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Statement of the Problem

The lives of members of modern society are in large measure characterized by membership in, and dependence upon formal associations. It would be difficult to imagine a single aspect of behavior which is not deeply affected by the complex of industrial, religious, educational, and other social organizations which permeate contemporary communities (Johns, 1963, Lippit, Watson & Westley, 1958; Etzioni, 1961). Indeed, the growth of formal organizations has been represented as one of the dominant societal trends of our time (Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek, & Rosenthal, 1964; Presthus, 1962).

One important class of associations to be found in the modern community is the non-governmental social welfare agency. These organizations are charged with the responsibility of providing a broad spectrum of social services to large segments of the population. Each agency has a distinctive action program:

At the limit, an environmental stimulus may evoke immediately from the organization a highly complex and organized set of responses. Such a set of responses we call a *performance program*, or simply a *program*. For example, the sounding of the alarm gong in a fire station initiates such a program. So does the appearance of a relief applicant at a social worker's desk (March & Simon, 1958, p. 141).

The nature of an existing agency program at any given time is a function of many different factors: the demographic composition of the population; the distribution of the population within the community; the community-wide organizational welfare organizations; inter-institutional arrangements; available facilities; the reigning social philosophy; the perceptions of the agency's administrative leaders of their clients' needs, etc. At a given time and under the conditions of the total environment, the agency program might be judged as satisfactory with regard to the attainment of the organizations stated goal. However, under different environmental circumstances the agency's programmed activities may no longer be regarded as appropriate either to the organizational goals or to the current needs of the client population.

Community social welfare agencies exist for the most part within the matrix of a rapidly changing social environment. The size, composition, and distribution of the population are in continuous flux. Basic community institutions continue to revise their conceptions of their proper functions. The increased activity of tax-supported agencies in providing social services and the expansion of welfare benefits provided to employees of industrial organizations are cases in point. Changes are occurring both in the ease and level of attainment to higher socioeconomic levels independently of the efforts of social service agencies. These changes and others have important implications for current agency programs. In some cases these environmental changes obviate the need for services which are presently available. In other cases the demand for new services is created. If the services of a properly functioning social welfare organization are based on the needs of its client population then the program of that agency should adjust to the changing needs of the people it serves (Johns, 1963).

However, organizations in general, and social service agencies in particular, are highly variable in their willingness to change their programs in response to changing circumstances. Several authors have noted that organizations tend to resist change and others have hypothesized conditions which are associated with such resistance. Johns (1963) suggests that the following three conditions are likely to exist in agencies which are unresponsive to change:

- a governing board which has had little change in personnel for many years, the members of which have become absorbed in other enterprises, and who possibly have grown old in years;
- a professional staff which has become ingrown, whose key members have been in the same organization, possibly in the same position for many years, who have not been keeping up with developments in their field;
- an organization which has had little major change for many years, in its program and services, its staff or board personnel (p. 28).

Others have noted the similar resistance to policy changes in formal organizations (Kahn, et al., 1964):

In organizations the "accepted policy" is accepted by definition and bolstered by precedent and ideology. The newly created policy must be justified prior to its acceptance. Organizations vary considerably in their

receptivity to change, but it is the change and not the status quo which must be newly justified (p. 125).

On the other hand, many organizations manifest a greater receptivity to innovation:

...many bureaucracies show a remarkable viability in the face of changing circumstances. The viability suggests that even organizations largely oriented toward fixed rules may be equipped with the resources for making decisions which depart from... rules or alter them. In bureaucratic organizations such departures from rules are not universally permitted, but appear instead in particular organizational positions or substructures. Selznick (1943) singles out informal organizational structures as the primary instrument for modifying organizational goals and policies in the face of changing situational demands. Katz and Kahn (1962) argue that positions at the organizational boundaries are directly exposed to changing external requirements, and that the occupants of such positions become proposers of organizational change (Kahn, et al., 1964, p. 126).

If the community service organizations of a community indeed "have a special obligation to keep their services attuned to the changing needs of people (Johns, 1963, p. 153)" it behooves those who are responsible for the planning and provision of welfare services to recognize the variable receptivity to change on the part of social agencies and to understand the characteristics of agencies that are associated with varying degrees of receptivity to the implementation of suggestions for program innovation.

Unfortunately, relatively little information is available on the implementation of program change in community welfare organizations. Several general discussions of organizational structure and change are available (for example March & Simon, 1958; Blau & Scott, 1962; Bass, 1960) as are collections of articles on the subject (Etzioni, 1961; Bennis, Benne, & Chin, 1961; March, 1965). However, by far the greater portion of the literature pertains to organizations other than social welfare agencies such as business organizations (Dill, 1965), public bureaucracies (Peabody & Rourke, 1965), military organizations (Lang, 1965), unions (Lannenbaum, 1965), hospitals (Perrow, 1965), schools (Bidwell, 1965), and prisons (Cressey, 1965). With the exceptions of a few case studies (Sills, 1957; Sims, 1936; Pence, 1939; Sorenson & Dimock, 1955) and the general discussions based on several case histories (Johns, 1963; Lippitt, Watson & Westley, 1958) there are virtually no

Organizational Innovation

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