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Solving the Effectiveness Dilemma:
How Can An Informal Network Create Change?

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ABSTRACT

Interagency networks seem to be good vehicles for informal communication and coordination. However, if they are to be effective in bringing about innovation, networks must develop some of the boundaries and structure of a group and thereby lose their informality. Examination of a case history of a network in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, suggests one alternative: A network can remain informal and operate by consensus but give rise to sub-groups which take potentially controversial action in their own names. This possibility is explored and related to the emerging theory of social networks.

Fragmentation of social services, along with tight budgets, had led to increased interest in the development of interorganizational networks as part of the practice of community psychology (Reid and Chandler, 1976; Sarason, Carroll, Maton, Cohen, and Lorentz, 1977; Sarason and Lorentz, 1979). Earlier, similar groupings called welfare councils (Cox and Tropman, 1976) attempted to provide coordination and planning within communities. These councils have existed in the United States for something over 50 years; in the 1960's, they came under attack for being more effective at blocking innovative change than creating it. Indeed, Warren, Rose, and Bergunder (1974:32-33) suggest that health and welfare councils, as examples of what they call Community Decision Organizations, have several latent functions in addition to their manifest one of facilitating coordinated planning. These functions include protecting existent organizations from competition, from challenges, and from new conceptions of problems.

Informal networks, on the other hand, are quite different. They do not necessarily make binding decisions, and they differ from health and welfare councils in both structure and function. Networks are unbounded, open systems of linkages among individual elements (Sarason, et al., 1977). There is no necessary hierarchical structure; and goals, insofar as they can be inferred

from interaction in networks, can be fluid and changing. Much of the value of a network as perceived by its members comes from informal information sharing in a non-threatening social context.

As a result, members of a network face a dilemma when they feel called upon either to develop a more formal structure (for purposes of efficiency) or to take positions on potentially controversial matters (for purposes of effect). To do either is to risk loss of the informal and non-threatening atmosphere which members find attractive; to do neither is to risk being ineffective.

We suggest that it is a common developmental dilemma. This paper will focus on the dilemma, through analysis of a case history of an informal network of human service staff people in central Pennsylvania. We begin with some background material on why such networks might arise in the first place and on some concepts useful in analyzing activities undertaken by networks.

Fragmentation and Service Gaps

The identification of discrete skills in human services, as in medicine and elsewhere, has enabled the development of sophisticated services for meeting human needs. The identification of groups of people with special social service needs also resulted in the appearance of problem-specific agencies, each with a special charge and caseload. The American tradition of voluntary action has facilitated this process by providing a context in which both professionals and volunteers feel free to develop new agencies as soon as they see new needs. The new agencies, however, are seldom well interlocked with existing ones, and fragmentation of services results (McShane, 1979).

Clearly, as human service programs have diversified, it has become increasingly difficult for any one among them to treat all the needs of any one client. Most specialty agencies are not geared to provide for the needs of the whole person (Eriksen, 1977). Instead, they can only do so through effective referral to other specialty agencies. Of course, there is a recognition that, with the sub-division of human needs into particular need categories, corresponding program specialization has rendered caregiving organizations more interdependent. One would assume that this interdependence, if recognized, might give rise to efforts at interagency coordination to offset isolation among the elements in the continuum of care. The sociological literature suggests that matters are not quite so simple (Litwak and Hylton, 1962; Meyer, Litwak, Thomas, and Vinter, 1967). Formal coordination is more likely to occur when there are many (e.g. 100) agencies, when agencies are aware that they are dependent on each other, and when the activities requiring coordination are uniform

and standardized. An example might be coordinated fund raising by a Community Chest (Meyer, et al.; 1967). With fewer agencies, less official awareness of interdependency and highly varied non-standard activities, formal coordination will be unlikely. Instead we would expect to find personal ad hoc contact or perhaps conferences between agency staff. Formal coordination seems unlikely because the social structure of the situation simply does not demand it.

In the present case, a network in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, we have many agencies (the network's 1980 mailing list names 115). However, there is mixed official awareness of interdependence; and interagency activities vary widely and are not uniform. As a result, we would not expect and we do not see widespread formal coordination.

Informal coordination, however, does occur both in Harrisburg and in general. Often it tends to support the status quo (Warren, Rose, and Bergunder, 1974). This support results from a desire shared among agencies to continue with as little interference from other agencies as possible. More precisely, it is in the interest of any one organization to be concerned about its own survival, defined as continued access to clients, labor resources, and other resources like plant and funds (Levine and White, 1961). Since this is true of all agencies in a given area, an interagency "live and let live" norm (Warren, Rose, and Bergunder, 1974) develops, serving the function of reducing the range of possible conflict among agencies.

In the case of an interagency network, the "live and let live" norm would give rise to pressure not to raise controversial issues if any member agency felt that it could be injured by the ensuing conflict. This is one horn of the network's dilemma. Not dealing with the issue is the other horn.

Conflict can also arise from duplication of services. Agencies may avoid duplication by seeking "domain consensus," defined as the degree to which agencies " . . . accept each other's claims to the social . . . problems covered, services offered, and type of recipient served" (Levine, 1974:376). The result of domain consensus is a shared aversion to duplication of services, an aversion which increases the more scarce social service monies become.

As Levine points out, one of the problems in interagency coordination is that there are many levels of authority, both public and private, and that " . . . no single agency is charged with the responsibility of coordinating the activities of other health and welfare organizations" (Levine, 1974:374). In a world of different mandates and unshared masters, it makes some sense for each agency to be concerned about generating "success" primarily in the terms which its funders happen to use. As a result,

fragmentation spawns service gaps.

One possible corrective to fragmentation is the use of informal networks of agency personnel for information sharing, social support, joint planning, and joint action.

Networks

There are two widely available reviews of literature relevant to networks (Sarason, et al., 1977; Mitchell, 1969); the work of these writers will not be repeated here. The term network is widely used in current social science. Networks are generally considered to be unbounded systems of linkages among individual elements. The elements can be persons, or other parties, such as agencies. Linkages vary greatly in content; but, in most network theory, they are seen as having positive and negative value for participants as well as simple connection. Elements can be linked to each other directly or indirectly through intermediate elements.

Human service networks. In the cases under consideration here, the elements are individual people who usually work for a human service agency but who do not necessarily represent the agency within the network.

This is important because it allows involvement in network activities to take place on a relatively informal, even ad hoc basis. Remember that networks are not quite the same as groups; they have a relatively open structure with no clear inside and outside and are less likely to have stable goals or internal hierarchies. As a result, they are more flexible; and we suggest that networks are more able than tightly structured groups to new demands from changing environments.

However, concerted response by a network raises the dilemmas to which this paper refers. Again, informality is attractive; but effective action implies some degree of group structure (Sherif and Sherif, 1956). As we suggested earlier, effectiveness in areas of even mild interagency conflict is likely to threaten some potentially allied agencies. As a result, the network is likely to become less open and more like a group. To the degree that the network becomes engaged in actual conflict, the pressure for the development of group boundaries is likely to become overwhelming (Sherif, 1966).

Clearly, if a network is to take effective action and remain a network, some way to transcend the dilemma must be developed.

One such transcendence can occur through the social support function which networks often serve. Consider people who see a problem within their own agencies and see as well a potential solution--but who are unsure of their ability to effect the solution. Discussion of the situation within a network may provide

clarity of understanding but perhaps more importantly may also provide encouragement from friends, enabling people to act as individuals, effecting solutions.¹

Another way to transcend the effectiveness dilemma might be to form sub-committees which could be either ad hoc, "one shot" entities (quasi groups) or actual groups. If the sub-committees do their work outside of the network in their own names, then the network itself can be protected somewhat from the effects of action. This is an important possibility, and we shall examine it further by discussing various kinds of groups and quasi groups.

An action-set is initiated by a person for a particular purpose, with a wide variety of outgoing links (kinship, a shared occupation), but a single kind of incoming link activity--in Mayer's (1966) prototypical case, electoral support in a campaign. Action-sets are bounded (not infinite, like a network) and made up of both direct and indirect links. They are impermanent, lasting only until the initiator's purpose is achieved. They are quasi groups, similar both to networks and to true groups.

In a given network, different action-sets can emerge from different contexts and for different purposes. For instance, in a human service network, action-sets might be called together to provide interagency planning for a given client or to provide criticism of a particular agency's proposal. The purpose of action-sets are relatively clear, short-term, and are usually stated by an individual actor. The action in the action-set can take place under the name of the network or outside of the network per se and under the name of the individual actor. Again, this is important since it is one way a network can have its informal cake and eat it too.

Action groups. In contrast with action sets, we suggest a new term, action group. The term refers to bounded, purposive entities emerging out of networks which differ from action-sets by having hierarchically structured roles including leader roles and by serving collective rather than individual purposes. Action groups are true groups formed for the purpose of task-related social action. Again, the action can take place under the name of the action group rather than the network, allowing action, but protecting the network.

We shall return to this issue after consideration of the history of a particular network. This entity, the Cross Problematic Committee (CPC), has existed in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, since 1975. A study of its development and activities can shed light both on development of network goals and on the conditions under which a network can be effective.

¹Dr. Sandra Prince-Embury is thanked for suggesting this possibility.

The Cross Problematic Committee

The City of Harrisburg lies on the Susquehanna River in south central Pennsylvania. It is a manufacturing center, a transportation center, and the State Capital. Dauphin County, within which Harrisburg lies, has a 1980 census of 232,317; and the Harrisburg Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area (Dauphin, Cumberland, and Perry counties) has a population of 446,071 (Scotzin, 1981). A 1980 survey of social agencies, carried out by Direction Services, indicates over 800 such agencies in the metropolitan region. The city is somewhat less than 200 years old and has an ethnically and racially mixed population. Although Harrisburg itself is rather small (53,000 in 1980), it shares some of the urban problems (racial tension, high inner-city unemployment, out migration) of its sister cities in the northeast.

History. The Committee's two founding agencies were Harrisburg's 24-hour ambulatory alcohol detoxification shelter and its emergency mental health/mental retardation (MH/MR) crisis intervention program. The two systems (drug and alcohol and (MH/MR) came into contact largely through these two agencies.

The founders of the CPC saw a relationship between the trend toward specialization in human services and the need for the corrective development of intercoordinative machinery.

Programs which provide emergency 24-hour human service seem to be fertile ground for the development of contact networks and for the identification of service gaps in the community. Such agencies must respond to a great range of service needs since they are often the only human service shows in town during hours of darkness (supplemented of course by emergency medical and law enforcement programs) and since they must learn to draw creatively on resources to treat effectively each human service crisis.

The two founding agencies became aware that many people with multiple problems, such as those who were both emotionally distressed and abusive of alcohol, could be justifiably turned away by the MH/MR agency because they were alcohol abusers, but also turned away by drug and alcohol because they needed mental health services. By applying in good faith a rigid set of standards for service eligibility, each agency closed the door on clients in need.

In researching the client records, the two agencies became convinced that, for want of cooperation and flexibility, a large number of seriously disabled persons were being excluded from service caseloads; and it was out of these-specific concerns that the first CPC meeting occurred in September, 1975. From the start, the CPC was an informal human services network for the

sharing of information and the identification of case specific problems.

The early meetings of the CPC included participation from primary providers of service within the drug and alcohol and MH/MR systems. The meetings discussed clients who appeared on the caseloads of both agencies. The hope was that enough cooperation could be engendered in these meetings to permit the development of joint treatment plans. Such plans did indeed result in some cases.

Quite soon, the CPC expanded its membership to other human service organizations. As agencies discussed one another's services, the CPC began to demonstrate merit as a forum for information sharing across human service disciplines; and program representatives began to feel more comfortable with one another.

The CPC quickly identified service gaps affecting clusters of clients. By early 1976, the Committee had begun to consider ways in which service gaps could be brought to the attention of those in positions of power. These service gaps, highlighted through the consideration of case specific problems, became "causes for the Committee.

Through word of mouth within the human service community, the fact became advertised that a forum was evolving through which individual agencies could gain the floor to discuss their work and concerns with professionals and workers from other programs.

Participants in the CPC varied from meeting to meeting, but with each new issue or client additional agencies joined in the process. Meetings not devoted to particular cross problematic people were focused on topics such as shelter for transients or a particular agency's program. As more agencies used the Committee for whatever purpose, its value as an information sharing setting heightened. By the end of the first year, what had originally begun as an interface between two agencies became a project that incorporated 15 human services. It had also evolved from clinical discussion to information sharing and issue evaluation.

Within the first year, one action-set² had developed, led by the Committee's convener. This focused on residential treatment

²In reviewing Committee records, the following operational distinction was made between an action-set and an action group. If an individual member of the Committee had become interested in an issue and if there were evidence of that individual's activating others about the issue but no evidence of a group forming, with meetings, division of labor, or a name, then an action-set was inferred. If there were evidence of meetings of more than two people, division of labor, and a name, then an action group was inferred. Note that the work of either a set or a group can take place either inside or outside the Committee network itself.

for organically disabled alcohol abusers and succeeded in developing community support for a shelter. Along the way, Committee discussion also generated momentum to a United Way Task Force an action group which developed astutely and facilitated establishment of an eventual YWCA emergency shelter.

During the second full year, 1977, it became clear that the Committee was serving simultaneous functions that were in some ways beginning to compete with one another for time. The Committee, which met bi-weekly, was becoming increasingly absorbed in addressing problem areas and considering ways of bringing about community change while the case-specific discussions, which most interested many of the original members, had taken a second seat. By the end of 1977, 43 people had attended one or more meetings, 33 of them during 1977 itself. Of these 33, 18 joined the group during 1977.

As the group continued to grow and included people from outside the continuum of care for clients, concerns for confidentiality in the discussion of individual cases arose. This was at a time of new and stricter State and Federal guidelines for the sharing of information about clients in treatment.

Problems related to confidentiality eventually proved insurmountable to the Committee, which dropped the case specific function from its repertoire after experimenting briefly with compromise strategies. Records of CPC meetings show that during the third year (1978), it had become almost exclusively information sharing and issue oriented in its agendas. The confidentiality crisis represented the end of the first phase of development for the Committee. Although this change was accompanied by some shifting in core representation,³ the Committee continued to expand in size and scope.

As discussion of cases decreased, consideration of issues increased. In the second year, 1977, one action-set was formed around Traveler's Assistance, and a group formed seeking support for a halfway house for non-alcoholic drug abusers. The Traveler's Assistance set still (as of 1981) exists and shows promise of giving rise to United Way funding. The halfway house group failed and disbanded.

³ Although variables other than just the focus of the Committee were probably at play, the core of the network shifted away for organizations with primary case-specific concerns (e.g., alcoholism, children and youth, probation) and toward those with more general planning concerns (e.g., the YWCA and United Way) in the period from 1978 to 1979.

During 1978, one additional action group was formed, tellingly named the Resource and Influence Committee, whose charge it was to seek both for the Committee. By 1980, this sub-committee had developed into a full-blown steering committee. This evolution will be examined further below.

By the Fall of its fourth year, 1979, the CPC was simultaneously pursuing many issues, several of which required the development of sub-committees answering back with recommendations for action. Still, the Committee was informal, unincorporated, and only loosely coordinated.

An emphasis on issues characterized the Committee's second phase.

The Committee approached issues in several ways. Some problems were resolved through the natural process of information sharing through network meetings in which agencies improved communications and thereby offered better service.

Some issues tackled by the Cross Problematic Committee called for more than the process of meeting and discussing, particularly those which cited service deficits that only new programming could correct.

By the end of 1980, an additional group had formed which was clearly based outside the Committee with a constituency and some hope of developing a center for deaf people. Four additional action-sets had also developed centered around interested individual committee members. All still function, up to the time of this writing, the Spring of 1981. One focuses on public relations for the Committee. Another, working on client problems with MH/MR catchment areas, continues with the active involvement of the Steering Committee. The third focuses on tenant-landlord relationships and has scheduled several discussion meetings with landlords and with city low-income housing officials. The fourth focuses on problems of adolescents and works by providing a Committee liaison with interested community leaders.

As time passed, the Committee established and maintained close communication and overlapping membership with the United Way, the coordinative offices of County Human Services and City government. These links enabled the CPC to speak to decision makers about the periodic need for innovation. The Committee was successful in putting its priorities on the "to do" lists of influence wielding organizations, and this made the Committee's role in community issues even more legitimate.

In looking back over the first five years of the CPC, there is much to suggest that something here has worked to bring agencies together to share information, identify problems, serve as a forum for planning, and seek solutions. Participation rose from 15

participating agencies in 1975 to 69 in 1979 with more than 140 agencies having participated in some fashion by December, 1980. One hundred and fifteen agencies or individuals currently receive minutes.

Process. One of the more obvious elements in the success of the Committee is its reliance on a consensus model for decision-making, which allows both informality and enough order to advance solution.

The Committee operates by consensus, meaning that activities and projects of the Committee must first be unanimously approved by those present at meetings. Since no one objects to the development of action sets and groups, the CPC has been able to avoid two common traps: the statement of generalities too broad to pursue, or the development of factions which no longer communicate with each other. Consensus reduces the potential threat to any member while it allows the development of broad policy, which can lead to action.

Of course, adopting the consensus model does delimit the potential range of action possibilities for the larger Committee. Some issues that speak to the very heart of what is wrong in the community cannot be effectively addressed through a consensus forum (one veto and you're out); but again the trade-off is that the Committee has succeeded in bringing diverse groups together to select problems and strategies.

Another element that accounts for Committee diversity is a matter of style. Under the ongoing leadership of the chairperson, there is an implicit understanding that, "We are all in this together." The question is not, "Who is doing his or her job," but "What can we do together to make the community work more effectively." This makes Committee participation attractive to a wide variety of people: administrators, supervisors, direct service workers, and citizens. Because of this vertical mix, discussions of issues tend not to focus on the territory and culpability of particular agencies but rather on potential interorganizational solutions.

Structure. The discussion of style brings us to the discussion of Committee structure. Once more, the CPC is a vehicle without by-laws and without binding parameters. The chairperson and action-set or action group leaders provide much of the energy. No formal offices exist. The necessary ingredients have been the willingness of agencies to permit representatives to attend and to commit space for meeting locations which shift from agency to agency. One benefactor agency (the local MH/MR program) has released the time of the chairperson between meetings for meeting coordination, phone calls, and preparation and circulation of meeting minutes. The chairperson has acted as such throughout the history of the CPC.

One of the more interesting issues relating to structure within the Committee has come out of discussions about how best the Committee might develop resources with which to gain additional policy-making influence. As was mentioned above, an Influence and Resources sub-committee formed in 1978, charged with exploration of various alternative routes to increased power. After several meetings and much discussion, the sub-committee (by then an action group) recommended that grant proposals be written so as to bring funding for a staff person. This person's job would be to coordinate sub-committee (action-set or action group) activities and do necessary research and followup of Committee decisions.

At a meeting in the Fall of 1979, the Committee rejected this recommendation for two reasons. First, there was fear that obtaining funding would threaten member agencies, who would become concerned about possible conflicts over policy issues with a high-profile Committee. Second, network members felt that a staff person, if hired, would tend to solidify his or her position by locating issues or problems which demanded staff time, whether or not the Committee would otherwise feel that action was called for. Members expressed liking for the informality of the Committee and for the fact that it was able to drop issues which seemed unimportant to the membership.

After considerable further sub-committee discussion, the leader of the Influence and Resources sub-committee suggested that it might appropriately transform itself into a steering committee to be made up of leaders of action-sets or action groups and other interested individuals. This suggestion was accepted at a Committee meeting in early October, 1980. The Steering Committee continues to meet between Committee meetings with coordination of action and strategy as its primary agenda. It recommends policy to the full Committee but does not act on its own.

Discussion

The decision not to hire staff is particularly interesting since it provides one way to avoid the goal displacement to which the development of vested staff interests would tend to give rise (Selznick, 1943; Hudson, 1978).

At the same time, the development of a Steering Committee provides a mechanism for necessary internal division of labor and coordination of effort. The Steering Committee becomes, in effect, an action group with the Committee as a whole as its field. With the maintenance of a consensus decision-making norm, the Committee can remain informal and non-threatening to its membership.

However, in order to carry out Committee decisions and have effect on people external to the Committee, additional sub-sets

of people capable of carrying out action seem to be necessary. What the Committee has hit upon is a widely varying array of sub-committees ranging from single people who activate others (action-sets) of full-blown possibly externally based groups which can act in their own names (action groups). Since action on social issues involves conflict and conflict gives rise to groups (Sherif, 1966), action groups seem most likely to form where controversy is present. The history of the Committee suggests that action groups are most likely to form either when new resources are needed to fill service gaps or when policy changes are necessary at a systems level in order to correct policy. In other cases, either informal coordination or action by interested individuals seems sufficient to correct fragmentation or the filling of service gaps through reallocation of resources. Figure 1 outlines these relationships.

Figure 1

Relationships Between Human Service Problems,
Solutions, and Degree of Appropriate Group Structure

<u>Problem</u>	<u>Solution (Goals)</u>	<u>Degree of Structure of Entity Achieving Goals</u>
Fragmentation	Informal Coordination	Low: Network
Service Gap	1. Plan reallocation of existent re- sources	1. Medium: Action-Set
	2. Plan development of new resources	2. High: Action-Group
Systemic Cause of Human Hard- ship	Campaign for social change	High: Action-Group

An example might clarify the relationships further. At the same time, it can illustrate the possible evolutionary development from network to action-set to action group.

An Example: Fuel Costs. In the least structured of network settings, a news-sharing session among workers from various agencies, a variety of concerns can arise. For example, as winter nears and oil prices rise, methods for handling emergency requests for fuel or fuel monies are likely to be discussed. At the very least, agencies will learn of each other's plans (or the lack of them). Individual agency staff or agency representatives might

go on record as being willing to allocate staff time or monies to fuel-related concerns. Sometimes an open commitment of this form can be useful in itself when publicized through network minutes.

On the other hand, it may be that what surfaces in an information sharing session is that there are no adequate plans to handle an impending fuel crisis. Federal monies may not have been appropriated, state disbursement systems may not be in place, or other snags might occur. In this case, a network has a number of alternatives for action.

It might, for instance, form a sub-group (an action-set) focused around an interested network member, which would write a letter, contact appropriate officials, or otherwise make action-set concerns known to those in power. This is a short-lived sort of activity, the mildest form of administrative lobbying. Agitation for planning has emerged out of information sharing. There has been a small, incremental shift in an ad hoc goal. With this shift, there has also been a change in network structure. The action-set is an identifiable sub-grouping; and, should it continue functioning longer than the time necessary to send off a letter, it is likely to develop its own internal structure of roles and statusus.

In some cases, there will be conflict within the network over the appropriateness of this sort of administrative lobbying. The development of an action-set allows a consensus against lobbying to continue within the network as a whole, while at the same time allowing others to take action in their own names.

In some cases, network meetings might, through the simple fact of interpersonal nurturance, embolden members to take action within their own agencies, forming action-sets of which the network itself is not aware. Indeed, it often may be that it is in this fashion that networks lead to social action: by strengthening individuals rather than by forming action-sets or groups directly.

However, one's home agency is not always fertile ground for action, and action-sets are not always effective.

Another strategy, which seems particularly effective filling service gaps, is resource bartering. Sarason (Sarason and Lorentz, 1979; Sarason, et al., 1977) has been a particular champion of bartering as a solution to the problem of diminishing resources. The essential idea is that people with various skills and other resources can be brought together, sometimes outside of their professional roles, and set to work on a problem with as little flow of dollars or development of group structure as possible.

A grouping like this has aspects of both action-sets and action groups. It is ad hoc and task focused but dependent on leadership (Sarason and Lorentz, 1979), and therefore partially structured. It is an action-set which has changed through continued existence over time. In the fuel example we are using here,

a bartering group might pool all available agency resources and set up an emergency fuel center with some monies and supplies but with more people acting in general helping roles.

What if the action-set should still be ineffective? To carry the energy example forward, what if fuel prices continue to rise, funding is not forthcoming to low-income people in need of fuel, and resource bartering cannot meet the need? A variety of possible goals, strategies, and tactics is available.

One strategy is simply to reiterate action-set activity attempting to bring about social planning through attempts at persuasion. Another would be to locate potential allies and begin to pressure state level administrators and legislators. To do so is to move into Rothman's (1970) realm of social action which is an inherently more hard-edged kind of activity based upon conflict.

Clearly, it would be difficult and unlikely for a network of human service workers to enter into contest with, among others, their funders and employers. Network consensus would collapse with the introduction of such a goal. On the other hand, it might be possible for a sub-set of relatively invulnerable workers to come together, informed by network meetings, but acting without specific network authorization. Even with such independence, network linkages could be used, along with others. Such a sub-set, we suggest, is likely to become an action group by engaging in conflict and thereby developing internal structure and in-group boundaries. Eventually, the action group might transform into either a citizen's interest group or part of a larger coalition of such groups.

The network has spawned an action group, which then exists independent of the network. By doing so, the network maintains its own goals, while not inhibiting the development of new activity (Hudson, 1978).

Summary

The history of the Cross Problematic Committee illustrates one way for an informal network to remain informal but also take social action and be effective.

An emphasis on consensus reduces the threat of unwanted policy decisions for any given member. At the same time, the development of "one-shot" action sets or their more formal brethren, action groups, allows sub-sets of the network members to take action on issues. If the members all agree, such action can take place in the name of the network itself. If not, however, action groups or action-sets can act in their own names, energized by network discussion, but acting independently. It is clear that such informal mechanisms for social action will become increasingly

important as fragmentation of social services persists, and budget cuts reduce services and force innovative solutions.

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