer pretend that treatment is provided in a vacuum from the context of service delivery. It therefore follows that this knowledge is essential in the curriculum of basic professional, higher degree, and continuing education courses.

This is so even though the selection of organizational context to the taught is a difficult task. Organizational theory, which refers to both descriptive and prescriptive aspects of structure and design of organizations (Robbins 1983:6) provides disparate approaches to understanding organizations. This leaves a daunting task for educators charged with selecting content to fit with already overflowing course syllabi.

This paper will focus on two components of organization theory and dynamics which in the writer's view are particularly influential in service delivery. The two components are the environments and cultures of human service organizations.

These components are selected because they are considered to bear most directly on the delivery of services and they are issues currently being explored in Management and Organization Literature

(Hilmer 1985; Peters & Waterman 1984 Kilmann et al 1985). They will be discussed in the context of the characteristics of human service organizations and some current practices in business organizations.

I will first consider the characteristics of human service organizations. Secondly I will discuss the environment of the organizations and consider how these affect service delivery. The culture or internal environment will then be considered. Finally, the need for inclusion of this knowledge in professional course curriculums will be discussed.

Characteristics of Human Service Organizations

For the purpose of this paper human service organizations will be defined as those organizations which have the following characteristics central to their operations.

1. Their purpose is meeting socially recognized needs (Martin 1985).
2. Their 'raw material' is people with specific characteristics and they engage in people processing and people changing tasks (Hasenfeld & English 1974).
3. Their clients are in relatively powerless positions (Martin 1985).

These characteristics are viewed within a systems framework. They include the major elements of human service organizations, those of purpose, values, technology and high degree of dependence on the external environment which have all been identified in the literature. (Hasenfeld, 1974; Martin, 1984; Sarri & Hasenfeld, 1978; Sauber, 1983). It is within this framework that environments and culture will be analyzed.

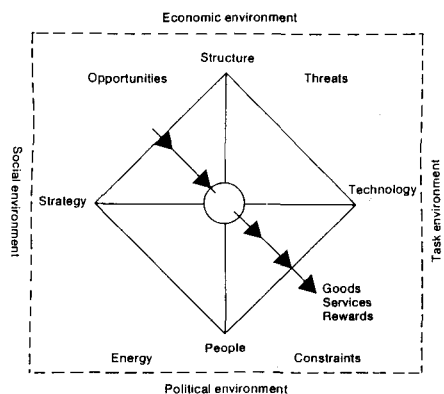
The Human Service Organization and its Environments:-

Human service organizations "are being buffeted by a host of political, economic and social forces that are requiring adaptation and change" (Patti & Resnick 1985; 269). The question for human service organizations have characteristics different from business and other profit organizations, for unlike business organizations the market place is not the final arbiter. Whilst a (business) company

"must adapt or perish" (Byrt & Masters 1982; 69) a human service organization will continue to operate as long as it meets approval of the dominant bodies legitimizing it, even if the actual service it provides is not effective in terms of client outcomes.

In examining the environments of human service organizations it is useful to apply the model developed by Byrt & Masters (1982; 69). This model hypothesizes that there are four interdependent elements with the Organization system (Structure, Strategy, Technology and People) and one independent element viz. environment. The environment can be analyzed into four components – economic/social/task/political.

The Organization as an open system



Byrt, W.J. & Masters, P.R. – 1982:69

Economic Environment

The economic environment refers to the macro and micro economic environment within which the organization operates and it is crucial for human service organizations. Most non-profit human service organizations receive government funding (direct or indirect) and changes in the economic environment can directly affect the amount and type of work undertaken.

A child and family agency may find that unemployment increases the incidence of illness in children of those unemployed (Doctors Reform Society, 1982; Windshuttle 1979) and increases reports of child abuse (Smith 1977). However, at a time more services are required the organizations budget may be cut because

of the national economic situation. Other non-profit human service organizations, particularly those involved in welfare may find the organization's survival potential enhanced by a down turn in the economy. For example, a agency supporting low income families is required more in times of high unemployment. The economic environment cannot be considered in isolation from the political, cultural and task environments. The western economy with low commodity prices and high level competitiveness in value added goods and services has led to countries to be more concerned with protecting their own economy, rather than exploring the viability of all sectors in their individual economies, that is, each country focuses on maintaining its economic status quo in the economy, rather than innovative change and the concomitant risk. This situation is mirrored in a country's approach to its organizations.

There is at least one major similarity between business and human service organizations i.e. survival deflecting from operational goals. The survival of the business or organization is in my opinion, the dominant goal of the organization. A new threat to business organizations has arisen and that is the phenomenon of takeovers of companies. A business organization may be meeting its business objectives extremely effectively, and can be taken over by another company for the very reason it is working effectively and is seen as something desirable which will strengthen that company. So in order to survive as well as meet its business objectives an organization has to build defences to prevent being taken over, that is it has to not only maintain a legitimacy with its task environment but protect itself from influences outside its task environment. The result of this is that business organizations can find it difficult to focus solely on their operational mission. This situation can lead to poor performance of the primary tasks of the organization. Human service organizations are also confronted with this trend. They are obviously not in danger of being take over targets. However, economic power shifts between interests groups in the community, the legitimacy of certain human service organizations may be in jeopardy.

In the current economic environment scarcity of financial resources is changing the context of human services administration (Hasenfeld 1984). The current trend to intergation of human services is being influenced by financial reasons as well as other factors.

Social Environment:-

To understand the importance of the social environment it is important to consider further the unique characteristics of human service organizations. Human service organizations are established to meet the needs reflective of values held

within the community. These values particularly in relation to children and families are not always common to all sections of the community. This situation can create further tension for human service organizations, as in supporting the values of one group in the community it can be in conflict with another group.

The dynamic social environment, with the presence of multi-cultural values and accepted behaviours, means that the human service organizations face a diverse social environment. Established in accordance with dominant values of society any changes or conflicts in the social environment can affect the organisation. The legitimacy conferred by one group in the community may not be accepted by another group.

From the foregoing it is evident that although all human service organizations are established to meet socially legitimated needs, (a want for a service articulated by a group of individuals and a need recognized by some significant sections of society and for which there is allocation of resources (Martin 1982), there is no guarantee that these will be accepted by the total task environment. Increasingly in today's environment influential groups in the social environment are focusing on wants of people which are legitimated as rights. An example of this is the dilemma which arises when parent's rights and children's rights can be in conflict and/or in conflict with the child's needs. This dilemma is an example of the responsibilities held by human service organizations charged with protecting needs of specific groups.

Political Environment

The political environment influences each Human Service Organization firstly to the degree to which they are dependent upon government funding. Often human service organizations are established to fit ideals or pragmatic interests espoused by political parties in power, only to be dismantled when an opposition group gains power.

Human Service Organizations can become the proverbial political football for opposing political parties. This is a particular threat with respect to Human Service Organizations which, for example serve single parents, or unemployed, or delinquent youth. The charge by some political elements in society that Human Service Organizations support what some groups see as non-acceptable behaviour is not a new phenomenon.

Task Environment

The task environment includes those elements in the environment which directly affect the running of the organization. That is the clients, potential clients, formal organizations which utilize or liaise with the organizations, referers (suppliers) and other groups who are seen, or see themselves as being part of the active

environment of the organization.

The Organization has to maintain legitimacy in terms of its overall mandate with the total environment, and at the same time maintain specific legitimacy with different components of the task environment for the manner in which it interprets its specific mandate (through its services and contact with all elements of the task environment).

Part of the human service organizations mandate has been to be proactive in assessing needs and developing new approaches to meet them. There is a danger now that influential community groups will demand that human service organizations be solely reactive in meeting wants, with needs being determined without due consideration to relevant theory and practice knowledge. The problem here is that, as those who work with families know, many components of a human service organization task environment have rights and wants which may conflict with the rights and wants of other individuals in the task environment. An example of this is in the area of intercountry adoption. In the State of Victoria, Australia, a very vocal powerful segment of the task environment, some potential adoptee parents, campaigned strongly for the removal of what they saw as bureaucratic and professional interference with their want (and right) to adopt a child from another country. Denying the validity of some requirements to assess suitability as adoptive parents. The human service organization had to determine which part of its mandate to support - to protect the needs (as interpreted by professionals in the organization) of children in other countries and to provide for the needs and wants of those in the community who indirectly (through taxes) financed them. Whilst the conflict was eventually resolved in the direction of support of children with improvements in the assessment process) the vulnerability of the professionals involved was demonstrated as their entire assessment processes were examined and professional judgements challenged by a management concerned with the organization's survival and using other standards for assessment. For the professional in this situation it was not enough just to have knowledge and skill with respect to the primary task of finding the best resolution for those in the adoption triangle. The professionals needed to know how to present their work to the organization so the core of their work would be supported. Accountability, an essential aspect of practice means that the professionals work should be open to scrutiny. What is important is that the purpose of that examination is in keeping with protecting the primary task of the service and is not contaminated by other agendas within the organization or from the environment which put the primary task at risk, unless what is being challenged is the validity of a particular task.

The vulnerability and powerlessness of clients of human service organizations who are part of the task environment causes particular difficulties for human service organizations. In the past it has been considered that professionals in the power position could and some did exercise their power inappropriately over clients. The writers concern is that whilst the power of professionals may weaken in organizations the actual client power will not necessarily strengthen. The power of sanctioning groups in the community has strengthened but there is a danger in the belief that stronger extra mural controls and strong scientific management will strengthen the clients position. This denies the fact that management is a part of an organization and has investment in survival and hence may focus on maintaining legitimacy with components of the environment more powerful than clients.

Environmental Influences – A Summary

"The environment (is) the major source of uncertainty for organizations" (Byrt & Masters 1982; 69). Mintzberg (1981) has suggested "that the more complex the environment the more difficulty central management has in comprehending it and the greater the need for specialization. The more dynamic the environment the greater the difficulty in standardizing work, outputs or skills" (p.116). He suggests the structure of such organizations should be less bureaucratic. Human service organizations are particularly affected by the dynamic environment within which they operate, yet there is a push for them to become more bureaucratic (Mintzberg 1981, Tierney 1985, Ainsworth 1985).

The move to greater bureaucratization in human service organizations can be seen in Australia, and I suspect elsewhere as well, there is an attempt to correct the deficiencies of Human Service Organizations by strengthening control from the external environment. Given the danger of blurring of boundaries of the human service organisation and the external environment this trend may weaken human service organisations. The organisation will find it more difficult to creatively manage the tensions in the environments and be less able to influence those environments.

Culture

Culture is becoming an increasingly important concept in the study of organizations. There are now many claims that organizational "culture can determine the degree of effectiveness of the organization" (Schein 1985; 24). Culture then must be of interest to human service organizations as their effectiveness is often under challenge from their internal and external environments.

Definition of Culture

The culture of an organization refers to the shared values of the members of the organization. (Peters and Waterman 1984). It is those values into which staff of the organization are socialized. Schein (1985; 14) hypothesizes there are three levels of culture. These are: technology and observable patterns of behaviour (level 1); the values of the organization expressed formally or otherwise known (level 2); basic assumptions in reference to relationship to environment; nature or reality, time and space; values re. human nature and activity and human relationships; assumptions which are invisible and taken for granted (level 3).

Organizational culture is usually defined in the literature as shared values held within the organization. Examples of organizational cultures defined in this way are given by Peters & Waterman (1984). They include IBM, Hewlett Packard, Procter & Gamble where "the dominance and coherence of culture proved to be an essential quality of the excellent companies" (p. 75). This definition assumes there is only one culture in an organization. This is debatable. It has been suggested (Kilmann et al 1985) that theorists using a Theory X approach to organizational behaviour see one culture, whilst those using a Theory Y approach assume multi-cultures in the one organization. Even the multi culture approach however is based on the assumption that core values are accepted by all members of the organization. Whether an organization has one or a diversity of products also influences whether there is more than one culture.

The area of organizational culture requires more study. For example is it the size of the organization and/or its diversity in products which influences of whether it can support more than one culture? There needs to be more research in this area, particularly with reference to multi cultures and human service organizations. The characteristics of human service organizations necessitate the presence of competing mandates, technologies and values. Unless it is possible for organizations to develop multi cultures which support each other or the effect of culture is minimized, the effectiveness of human service organizations will be more difficult to achieve.

Influence of culture

The degree of influence of culture and the direction of influence is debateable (Kilman et al. 1985). Culture can be negative or positive and can be strong or weak in its influence. My proposition is that culture will be influential in human service organizations due to their specific characteristics. One reason for this is that human service organizations are usually protected from the 'natural' outcome of the

lifecycle, through support from the elements in the environment which maintain it, whether or not it is actually achieving effective outcomes (Kadushin 1977). Whereas although poor functioning organizations can have strong cultures (Peeters & Waterman 1984), if these are negative cultures the organization becomes a closed system and eventually moves to entropy. Protection from the natural organizational life cycle gives both positive and negative cultures an opportunity to flourish in human service organizations, and hence to influence the effectiveness of the organizations.

Influence of task, technology and observable behaviour on developing culture

Wieck (1979); Hasenfeld (1979); and Tierney (1985) all identify a common factor which is a characteristic of human service organizations and affects the development of culture, that is the phenomena of "loose coupling". Loose coupling refers to the situation where tasks are non routine, and unpredictable, knowledge is incomplete and consequences of actions uncertain.

The management of this situation in an organization has a strong influence on developing culture. The current solution is to move towards tighter coupling (Mintzberg, 1981). This approach appears to assume that the human service technology can be managed to a particular level of quality tolerance which can be manipulated. This denies the interactivity of treatment intervention, the presence of professionalism and the complexity of tasks. Without proper management a culture can develop which is not conducive to effective service.

Linked to the loose coupling phenomenon is the status which the organizational culture confers on different programs (tasks) and their operators. The uneasy fit between programs can influence the culture of a human service organization and the balance of organizational 'domains' (Kouzes & Mico 1979). These domains are eg. the policy management and service components of the organization and each functions according to different principles, different criteria and different work modes. Tension arises between each domain and Tierney (1985) suggests that the "customary way of dealing with these tensions in child and youth welfare has been by the formation of a coalition between management and policy-makers to so simplify the service task as to suppress claims of service providers to different normative criteria" (Tierney; 5).

Mintzberg (1981) appears to support this in his proposition that Human Service Organizations are moving towards greater bureaucratization. Here lies the paradox. What should be the strongest domain or core of the organization (i.e. the direct service to the clients) can become the

weakest. The consequences of this can have a ripple effect through the organization as, what should be the driving force of the organization is in fact being driven by the other components of the organization. There is a danger then that the culture of Human Service Organizations will be characterized by weak service domain, strong policy and management domains, with consequences of low morale, inappropriate management and non-effective service. Any business organization with this culture would not survive.

The Influence of Professionals on Culture

Human Service Organizations are characterized by the high number of professional staff who are responsible for the operating core of the organization. The presence of professionals in organizations does not of itself suggest unique characteristics for Human Service Organizations (in the USA 75% of professionals are salaried employees (Raebin, 1984)). However, the move towards greater proceduralization in Human Service Organization puts pressure on those professionals. This has led to 'the whistle blower' (Gummer, 1985) approach to standards and accountability and means the professional can no longer just rely on 'good work' to enhance him or her in the organization and to be sure they have the support of the organization.

The professional worker has personal, professional and organizational values (as well as knowledge and skills) which will influence how he/she handles a client situation. It can be assumed that the personal and professional values are congruent however the professional may be in conflict with organization values.

The process of personal and professional values becoming shared values requires that the testing of values and consistency in outcome. It is difficult to test the effect of values in human service organizations where there is relatively incomplete knowledge (technology) and an uncontrollable environment. Because of the difficulty of testing values they may be imposed on staff. This can lead to values being espoused and actual behaviour of staff being incongruent with these values. This creates tension, a negative culture, and utilizes energy in the organization which would be better directed towards organizational effectiveness.

Another difficulty for human service organizations is determining the participants in establishing shared values. For most human service organizations, their boundaries are likely to blur with the environment. For example, are clients of a health or welfare organization part of the organization? Customers are generally not considered part of a business organization's internal environment. Human service organizations, because of their characteristics, including the fact that the technology utilized requires commitment

to the interaction from clients, clients are considered part of the organization. In clinical treatment situations clients have to share the basic values of the organization, otherwise it will be difficult for clinical engagement to take place. The process of engagement is shared mutual expectations, and it would follow that these should at least in part stem from the culture or values of the organization. This makes development of an organization culture difficult for human service organizations.

Basic Assumptions in Organizations

The deepest level of culture in an organization are the assumptions which are taken for granted. If values become basic assumptions in the organization they can protect the core activity of the organizations. Yet because of the difficulties identified (difficulty in defining goals; incomplete technology and dynamic uncertain environments) it is values related to non-core functions which are likely to gain ascendancy in the organization, as due to difficulty in testing values, the values are espoused or imposed.

The problems in establishing shared values can be ignored. It is often assumed for example that services, with different goals whether they be therapeutic or preventative community work, can co-exist in an organization without conflict. However unless the two components are protected from each other a program can dilute effectiveness of the other. It requires different skills and knowledge to work as a clinician than as a community worker (Perlmutter (1985)) and usually different personality types undertake the work. It is also recognized that individuals are attracted by different cultures. (Peters & Waterman, 1984). Hence, it appears human service organizations with more than one program need to develop and support more than one culture. An agency that does not take action to protect its different programs is in danger of those programs acting against each other and destroying the effectiveness of the organization. This is particularly true for agencies which introduce innovative programs, and undertake research projects. They must ensure that these new programs or research activities fit with the other ongoing services of the agency, or are protected so they are able to operate as autonomous service departments. Existing programs the agency wants to maintain, will also require maintenance but if they fit with the existing culture this will not take so much energy.

Another constraint relates to the temporal mandate given to certain programs. That is whilst some programs are on-going and regularly funded, others (often new approaches to treatment), have to search out funding which can be given on a one, two or three year basis. This can lead to damaging conflict in the organization as well as losing time in continual search for funding.

Summary of Culture & Human Service Organizations

The blurred boundaries, the involvement of clients, the relative powerlessness of clients, the constraints from outside the organization, the structural conflicts within the organization and the presence of professionals, all combine to demonstrate the difficulty for a multi-facet human service organization to build a strong positive culture. It is not difficult to see that Human Service Organizations, small in size and focussing on a simple component of service (for example a child psychiatric clinic) will have a more identifiable culture than for example a community mental health clinic which would have many diverse policies to implement, competing programs and target groups and hence a greater diversity of staff. The latter clinic will need to sustain more than one culture. But if the organization is small how possible is this? Research is necessary to explore the viability of a small agency supporting more than one culture. It may be preferable for small agencies with multi programs to attempt to minimize the effect of culture.

Yet the problems of building a culture in a Human Service Organization need not necessarily lead to negative consequences. The tensions alive in the organizations as individuals and groups struggle to have their values accepted as the dominant values, can produce an energy which stimulates a search for development of greater knowledge and skill, and hence more effective services. This energy can protect the organization from the danger of strong cultures which socialize staff and lead to inappropriate norms of behaviour causing the organization to become inwardly focussed and unable to respond to changes in the environment. It can also act to prevent the development of espoused values which can be a barrier to effective behaviour and to the necessary constant questioning of treatment approaches. Support of those staff who do not challenge the culture and ostracism of those who do, is also a danger which can be averted if organisational energy is utilized positively.

Importance of teaching treatment in the context of service delivery.

The foregoing discussion has demonstrated the complex environment within which the clinician and researcher operates. To do their work effectively they must be aware how the delivery of their service is affected by the organization in which they work, or have allegiance to (e.g. their professional organization).

The clinician/researcher can no longer expect that his/her services will be seen as the core activity of the organization which will be protected by the management against threats from the environment. The objectives and processes of human service organizations are influenced by an

external environment with which management wants to maintain legitimacy and over which it often has relatively little control.

With the current emphasis of management on internal resources to ensure organizational efficiency and hence survival, there is a danger that factors other than the needs of the target client group will be more influential in shaping the objectives and in turn the culture of the organization. The concomitant danger with this is that those administrative staff with little understanding of the specialist needs of the organizations clientele will be defining the objectives and process of delivery of services.

Unless clinicians influence the organizational culture in which they work they face the potential danger of being socialized into accepting treatment approaches which fit management objectives but are not necessarily the most appropriate for the client group.

Values related to care of children and families may no longer necessarily be the major influence in the culture nor drive the mission of family and child agencies. Yet part of the professional's legitimacy and sanction in the organization comes directly to them from the public with expectations of proactive shaping of policy which will support these values.

Conclusions

Environments and culture are important to human service organizations because of the particular characteristics of these organizations. Human service organizations are operating in a changing context. The solutions suggested (eg. increased bureaucratization) may be inappropriate. External controls do not improve professional standards (Mintzberg 1981), this can only be done through training and retraining. To improve standards the emphasis should be on education of its professional. As the knowledge from the basic degree is perhaps redundant within five years (Borowski & Frederico 1986) this education should go beyond the basic degree.

Culture needs to be managed if the energy of the organization is to be directed towards facilitating effective treatment. With respect to culture the leader has to become like a conductor of a symphony orchestra (Mintzberg 1981, Slavin 1980) and is perhaps less difficult for leaders to do this if they are specialists in the area as well as administrators.

If human service professionals do not receive input on knowledge of organization, dynamics in relation to environment, culture, and dynamics of leadership in the context of their specialized knowledge and skills the organizations may be managed by administrators without essential core knowledge or practitioner leaders whose effectiveness is diminished by lack of appropriate organisational knowledge. If this occurs current treatment approaches may be less effective and development of

new approaches to treatment may be held back.

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