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Fred M. Cox
University of Michigan

John E. Tropman
University of Michigan

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COMMUNITY PLANNING ORGANIZATIONS COPING WITH THEIR PROBLEMS:
THE CASE OF THE WELFARE COUNCIL

by

Fred M. Cox and John E. Tropman
The University of Michigan

ABSTRACT

Community welfare councils, sharply attacked in the 1960's, have survived, while many of their competitors have lost ground. Understanding their survival may help community planning agencies and planners. This study combines data from a survey of community welfare councils with data from a longitudinal study of a single council. The basic problem of councils is conceptualized as value precariousness, following Clark and Selznick, and data are provided that tend to confirm the existence of this problem among councils. The ways in which councils cope with the problem are described in some detail. Finally, the findings are compared with three similar studies.

The community welfare council is an institution which has existed for over 50 years. It began in the larger communities of the United States. Today there are over 450 Councils across the country. For many years, they were the only organizations that carried out any community-wide health and welfare planning at the local level.

In the past ten years, a number of new community planning organizations were created, some in specialized areas such as mental health, juvenile delinquency or poverty, and others of a wider scope. These new planning organizations were competitive with the welfare council, often sharply critical of its performance.

The Council is of interest not only because local community planning and coordination are critical issues, but because the survival of local planning organizations is problematic. Most Councils have persisted, while the community planning organizations developed in the 1960's are now passing from the scene. Delinquency planning under the aegis of the President's Committee on Juvenile Delinquency and Youth Crime is no more. Community Action and Model Cities programs are in serious difficulties in many localities.

Councils must be understood in the context of what is known about community planning organizations generally, with an eye to uncovering some of the critical problems this type of organization must solve if it is to survive. Although organizational survival is not sufficient, it is certainly necessary for community planning. The problems with which the Council copes may well be the ones which were fatal to other planning organizations. It is from this perspective that we

approach the study of the Council.

Methodology¹

The survey data for this study come from a questionnaire sent to executive directors of welfare councils and councils of social agencies in 1963, under the auspices of the United Way of America, then called United Community Funds and Councils of America. Of the 364 questionnaires sent out, 154 were returned. In the main, it was councils in small cities which did not respond (only 14 percent, while in cities over one million, 95 percent responded). In all cases the executive was the informant, reporting on the council. Questions covered included a broad range of items. The size of the staff, their educational backgrounds, the nature and extensiveness of the programs that the councils undertook, the nature of the councils' structure, and the size and occupational backgrounds of the members of the boards of directors were all included (Tropman, 1972).

The case study is based on data collected between October 1962 and December 1963. It rests heavily on an examination of documents, dating for the most part between 1940 and 1963, which were catalogued and classified. The documents included internal memoranda, correspondence, formal reports of studies, brochures, and working papers. In addition, the minutes of the council's board of directors were reviewed, with emphasis upon the requests for study and action directed to the council, and the council's disposition of these requests. All of the council's studies and reports were gathered, listed, and read. Special attention was given to the identification of crises in the council's history, factors relating to their emergence and the ways they were resolved. In addition, information was collected from a random sample of council members active in November 1963, with a response rate of better than 70 percent. The questionnaire inquired about attitudes and opinions related to planning for local social welfare programs, the length and type of participation in the council, and basic demographic characteristics of active members. In addition, a number of open-ended interviews were conducted with members to probe and explore matters that were left ambiguous by the documentary and survey data.

The Problem: Precarious Values

Basically, the Council and perhaps other agencies engaged in interorganizational planning and coordination suffer from what Clark has called precarious values (Clark, 1956; Selznick, 1957). Operationally, precarious values are indicated by four conditions: (1) Vague goals and values, (2) Numerous goals, (3) Marginal legitimacy of goals and values and of leaders, and (4) Weak support for the autonomy of leaders.

How do these four conditions indicate the precariousness of values? First,

¹For further details on methods used in collecting these data, see Tropman (1967:27-46) and Cox (1968:261-267).

when goals are vaguely articulated, there is great uncertainty about whether particular actions help achieve goals. Some degree of ambiguity may be necessary in external relations to impede mobilization of opposition, but those responsible for their pursuit must be clear what they are after if they are to judge the effects of particular decisions.

Second, when goals are numerous, leaders may be left with little sense of direction. Numerous goals without priorities provide leaders with an opportunity to claim success for the achievement of any number of goals which may, nevertheless, be quite peripheral to the central values and interests of the organization. Attention will be given to what can be achieved rather than to what is of central importance, and the organization may drift away from its major commitments. The elaboration of goals may facilitate organizational survival when important values are unattainable, but it signifies the precariousness of central values.

Third, if advocates command little authority, the goals they support have slim backing. If particular values themselves are of little importance in a society, they are in danger of displacement. If there is wide disagreement on goals, conflict is likely to drain away efforts that might otherwise be directed toward their achievement.

Finally, when leaders are preoccupied with maintaining sources of support, fending off incursions into their domain and attacks upon their integrity, they have little time and energy to pursue goals. Under these four sets of conditions, then, goals and values are likely to be precarious.

What evidence is there that the Council's values are precarious?

Vague goals and values. To the degree that the Council's goals are vague, one would expect to find employees assigned to general, non-specific job categories. This appears to be the case. In our study of 154 welfare councils, out of an average of 3.6 professional employees, 2.3 of them are assigned to a general category, "Executive, Planning and Administration", while 1.3 are classified under specific task categories such as Social Service Exchange or Information and Referral Service. The national organization of welfare councils urges its members to employ social workers trained in community organization in its executive positions (United Community Funds and Councils, 1962). This training places more emphasis on organizing community resources to meet needs than it does upon knowledge of particular social problems, services or population categories. The Council's domain is defined as encompassing a wide variety of social problems which are never exhaustively identified, leaving its boundaries highly ambiguous (United Community Funds and Councils, 1965).

Numerous goals. The one Council studied in detail was engaged in no less than 77 activities between 1960 and 1963. In April of 1963, that Council reported that it was engaged in 16 major activities. Any one of these activities might produce numerous recommendations which the Council would have some responsibility to implement.

Marginal legitimacy. In 1963, the mean income of councils was around \$84,000. This budget is not a large one, and suggests marginal support from American communities. Particularly in smaller communities under 200,000, the budget is small, averaging around \$17,000. This level of funding, per capita considerations aside, is simply insufficient to support adequate planning and coordinating machinery. Hence, the level of funding, especially in smaller communities, suggests a dubious legitimacy.

A second way to look at marginal legitimacy is to ask if Councils act to implement their study recommendations. Rightly or wrongly, Councils have a reputation for ineffective foot-dragging, though specific ones are known to be effective. The data from the study of 154 Councils indicate some support for this impression. Council executives rated their activities on a scale of 0 (nothing had been done) to 7 (the Council had made some recommendations and had taken action to implement them). The median score for five groups of activities studied was 1.94 which suggests that Councils were not moving to implement their recommendations too strongly. Using a different measure, 22 percent of the Councils took action to implement recommendations on some topic. Even in this group we do not know whether the action was successful. This suggests that Councils do not enjoy a degree of legitimacy sufficient to really move on implementation.

Limited financial support and minimal implementation of study recommendations raises questions about the Council's legitimacy, but says little about the sources of that weakness. It may be that there is conflict over the goals pursued by Councils. The importance attached to such goals may be limited, or leaders may be able to claim only limited authority and respect.

Our case study of one Council suggests that this Council from time to time became involved in controversial matters such as birth control and national health insurance. Although the salience of these issues was high, agreement on the values represented by them was low. The majority of the activities in which the Council engages--efforts to improve rehabilitation services for the handicapped, for example--are of modest concern to most people, except those directly affected.

Legitimacy may be assessed by the extent to which the Council can attract top community leaders to the board. The data from our study of 154 Councils reveal that 36.9 percent of the Council board members are rated "top community leaders" by Council executives. While no exactly comparable data are known, Seeley's work suggests that welfare councils have fewer top community leaders than either the Red Cross or the Community Chest.²

²Seeley (1957:284,307-310) found that 43.8 percent of the campaign leaders for the Red Cross in Indianapolis in 1955 were recruited from among persons and families described as "civic leaders," "well-to-do," "solid citizens," and whose family heads were executives or professional men of high status. This percentage figure also includes persons of higher rank. The comparable figure for the Community Chest in that year was 36.3. Because our Council data were estimates made by Council executives without any definitional criteria or actual count of such

Although welfare councils may not have the same proportions of high status volunteers as other similar organizations, they do at least have some. On this basis it can command a measure of legitimacy based on consensus among civic leaders. But much of its appeal for legitimacy is based on professional grounds. Most of the professional staff (66 percent) and even more of the executives of Councils (80 percent) hold masters' degrees in social work. While this training provides professional qualifications, the social work degree does not have the prestige of the M.D. nor the recognition of the law degree. Further, many other people, laymen and professionals, make claims to expertise in areas overlapping social work. Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that the social worker's ability to speak authoritatively on matters within his domain and have his professional opinions widely accepted is marginal.

Marginal autonomy of leaders. Our study of 154 Councils shows that 88 percent of the funds that support councils come from local community chests or united funds, varying between 96 percent in smaller communities and 79 percent in larger ones. Leaders must consider the effects of their actions upon their major source of funds. While most Councils, including the one we studied intensively, enjoy close and generally cordial relations with supporting Chests and Funds, their autonomy is thereby constrained. Actions offensive to major contributors are frowned upon. Substantial resources must often be devoted to completing agency studies and other tasks for the Chest or Fund. There are ways to finance non-profit organizations that involve considerably less reduction in the autonomy of leaders, such as obtaining gifts and bequests which are invested, the income being used to provide operating funds; and soliciting small amounts from multiple sources rather than large amounts from a few sources.

It is not uncommon for councils to be preoccupied with the reorganization of their formal structure. The Council we studied intensively underwent three major and two minor reorganizations during the period between 1940 and 1963 and another major reorganization occurred after the study was terminated. These reorganizations were responsive to changes in the Council's environment, particularly changes in Community Chest and United Fund organization. The Council's leaders were exposed to irresistible pressures that diverted large amounts of time and energy away from the definition and pursuit of the Council's planning and coordinating objectives, and thus limited the freedom of action of its leaders.

leaders, while Seeley's data are based on ratings made by his research team using carefully defined criteria applied to each leader, we believe that the Council data overestimate the proportion of top community leaders active in welfare councils. Furthermore, those on boards of directors tend to be a more select and high status group than those who are active in the various committees of Councils, which committees are analogous to the campaign organization of the Red Cross and the Community Chest, on which the Indianapolis data were based.

³ See Hodge, et al. (1966). Although this study did not examine "welfare council executives" or "social workers," extrapolation from the data strongly suggests that the professional staff of welfare councils falls below physicians

The Council's mode of operation is designed to maximize interference with independent action by its leaders. The Council's major operating values include democratic participation of a large and widely representative group of people in a very substantial number of committees that hold frequent meetings and extend their deliberations over periods of months and sometimes years. It is hard to imagine a formal process better calculated to reduce leader autonomy, yet it must be remembered that this process is regarded as a major operating value of the Council.⁴

To sum up, the autonomy of the Council's leaders is restricted by their dependence on a single source of funds, irresistible external pressures, and commitment to active volunteer participation. These divert effort from planning local health and welfare programs. The limitations on their freedom springs in part from the marginal legitimacy of professionals that staff welfare councils and from the limited numbers of prestigious community leaders that Councils have been able to attract. The low level of autonomy and legitimacy of leaders has contributed to the precariousness of the Council's values together with vague and numerous goals, and the minimal importance attached to most of the Council's activities. Much of the Council's mode of operation and structure must be seen as attempts to master these conditions of its existence.

Coping with Precarious Values

The Council uses a variety of mechanisms that clarify goals, reduce their number, heighten their legitimacy and strengthen leaders. In effect, these are mechanisms that, intentionally or otherwise, assist the Council in reducing to some extent the precariousness of its values.

Formal Structure. The pattern of representation, committee structure and (2nd rank) and lawyers (11th rank). "Welfare worker for a city government" ranked 44th and "sociologist" ranked 26th.

⁴There is, of course, a very important dilemma here. While the autonomy of leaders is essential in the effective pursuit of major substantive planning goals, such autonomy conflicts with a major value of welfare councils--democratic procedures. While some planning objectives are only attainable through participation (e.g., actions requiring full commitment to operating goals and active and detailed compliance with procedures by the participants), in much planning where policy making and operations are done by different people and political or bureaucratic processes are used to influence decisions, participation is wasteful of time and effort and occasionally counterproductive. Before this dilemma can be resolved, welfare councils must decide which of their values are most important--effective planning or democratic processes. This problem is discussed in detail by Rein and Morris (1962).

roles may contribute to the legitimacy of an organization's decisions. The Council seeks to "represent" various sectors on the board. In our study of 154 Councils we found that the 4,770 board members could be classified in nine different "community sectors." The distribution of proportions falling into each sector did not vary much when councils serving communities of varying sizes were studied separately. People drawn from business and industry were most frequent (34 percent), followed by local professionals--doctors, lawyers, etc.-- (22 percent) and members of the health and welfare professions (12 percent). People drawn from other sectors--public administration, religion, higher education, the mass media, labor, and elected officials--were represented in decreasing proportions ranging from about 8 percent to about 2 percent in that order.

In our case study we found that, in 1963, 55 percent of its leaders and 40 percent of its active members had served on the board or committees of the United Fund or one of its predecessors. Fifty-six percent of that Council's active members were employees of health and welfare agencies and 30 percent were volunteers in agency activities. They were drawn from all parts of the county served by the Council, roughly in proportion to the distribution of the population in the county. Wide representation serves to strengthen the legitimacy of the Council's decisions.

The Council we studied intensively appointed 24 committees representing various interests. Three represented welfare professionals employed in health, welfare and recreation, respectively. One brought together representatives of councils in each of six localities. Four were concerned with the so-called "common services" such as the volunteer bureau and the welfare information and referral service. Several were engaged in making studies of welfare agencies that had applied for admission to the United Fund. The rest were involved in a variety of activities associated with particular agencies or fields of service--adoptions, hospital planning, homemaker service, etc. Thus, through the proliferation of committee activities, the Council accommodates a wide range of welfare interests, allowing each to pursue its objectives through the Council. This signifies the recognition of the Council as a legitimate vehicle through which various welfare interests may gain a hearing from the community.

Finally, the Council under intensive study recognized rather explicitly that its recommendations were frequently ignored, and tried to do something about this by distinguishing between the roles appropriate to welfare professionals and other "interested" parties such as agency board members, on the one hand, and "disinterested" citizens and community leaders, on the other. It recognized the need for greater participation by community leaders, that they and other disinterested citizens should have final responsibility for the Council's recommendations, and that welfare professionals and those representing particular agency interests should serve in a consultative or advisory capacity on study committees.⁵

⁵ Although planning organizations that seek general community acceptance may find that structural approaches such as these enhance their legitimacy, other types of planning organizations that base their support on a competitive pluralistic doctrine and pre-determined objectives or on expertise would find structural

Decision making criteria and processes. One way an organization may protect its weakly supported values is to adopt methods and procedures for reaching decisions that enhance their legitimacy. Welfare councils are service oriented, that is, they respond to requests from others rather than having firm agenda of their own (Zald, 1966). The Council we studied intensively received 96 requests for decision or action between November 1960 and June 1962. All but 23 percent of the 71 requests to initiate activity came from sources outside the Council. To some degree, following the request of someone else legitimizes Council action in a particular area.

Welfare councils give considerable evidence of respect for "the facts." Typically, they maintain research departments to search them out, and bolster their recommendations with facts. They endeavor to elicit the participation of professions, affected parties and disinterested citizens from various walks of life in interpreting the facts and formulating recommendations. Where there is a conflict, Councils believe that the best interests of the whole community rather than the interests of particular groups should prevail. They search for general rules which can be universally applied under stipulated conditions, rather than making decisions on an ad hoc basis. Councils regard themselves as neutral and unbiased vehicles through which wise recommendations may be formulated rather than as partisans of particular points of view. In addition, they emphasize that their planning activities threaten no one because Councils are dependent upon voluntary compliance with their recommendations. Open channels of communication, with community decision-makers and the public, involving "education," "patient negotiation, persuasion and a meeting of minds based on the logic of the situation" is regarded as necessary to bring about favorable action on Council recommendations (Harper and Dunham, 1959:363,393). All of these factors tend to enhance the legitimacy of the Council's recommendations.

Relations with other organizations. Legitimacy may be enhanced by developing relations with other organizations either through (1) structural connection, (2) funding relations, (3) rendering services or (4) overlapping membership. Welfare councils have sought such relations with community chests and united funds, welfare agencies, and welfare professionals and interest groups.

Among the 154 Councils we studied, 53 percent were structurally independent of the Fund, 23 percent were quasi-independent (which means that there were two separate organizations with the same executive) and 21 percent were merged with the Chest or Fund (which means that the Council was simply a department of the Chest or Fund). Independence drastically decreased with community size. Further, as noted above, 88 percent of the funds supporting Council operations comes from Chests or Funds, again in somewhat greater proportions among Councils serving smaller communities. In our case study, we found that in 1963, 55 percent of the leaders and 40 percent of the active members had served on the board or committees of the Fund or one of its predecessors. We also found that the Council had met many requests from the Fund for studies of agencies applying for admission to the mechanisms such as those described here counterproductive (Rein and Morris, 1962).

Fund, for advice on budget requests from agencies and for counsel on improving the efficiency and effectiveness of agencies with which the Fund was dissatisfied.

In many cases, welfare agencies created welfare councils. In our case study, this was true. While early in its history, nearly all the agency representatives were drawn from Chest-supported agencies, the balance had shifted by 1962 to about 1/3 each from Chest-supported, other private and public agencies. In 1962, only 11 percent of the Council's 385 active members were nominated by welfare agencies. However, this was compensated for, to some extent, by the fact that 86 percent of the Council's active members were either employees of welfare agencies or volunteers in agency activities. Finally, the Council responded regularly to agency requests for studies of their operations, support of their interests, etc.

Welfare professionals (apart from the agencies that employ most of them) and interest groups looked to the Council, in our case study, as a platform from which they might articulate their objectives, garner support, etc., adding to the legitimacy of the Council as a center in the community for welfare planning and coordination.

While the mechanisms discussed above reduce the precariousness of the Council's values to the extent that they enhance the legitimacy of its goals and activities and of its leadership, they go only part way toward clarifying and reducing the number of goals and make no contribution toward enhancing the autonomy of its leaders which are also crucial in strengthening the Council's values.

Goal Reduction and Clarification. Given the Council's service orientation, its responsiveness to requests from various community groups, particularly the Chest and Fund, welfare agencies, welfare professionals and interest groups, the Council faces a major problem in reducing its work to manageable proportions and selecting from among the requests it receives those which are consistent with its goals and values and with its survival.

The Council we studied in depth dealt with this problem in three ways. First, it centralized its decision-making. Second, it justified withholding additional resources, especially to its most powerful and insistent constituent, the United Fund. Finally, it developed new sources of funds to expand its resource base.

By 1950, the Council had abandoned a pattern of permanent staff allocation to semi-autonomous committees representing particular fields of practice (e.g., family and children's services). It centralized decision-making in its board of directors, delegating responsibility to a program committee directly responsible to the board. It developed criteria for selecting appropriate projects; assigned priorities to various projects that were proposed and found desirable; set limits on the tenure of study committees; and delegated to the Council's executive director responsibility for recommending appropriate projects and priorities.

Although it had been unsuccessful in doing so in the past, in 1961 the Council

⁶See footnote 5.

was able to reject insistent demands by the Fund that it conduct a comprehensive study to plan for the long-range development of all local welfare services. The Council acknowledged that such a study was desirable, but pleaded inadequate funds and staff, and asked the Fund to provide money to hire additional personnel. Further, the Council argued that it was not available solely for service to the Fund but also had responsibilities to public and other non-Fund supported private agencies.

The Council was able to expand its resources by borrowing staff from other agencies and by obtaining funds from sources other than the United Fund. In 1962, the Council we studied closely received 41 percent of its support from state and federal agencies, city government, a foundation, fees, and a few other minor sources. While this did not reduce the number of goals the Council pursued, it had the same effect by increasing the Council's capacity to handle additional activities. In comparison to other welfare councils, this one received a very high proportion of its support from sources other than the United Fund.

Enhancing the Autonomy of Leaders. Centering control in the hands of a cadre of leaders seems antithetical to the principal values of welfare councils, which place great emphasis on wide representation and participation in decision-making. However, the phenomenon of leadership control in democratic organizations is well known,⁷ and it would be surprising if the facts were otherwise in welfare councils. Although we cannot be sure how widespread the phenomenon is among welfare councils, we are reasonably sure that within wide limits the staff, most of whom were social workers with close ties to other welfare professionals, was substantially in control of the Council we studied intensively. The proportion of the Council's active members nominated by organizations (mainly welfare agencies) diminished from 46 percent in 1940 to 11 percent in 1962. Thus fewer members were responsible for protecting salient agency interests, making it easier for staff to influence decisions. After 1957, individuals rather than organizations became members of the Council, and they were counseled to use their best judgment rather than trying to reflect the views of the agencies with whom they may have been associated, again leaving a void which was filled by the Council's staff. Not only was the decision-making process centralized, as noted above; key staff members were placed in crucial advisory positions to committees, and were generally deferred to by volunteers who typically regarded themselves as "laymen."

How is staff control maintained? First, long association between volunteers and Council staff developed attitudes of trust and respect. The average length of association of the Council's volunteer leaders was eight and one-half years in 1962. Other active members had been associated with the Council for an average of four and one-half years.

Second, staff advise in selecting volunteers for committee assignments. Given

⁷ Michels' work (1949), first published in 1915, is the classical study which demonstrates the precariousness of democratic processes even in voluntary associations that are committed to a democratic ethic.

the long background of the average leader in Council affairs, they know a great deal about the policies and problems of welfare programs and are familiar with the viewpoints of Council staff. Given the staff's role in their selection, they are likely to support decisions consistent with staff views even in the absence of suggestions from staff members.

Third, and probably most important, the Council's staff is in a key position to control the content of communications to volunteer decision-makers. A staff member generally prepares a "charge" to guide a committee's work, selects "experts" to testify before committees, organizes relevant data for committee review, prepares drafts of reports and recommendations, etc. Although it is possible for volunteers to overrule staff decisions, in practice committees are highly dependent upon such staff inputs.

Finally, there is some indication that, as a price for their influence, staff members avoid the salient interests of volunteers, especially when a proposal would mobilize controversy. In this way, the Council staff, in tacit coalition with welfare professionals, can advance their professional interests within the limits of existing consensus.

Comparison with Other Studies

How do our answers compare with the conclusions reached in other studies? We have been able to find only one other study of a community welfare council (Baker, et al., 1973). However, there are a number of studies of community planning as a process and its problems (Burke, 1965 and 1967; Callahan, 1973; Gilbert, et al., 1973; Head and Drover, 1970; MacRae, 1965, Perlman, 1961), and a few studies of other community planning organizations (Marris and Rein, 1973; Seeley, 1957; Warren, 1967; Warren, et al., 1974).

One way to view our analysis is that it reflects the difficulty in achieving the objectives of community planning. Whether studies focus upon community planning as a process or upon the community planning organization, nearly all reflect the difficulty in achieving community planning objectives. The major difference between our analysis and most other studies is that our focus is upon what is required to cope with a selected range of organizational problems which we found to be characteristic of community welfare councils. Most other studies ask how planning organizations or planners can achieve their objectives; we ask how such organizations are able to maintain themselves. We have selected three studies that have special significance for brief attention here.

Reform and Its Problems

One question asked about Councils is why they have not been more successful in introducing reforms in the local community. The work of Marris and Rein (1973), while not focusing directly on councils, provides some perspective in this regard. Their study concentrates on strategies for achieving social reform aimed at reducing delinquency, poverty and related social problems, with special emphasis on the dilemmas experienced by the organizations in pursuing reform. In our terms, change

aimed at reducing poverty, etc. is a precarious value. The ways in which social reform organizations meet the difficulties arising from their efforts are analogous to what we have called coping.

The Philadelphia Center for Community Advancement (PCCA), used by Marris and Rein as a case study in the problems of reform-oriented organizations, provides several insights which parallel our own. The Center, which was in the process of formation at the time of the study, threatened to abort over the inability to obtain agreement between the funding source and the city government on the formal structure for planning. Because the problem of representation and the respective roles of various participants was never resolved, the Center found it extremely difficult to reach decisions. In contrast to the community welfare councils which pride themselves in the breadth of their representation, PCCA was torn with dissension over the appropriate formal structure for planning, who should participate, and the roles--planning, decision-making, advising, etc.--to be played by the various interests. One problem faced by PCCA--the participation of representatives of the target community--was not an issue during much of the period of our case study. Another important difference between PCCA and the welfare councils is that the former was bent upon major reform, guided by a theoretical perspective drawn from the social sciences. PCCA intended not only to plan changes but to gather within itself the authority to carry those plans forward into action. The welfare councils recognize they have no authority other than "the power of persuasion." They hope to be given a hearing by the various centers of decision, once they have formulated their recommendations, but recognize that they have no more than the right to educate, to urge consideration of their views by those who carry ultimate responsibility.

The service orientation of the welfare councils stands in marked contrast to PCCA and most of the other social reform projects studied by Marris and Rein. The leaders of these reform efforts had a more or less clearly formulated agenda they wished to pursue, while the welfare councils are largely responsive to external demands. Various interests use the welfare councils as vehicles for articulating and pressing their interests in the community. The Councils themselves are, by and large, viewed as neutral until they have adopted a position after a study process.

The kinds of internal influence exercised by the staff of the welfare council we studied intensively seldom have an opportunity to develop in the context of the newly emerging social reform organizations Marris and Rein studied. Perhaps in their later stages, when reform had been abandoned for ordinary service delivery, some of the mechanisms of staff influence may have developed, but this was not highlighted in Marris and Rein's study. Because of the salience of the interests involved for the various participants in social reform, it would have been surprising if staff had developed the same degree of control as it exercised in the welfare council we studied closely. Also, the degree of internal consensus found in most welfare council activities was not to be found in these social reform efforts. Yet the council we studied was in a dilemma. It could push reform to a point, but not too far. And indeed, it may well be most effective in picking up the thrusts developed by the now

defunct "reform" organizations and carrying them forward. Community consensus has shifted over this period and the welfare council is able to take advantage of the new consensus that forms around specific issues even if it is incapable of shaping that consensus.

Community Decision Organizations

Warren and his colleagues reflected a general concern with councils in the 1960's. They note that there was a feeling among many leaders of social reform organizations "...that the existing organizations in its (social planning) field, particularly the community welfare councils, were unable to innovate sufficiently to bring about system change..." (Warren, 1967:267). In this respect, however, the council did not appear to differ from the other group of organizations in the local community which Warren and his colleagues called community decision organizations (CDO's). They studied CDO's in nine cities between 1967 and 1972 (Warren, et al., 1974). They define CDO's as "organizations legitimated for making decisions and/or taking action on behalf of the community in specific sectors of concern." Among CDO's available for study, they chose the public school systems, urban renewal agencies, health and welfare councils, community action agencies, Model Cities programs, and community mental health planning organizations. They studied interaction, cooperation, innovation and participation among these organizations as they pursued social reform. While they would probably agree that social reform is a precarious value, they would not agree that the failure to achieve reform objectives is due to weak institutional supports for those values. Instead, they would argue that the "institutionalized thought structure" which provides the context for the operations of all CDO's--the view that American society is essentially sound in its organization, that residual social problems arise from the inability of a relatively small number of individuals to cope with the reasonable demands of the society, etc.--is strong and unchallenged by any of the CDO's and that failures to achieve sound reform are attributable to the tacit acceptance of the institutionalized thought structure which constrains action within socially defined limits. On the infrequent occasions when it is challenged, impressive sanctions are mobilized against the transgressors.

It has not been our task to explain the failure of the welfare council in achieving social reform. Rather, we asked a more limited question: How does the welfare council manage to survive in the context of its precarious values? And we answered this question with an analysis of the mechanisms used by the council in coping with its precariousness. These features of the welfare council can also help us understand why it has accomplished so little in the way of reform. For example, reform is hard to come by when decisions are made by those who are the targets of reform. The fiction of rationality in decision making obfuscates the significance of existing patterns of operation for the maintenance requirements of organizations to be reformed, and discourages the mobilization of political influence. Finally, the autonomy and influence of the welfare council's leaders is, as we have suggested, grounded upon and limited by the implicit rule that the salient interests of volunteers are not to be violated.

The Open Systems Approach

Of the three studies reviewed here, the recent study by Baker and his associates comes closest to our own, both in its focus upon the community welfare council as an institution and its concern with the problems faced by welfare councils in coping with the conditions of their existence (Baker, et al., 1973). Instead of beginning with an analysis of the precariousness of the council's major values and asking how it is able to cope with the problems flowing from that precariousness, Baker and his colleagues characterize the welfare council as an open system in a turbulent environment. From an analysis of the literature on open social systems, they identify five central dilemmas that councils must struggle with if they are to maintain themselves: (1) boundary control vs. boundary permeability; (2) variety vs. homogeneity of personnel, member agencies, constituencies, ideologies, issues, etc.; (3) differentiation vs. integration of internal structure and functions; (4) input vs. output constituencies, i.e., responsiveness to demands of those that provide resources vs. those who use the products of the council's activities; and (5) proactivity vs. reactivity or formulation of organizational agenda internally vs. responsiveness to external demands of funding sources, etc. In general, their conclusion is that the welfare council and other such open systems will move toward one or the other end of each of these polarized dimensions or adopt some mixed pattern depending upon specifiable conditions which they face.

Clearly, many of our findings may be reinterpreted in open system terms. Perhaps the major reason for the precariousness of the council's values is the openness of the council to external pressures. Leaders may state goals vaguely to diminish awareness of irresolvable conflicts resulting from the differing demands of various constituencies. Numerous goals are a way of responding to as many different demands as possible. Limited autonomy of leaders reflects their vulnerability to external demands.

Many of the mechanisms we found councils using to cope with their precariousness parallel resolutions of the dilemmas Baker and his colleagues observed in the welfare council they studied. Our discussion of the council's formal structure parallels Baker's analysis of the variety of inputs and internal differentiation. We found the welfare council to be widely representative of various sectors of the community, including the council's input constituencies, and we also found considerable internal differentiation in the form of committees and role differentiation of different types of participants (e.g., agency representatives were advisory; community leaders were given final responsibility for decisions). The council's service orientation may be interpreted as a form of boundary permeability and reactivity, in Baker's terms, while its efforts to locate universal decisional criteria are an indication of its efforts to integrate its decisions. The welfare council's patterns of relating to other organizations is a reflection of the openness of its system and the permeability of its boundaries. Our discussion of the council's efforts to limit and clarify its goals may be understood as a reflection of the process of integration and an attempt to become somewhat more proactive and homogeneous

in the problems it tackled. At the same time, the council's efforts to obtain funds from sources other than the United Fund and to borrow staff from other agencies reflected attempts to enable the council to react to a wider variety of demands placed upon it. Mechanisms for enhancing the autonomy of leaders may also be understood as integrative and proactive strategies.

One element of Baker's analysis that is conspicuously missing from ours is the dilemma of response to input vs. output constituencies. Our analysis did not lead us into an examination of this problem, although some raw data are available that bear upon it. We believe this reflects the historical period of our study, the fact that output constituencies--service agency clientele and ordinary citizens--were not an organized force able to bring negative sanctions to bear upon the welfare council until the mid-sixties. In fact, the concept of an output constituency was created by Warren about 1967 in an effort to understand community decision organizations (Warren, 1967).

Conclusions

Now that some of the high expectations of community planning (or community decision) organizations of the 1960's have been moderated, it is a good time to examine the problems of these organizations. Clearly, the critics of the welfare council fared no better, and in terms of organizational maintenance, worse, than the organization they criticized. That experience lends some support to Warren's notions of what happens when the "institutionalized thought structures" are challenged. On the other hand, the councils do try to represent and embody some other definitions of the problem, within an acceptable context. Baker and his associates, in proposing an open system model, come closest to presenting the kind of structure the council uses to survive. Using the open system approach, the council can engage in a series of coping mechanisms which retain it as a balanced, non-partisan organization. Our findings with respect to the council's strategies for survival are quite consistent with the open system approach.

We found that councils were able to cope with their problems by adopting (1) patterns of broad representation; (2) decision-making processes that encourage wide participation and maintain the image of the Council as neutral and non-threatening; (3) relations with other organizations that lend legitimacy to the Council's leaders and decisions; (4) methods for clarifying and reducing the number of goals and activities; and (5) approaches that enhance the autonomy of the Council's leaders.

The welfare council is only one of many locality-based organizations which may be called community planning or decision organizations. Others include city planning departments, councils of churches, hospital planning councils, model cities agencies, etc. To understand the success or failure of local planning will require comprehension of the community planning organization, both as an organization and as an actor in an inter-organizational network. This report contributes something to the first requirement. Knowledge of the welfare council should contribute to an understanding of the larger class of community planning organizations to which it belongs.

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