

Contradictions in the Design and Practice of an Alternative Organization: The Case of Hampshire College*

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Explicit and implicit design assumptions in the founding of Hampshire College are reviewed, especially as they relate to contradictions and problems evident in practice now, 20 years after its initial design. Issues include:

- *the role of ideology in distorting perception and impeding problem solving;*
- *the role of alternative institutions in the diffusion and implementation of educational innovations;*
- *the backsliding from an experimenting institution; and*
- *the difficulty of shifting from a founding to a self-renewing orientation.*

Historical analysis finds that Hampshire was not structurally designed or enacted as a national experimenting college, but acquired this style and image in exploiting the environment for financial and human resources. The College is also found to embody a major contradiction of American society: that between norms of individual freedom and responsibility and norms of social responsibility and community. Three conclusions are offered to designers of alternative

**From January 1973 through June 1977, I served as Founder and Director of the Office of Institutional Research and Evaluation at Hampshire College. In that role I authored over 100 research and evaluation reports (see SHIRE, 1973-1977). The data on which this paper is based reflect a mixture of methods, including participant-observation, observation, survey research questionnaires, interviews, document analysis, and administrative data analysis. My views on Hampshire and organizational behavior have been enriched and tempered by discussions with Dick Spahn, Pauline Lukens, Adele Durham, Carla Jackson, and Robert Birney. Portions of this paper were presented at the XXIII International Meeting of The Institute of Management Sciences, Athens, Greece, July 1977.*

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organizations:

- *there are semantic entrapments in the phrase "alternative organization"—its use may often obscure quite traditional ideologies;*
- *there is a need for explicit feedback and evaluation systems monitoring the planners and the plan; and*
- *the wise fool should be welcomed back as a valued member of design and management groups.*

Unlike the King advising Alice in Wonderland, I shall begin with the end of this paper and summarize my conclusions focused on the design of alternative organizations. First, I warn of the semantic entrapments of the phrase "alternative organization," and suggest that its use may often obscure quite traditional ideologies.

Second, I suggest that planners of alternative organizations tend to grossly underestimate the extent to which human and group dynamics transcend their plans, and thus grossly underestimate the need for quality control and feedback systems monitoring both the planners and the administrators of the plan. Third, I suggest that planners need to institutionalize a too-long forgotten role—that of the fool. The fool's task will be as it has often been: to punctuate the hubris of the planner, that prideful presumption that one's perspective is correct. In merging his/her art with that of the planner, the fool can help the planners become more aware of their own previously unrecognized, ignored, or denied assumptions.

These are my conclusions. Let me now run backwards through time with the Red Queen and follow Freud's suggestion that "every attempt at an explanation must be preceded by a description of the thing that is to be explained" (1921, p. 4). This historical description of the founding of an alternative organization, Hampshire College, shall be detailed, for "one cannot understand the work of the [college] without understanding the circumstances that gave birth to it" (Orlans, 1977).

HAMPSHIRE COLLEGE—A FORMAL DESCRIPTION

Hampshire College described itself to its first class of students in September 1970 as "a new, independent, experimenting, co-educational liberal arts institution brought into being through the initiative of faculty and administrative leaders at Amherst, Mount Holyoke, and Smith Colleges, and the University of Massachusetts" (Hampshire College Catalog, 1970, p. 6). It now has a student body of 1,225 students, 400 more students on field study or leave of absence, and a full-time equivalent faculty of 80, grouped in four interdisciplinary schools. At Hampshire, the sole measure of a student's academic standing is his/her progress on six divisional examinations—student initiated and

designed learning contracts which are approved by a faculty member. The divisional framework, which replaces the conventional freshman-senior sequence, was designed to accommodate individual patterns of learning and growth while helping the student move steadily toward greater independence in study. In many ways the exam system parallels American graduate education. Division I exams (one in each of the four interdisciplinary schools) demonstrate the student's ability to pursue independently advanced work—that is, competence in a "mode of inquiry." At the Division II level the student, with the help of a faculty adviser, designs and completes studies in the chosen area of concentration, often multidisciplinary. For Division III the student completes an independent project, participates in an integrative activity, and performs some community service. Because of the central role of Divisional examinations, various learning activities in addition to courses are part of the students' education.

Hampshire has several other nontraditional aspects. Formal evaluation of student work is by written narrative reports by faculty, and Hampshire does not give its students grades. Although students usually take courses, neither courses nor contracts give units of credit. Faculty serve under contract rather than under a tenure system. Hampshire's Board of Trustees has a faculty and a student member; students are members of the schools and vote on curriculum and faculty appointments and promotions. The College firmly tries to avoid most forms of sex-role stereotyping.

Examples of Hampshire's success include a student who obtained a master's degree from the University of Massachusetts for his Division III (senior) independent project; a student who served on a state council for environmental protection; a student who discovered that he preferred manual to academic work and became a locksmith and clock-maker; a student who arrived at Hampshire from prison and a drug rehabilitation program, whose autobiographical writings were compared by his adviser with those of Eldridge Cleaver, and who wants to enter a medical profession; a student who grew from writing short and inarticulate course evaluations to a good novel for her Division II paper; students who learn to respect their own insights and experience; and the many students who entered Hampshire with no direction, intellectually found themselves, wrote excellent Division III papers, and published their work.

To a student activist of the late sixties, this might sound like the answer to all his/her demands, an educational utopia; and to initial planners of Hampshire College in 1958, this may sound as though their design had achieved living form. That is only partly true. For another view of this same reality, some of the local campus issues and conflicts

during the past few years may be listed.¹

CAMPUS ISSUES AND CONFLICTS

Only 60% of an entering class will graduate from Hampshire. For the remaining 40%, Hampshire is unsuitable. Most of these withdrawals are not college dropouts, for they continue their studies elsewhere. From both the student and the institutional perspective, such an attrition represents a significant cost (Kegan, 1978).

For many Hampshire students—both those who will graduate and those who will withdraw—the campus may be described as a stressful place (cf. Bloom, 1975). Sixty percent of Hampshire's students feel isolated from most of the people at the College, while nearby at Amherst College or the University of Massachusetts, only 40% report feeling isolated. And unlike a college such as Black Mountain, students experience a severe lack of community (cf. Duberman, 1973). Some students complain of the difficulty of obtaining as much faculty time as desired, and faculty are concerned over their workload. The college government, designed for maximum participation by students, staff, and faculty, is often accused of moving slowly and unwisely, while students and faculty often feel excluded from decisions, ranging from budget allocations to parking lot regulations (cf. Hodgkinson, 1974).

I need not further detail some of Hampshire's campus conflicts. They are typical of American higher education today and they serve as a useful contrast to an image of Hampshire as the successful and planned evolutionary descendant of American colleges.

PLANNING HISTORY

An evaluation of Hampshire College and of its design depends both on one's perspective on what was finally implemented and also on one's choice of initial designs. Hampshire had a long planning history, long for nontraditional colleges of the late 60s, beginning even before the publication of *The New College Plan* in 1958. Reading the *Plan* today, at least three motivations for the creation of a new college can be seen:

¹A third view of the College would see it as perpetuating elitism and classism (cf. Archibald, 1976; Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Collins, 1977; Kamens, 1977; Shimahara & Scrupski, 1975). Hampshire does appear more elitist than a quite similar institution in the United States, the Evergreen State College, or the Open University of Britain, or post-Cultural Revolution universities in the People's Republic of China (Barendsen, 1973; Hsu-Balzer, Balzer & Hsu, 1974; Lauter, 1975; McIntosh & Palola, 1977). Bill Grohmann at Hampshire has suggested that there are two types of nontraditional colleges: student-centered and elite. Student-centered colleges, such as Bennington, Goddard, Antioch, and Black Mountain, try to work with their students until they are ready to graduate. Elite colleges, such as St. Johns, Reed, and Hampshire, have a special academic program from which substantial proportions of students will withdraw. Hampshire's common verbal image was of a student-centered college, but its enacted reality is closer to an elite college.

financial, educational, and political. The planners in 1958 saw a rapidly increasing demand for higher education coupled with limited educational resources. Thus, they planned for an efficient college, one eliminating "so far as possible rigidities and vested interests which tie up resources in wasteful ways" (Barber, Sheehan, Stoke & McCune, 1958, p. 14).

The planners believed that "the average student entering one of the better colleges is capable of far more independence than he now demonstrates" (p. 9) and that facilitating the development of one's own responsibility for life-long learning was an important goal for the college. Politically, the establishment of a new college may be seen as one means by which reform-minded faculty at established institutions could institute their preferred educational programs unencumbered by conservative, tenured faculty.

The New College Plan is subtitled "a proposal for a major departure in higher education," but it clearly limits itself to "changes not in ends but in means" (p. 5). It calls for a college which would provide:

education of the highest quality at a minimum cost per student and with as small a faculty relative to the student body as new methods of instruction and new administrative procedures can make possible. (p. 3)

The *Plan* further warns (p. 30) against "recruiting students chiefly on the basis of taking part in something 'experimental,' " because their "utopian and Bohemian aims," lack of discipline and responsibilities, and opposition to society as a whole were seen as rejecting the "generally accepted ends of rigorous liberal education." Moreover, a similar warning is made to deliberately avoid a faculty "entirely composed of experiment-minded people" (p. 31). In addition to these concerns, a student body "markedly distinguishable at entrance from those of first-rate colleges" might "increase the success of the new program but diminish its general significance" as a national alternative (p. 30).

Other aspects of the original *New College Plan* notable because of differences with later plans and absence from the enacted College include a strong emphasis on group work (p. 39), substitution of a faculty Senate for the usual Board of Trustees (p. 33), a president elected from the faculty for a fixed term (p. 34), and common intellectual experiences via college-wide courses during the January term (p. 9).

In 1965 Harold F. Johnson, an Amherst College alumnus, gave six million dollars to implement *The New College Plan*, and Hampshire College was granted a charter from the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. *The New College Plan* outlined a proposal in 56 pages; *The Making of a College* expanded that proposal to 386 pages including detailed space requirements, building costs, site plans, curriculum descriptions, and initial capital needs of 30 million dollars.

A different image of the new college emerged in 1966 with the publication of this second major planning document, *The Making of a College* (Patterson & Longworth, 1966). Besides being an "undergraduate institution of excellence" the College now proposed to be:

an innovative force in higher education generally. The College intends to be an "experimenting" one, not tied to a narrow or doctrinaire "experimental" orthodoxy. (p. 34)

The Making of a College is subtitled "Plans for a new departure in higher education" and also "Working Paper Number One." The document had several purposes. The authors described it:

as accurate an approximation of Hampshire College as its present leadership can manage The report is not a precise blueprint, but one in a series of successive approximations of what Hampshire will be and do. (p. xii)

The Making of a College was published by MIT Press and rather widely disseminated and reviewed. It is a curious mixture of tentativeness, as indicated by its working paper subtitle, and certainty, as indicated by many statements describing what the College and its students "will" do. This same style is evidenced in the next series of planning documents, issued during 1969 and 1970, just before the College opened for students. Bold—and expensive—proposals were firmly described with a title page note that they were only "planned programs."

Even before the first class of students arrived on campus, compromises had to be made with some of the initial plans—they cost too much. The Library Center, once to be the focus of the campus, was built smaller than initially planned, and a student center was eliminated. As the College grew and initial plans were tested against financial realities, other shortfalls were evident. A sophisticated electronic communications center including closed-circuit television and computer-assisted instruction was never completed according to plan. A residence hall of apartments shrunk 15% from the architect's initial plans, but was still used to house the same number of students.

Many of the students and faculty who first came to Hampshire felt they were invited to "help make the College," as an admissions booklet offered. The College's first year, 1970, was a peak year of student activism, of student-centered concern, of pressure for educational reform, and of such counter-cultural values of community, engagement, interdependence, and celebration. Contrary to its long, elite gestation, Hampshire was born amidst a populist and participatory ideology.

The environment in which it began formed one of the College's central contradictions: between the formal, written documents and the

informal oral beliefs, between support for the traditional aims of elite liberal arts education and new political demands for the restructuring of education; between the administration and faculty-students; between the constraints imposed by the founding assumptions in the charter decisions (Kamens, 1974) and the new possibilities desired by students and faculty. By the mid-70s, there were two Hampshires.

A third College document reacted to this contradiction. In a Winter 1977 statement, the College president wrote that Hampshire "has departed from the accepted ways" by having a structure of examinations, interdisciplinary schools, facile student leaves, and faculty employment by contract, but that "these ideas are no longer experiments, they are the way we do things at Hampshire" (Longworth, 1977). Moreover, he suggested that:

Hampshire's useful and real importance as an institution may be concealed or distorted by its continuing representation as "experimenting" (as we say) or "experimental" (as others say) college. (1977, p. 1)

What happened between the 1958 *New College Plan* calling for a change in means of education, the 1966 *Making of a College* explicitly proposing a national experimental college, and the 1977 recantation of experimentation? Why did the design and practice of this alternative college so diverge? To explain this I shall use the clinician's perspective which, according to Erik Erikson (1958, p. 50), "permits, in fact forces, him to recognize major trends even where the facts are not all available." But many facts are available, from formal studies of the College, informal interviews, and almost five years of participant-observation (SHIRE, 1973-1977; Wittow, 1977).

A CLINICAL PERSPECTIVE AND EXPLANATION

The key to the contradiction lies in the 1966-70 planning documents. Besides their planning function, they were fund-raising documents. In the mid to late 60s, governmental and foundation money was directed toward "social experimentation" and thus Hampshire was packaged as an experimenting college (Karl, 1976; Wolfe, 1970). But there was little structural or designed support for a true experimenting organization. All organizations engage in administrative changes, but few explicitly provide structures to learn from such changes and convert them into experiments (cf. Campbell, 1967). The need for such explicit concern for dissemination and transfer was recognized in Matt Miles' early work *Innovation in Education* (1964), but the College designers seemed to remember only the section of this book relating to potential local Five College collaboration. The need for organizational structure to support innovation and dissemination was overlooked (cf. Baldrige &

Burnham, 1975; Rogers & Shoemaker, 1971; Zaltman, Duncan & Holbek, 1973).

In the reality of structure and enacted budgets, Hampshire College was not designed as a national experimenting alternative college, but as a 1958-vintage alternative to its four siblings, more traditional colleges. To acquire the money necessary to establish and operate such a college, however, more popular appeals had to be made.

Plans for Hampshire were widely disseminated, and gained their own reality. The existence of the plans and the post-1970 existence of the College could be used by educators elsewhere to justify implementing parts of the Hampshire plans. Such simple exemplary existence is a major function of alternative organizations (Rothschild-Whitt, 1979). In addition, even if some plans were never implemented or were found to need substantial modifications, they can be used as examples for change elsewhere. Today the plans of the College are still confused with its enacted reality (cf. Fao, 1977).

Such "confusion" extended to the initial faculty and students. By the opening of the College in 1970, an experimenting and alternative college was being seen as part of the counter-culture. Faculty and students brought with them norms and expectations for greater freedom from traditional academic restraints and for greater participation in the governance of the institution. Eventually, such participation was seen by administration and Trustees as more natural and proper (cf. Stone, 1972).

Still there was conflict over the limits, the constraints, the definition of the College. In the name of experimentation, students and faculty called for rapid change, including wider participation, more power, less bureaucracy, and more community. They also strongly resisted the introduction of explicit guidelines and regulations which growing experience was showing, to some, to be necessary to protect students, faculty, and educational quality. The experiences of other alternative organizations—either from the past or contemporary to Hampshire—were blatantly ignored (cf. Kanter & Zurcher, 1973; Reitmann, 1977). In addition, active Hampshire people eager for immediate change did not consider necessary stages of organizational growth and change (cf. Signell, 1975; Torbert, 1975). Furthermore, governance and committee meetings were often characterized by inadequate knowledge of parliamentary procedure and such group process skills as active listening and maintenance behaviors (cf. Glidewell, 1970, p. 74ff), yet participants were reluctant to acknowledge that lack (cf. Argyris, 1965) or to take the time necessary to learn self-criticism (cf. Hinton, 1966, p. 395).

Even more fundamental contradictions were evident in the early years of the College's operation. American alternative organizations tend to

attract members with privileged backgrounds (Rothschild-Whitt, 1979), a class phenomenon also evident in the People's Republic of China (Schurmann, 1968, p. xiv). As such, they tended to represent well the dominant values of American culture: independence, freedom, discontinuity, and achievement (cf. Hsu, 1963, 1965). The College itself, with its strong emphasis on responsibility, self-reliance, and independent study, reinforced such values.

But there is a shadow to these focal values which those who believe in the liberal American ideology seldom recognize (Mannheim, 1936). Philip Slater has discussed it in terms of frustrated desires for community, for engagement, and for dependence (1970, p. 5). Moreover, he proposes that "we participate eagerly in producing the frustration we endure" by focusing on one side of a value, such as independence, and ignoring its other side.

Rational planning models seem to have a tendency also to ignore the shadow side of dominant cultural or local values. "The professional's job was once seen as solving an assortment of problems that appeared to be definable, understandable and consensual," but today "the classical paradigm of science and engineering is not applicable to the problems of open societal systems" (Rittel, Horst, & Webber, 1973, pp. 156, 160). Today colleges are not only embedded in a pluralistic society, but have also themselves become pluralistic local societies (cf. Greenbaum, 1974); in such a pluralistic setting, many design and living problems are only temporarily resolved.

CONTRADICTIONS AND CONFLICT

Some of the problems of our society are directly reflected in local campus problems and cannot be solved, but their tensions and contradictions can be recognized (Benson, 1977; Ehrmann, 1977; Mao, 1967; Slater, 1970). Usually these contradictions are underlying generators of a wide complex of symptoms. While conflict often "gets experienced at the lowest power portion of the system," such conflict "can seldom be resolved at a level lower than where it originated" (Isgar, 1977).

Hampshire has had discussion and debate for several years over the proper role of the residential houses (Kegan, in press). Some of the questions raised seemed to call for empirical studies and results; much appropriate information was available. But the continuing discussion over seemingly straightforward decisions (specifically whether to hire a new House Master) led me to conclude that this was a lower level manifestation of systematic contradictions. One contradiction was between assuming that students are responsible for their actions and also assuming that the College has an interest and right in maintaining or inhibiting various student behaviors. The College gives students and

faculty freedom, but also wants them to choose to behave in "appropriate" ways. By not explicitly recognizing this and other contradictions, solutions were being proposed that only partially addressed the underlying problem.

A second contradiction at Hampshire is between individual responsibility and social responsibility (cf. Boyer & Kaplan, 1977). While the academic and social systems of the College do strongly reinforce the notion of individual responsibility (cf. Clark, 1970), there are few norms holding a person accountable for the social consequences of his/her actions or inaction. The College has been "protected" from feedback concerning some of its shortcomings. Under the banner of free student choice, we allow and sometimes encourage dissatisfied students to drift away rather than confronting the source of their dissatisfaction. Some students use their residence hall mobility to move away from problem hall-mates, rather than confronting and improving the situation.

Some of Hampshire's dissatisfied students are likely to be just those individuals who are more sensitive to quality education (Hirschman, 1970). As another example of this contradiction, there is still some student and faculty belief that at Hampshire a student should be able to study and obtain resources for any legitimate academic area. The reality is that Hampshire was designed and operates on the principle that *within the available resources* a student may study, obtain resources, and be examined (that is, obtain academic credit) for any legitimate academic area. By confounding structural limitations (Hampshire does not offer courses in all subjects, but relies on its sibling four colleges for some areas) with possible quality problems, the College has been able to avoid for some time direct confrontation of a central question: where and how is it offering poor quality services.

Recognizing shadow sides of values, recognizing both the elements of contradictions is necessary for improved organizational design and administration. Critically, the assumptions and model one uses to define a situation and its problems have a substantial influence on the possibilities for resolving the problem (cf. Argyris, 1969, 1972). One can try to manipulate errant students, faculty, and administrators, and anticipate their resistance, or one can try to understand their experience and perspective and incorporate it in a shared model (cf. Kegan, 1975a, 1977). The latter approach is more likely to generate good problem definitions which in turn help generate problem resolutions that are more effective and lasting.

For example, Hampshire College, like many colleges today, is concerned with its rate of attrition (Kegan, 1978). There are many possible approaches to the problem of too many students deciding not to stay and graduate. Too often, however, the approaches reflect an uncon-

scious assumption that the causes are individual (cf. Brenner, 1973; Kanter, 1977).

Overemphasis on blaming persons not only prevents us from seeing more fundamental system causes but *creates* a cycle of adversary relationships based on uncharitable assumptions. (Alschuler, Atkins, Irons, McMullen, & Santiago-Wolpow, 1977, p. 4)

Because 60% of Hampshire's withdrawn students attribute their leaving to problems with educational direction or resources, the College could define its attrition problem as the admission of too many students incapable of self-direction or as a lack of proper faculty advising. The College could blame the students or the faculty, or both. Or it could enlarge its perspective, and try to learn how the College is stressful for students and for faculty. For example, the extreme individualism and lack of common experiences may be contributing to diffuse norms and anomie—for both students and faculty. As Dankwart Rustow has suggested, the proper function of the social scientist, and I would add the organizational designer, is:

to ascertain the margin of choice offered by man's social condition and to clarify the choices in that margin. (1967, p. 17)

I have described Hampshire College as embodying some of the major contradictions of current American society. Hampshire is well designed to nurture and strengthen individual responsibility and independent achievement for its students who graduate. It neglects the shadow side of this value complex, however, and frustrates desires for community, for engagement, and for dependence (cf. Slater, 1970, p. 5). This fundamental contradiction between individual and social responsibility remains at the core of Hampshire College, and it generally remains unrecognized by most college members.

TOP MANAGEMENT AND HIERARCHICAL CONTROL

There are processes to help individuals and organizations increase their awareness of their negated aspects of experience (Alschuler et al., 1977; Argyris, 1970; Bergquist & Phillips, 1975, 1977; Freire, 1970; Freud, 1933; Gibb, 1978; Kovel, 1976). But such programs are more successful with solid support from top management and/or grass-roots support. Moreover, such programs are difficult with control-oriented, Theory X management.

The initial administration of the College were the planners of the experimenting ideology. The first president and the first vice-president, who became the second president, were also the authors of *The Making of a College*. Before the first class of students arrived, a core group of faculty designed the academic programs in greater detail. The creation of a new organization is an exciting endeavor, but it can also leave

designers somewhat fixated on their notions and insufficiently sensitive to changing internal and external conditions (cf. Hirschman, 1968).²

The mission and core structural constraints of the newly designed college were firmly set in 1958: providing quality liberal arts education within minimal expenses by focusing on individual responsibility. In the late 1960s, to successfully exploit the environment, the College acquired the style of an experimenting college. By this process of acquiring necessary resources and more detailed planning, however, the College changed. By the time the College reached its full enrollment of four entering classes in 1973, there had been substantial changes in Hampshire's faculty and students, in American high school students, in higher education, and in the country. Too often comparisons were made with the initial *Making of a College* design, not with the broader mission of the College or with its new members (cf. Mitroff & Kilmann, 1976). Without sufficient awareness of the central ideology and contradiction of the system, suboptimal and dysfunctional solutions to incompletely defined problems were proposed.

Hampshire has a tradition of hierarchical control—the first major donor became the first chairman of the Board of Trustees and reviewed and approved expenditures from his gift. With such a tradition, the administration operated in some conflict with a growing faculty and student culture believing in the right to greater participation. To some extent this was a reflection of a nation-wide movement for student rights, but it was also a consequence of the experimenting image of the College. Kurt Vonnegut has warned that "we are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful about what we pretend to be" (1966, p. v). People used words such as experimenting, alternative, and nontraditional to describe Hampshire, and these words had diverse meanings. As with "open education" or "sensitivity training," common labels disguised diverse perceptions and misperceptions (cf. Barth, 1975; Giacquinta & Kazlow, in press; Kegan, 1975b, 1976). A gap grew between the expectations students and faculty developed from oral descriptions of the College and the formal documents reflecting administrative perspectives of the College. Although not necessarily intentional, such a definition gap created Orwellian stresses with language and for the members of the College (cf. Steinhoff, 1975; Postman & Weingartner, 1971).

Thus, the College was founded on a paradox. Official College publications were more precise than public discourse in describing the constraints of the College, but Hampshire could still advantageously

²Kazantzakis (1960, p. 479) suggests the need for flexibility: "A prophet is the one who, when everyone else despairs, hopes. And when everyone else hopes, he despairs . . . It's because he has mastered the Great Secret: that the wheel turns."

reap the financial and enrollment benefits of such amorphous alternative images.

TWO PATHS—CONTROL OR SELF-DESIGN

There were and are at least two paths the College could take in its search for survival and enhancement: a control orientation with the administration working to implement the basic designs of the College, or a self-designing orientation with the College leaders working to increase awareness and understanding.³

No organization is immutable and immortal, but a designer can start a process which will gain its own enlightened life. Hedberg, Nystrom, and Starbuck (1976) describe how an organization can be designed to meet environmental changes. One of their postulates is that "wisdom demands minimal rationality." Our rational models of the world always do it violence; we simplify, overlook, and ignore. The open organizational designer needs to:

face the as-yet-unformulated unknown and translate it into structures and practices that better represent it and improve our lives. (Torbert, 1976)

One way to maintain this trust and openness is what Jim March calls "sensible foolishness" (1972; cf. Cohen & March, 1974; Perrow, 1976).

These organizational theorists are playing the role of the fool, a quite useful role that has been overlooked in recent times by organizational designers, managers, and almost everyone else.⁴

THE WISE FOOL

The fool has a long and distinguished history (von Franz & Hillman, 1979; Welsford, 1935/1966). The fool has been of use to kings, and would still be of use to managers and organizational designers. A fool is needed to puncture the hubris of the planner, that prideful presumption that his/her perspective is correct. A fool's playfulness can also increase the variation that facilitates Darwinian selection and survival (Aldrich & Pfeffer, 1976; Hirschman, 1968). Wise foolishness can

³One reviewer posed the fecund question, what would the author "have done differently in order to make the Hampshire College experience be more productive?" A complete answer to this question could in itself be another paper. A brief and incomplete response would be to have the knowledge and perspective in 1972 that, in 1977, permitted drafting this present paper and its methodological cousin (Kegan, 1977)—that is, five years' experience, experimentation, and learning. P. D. Ouspensky's *The Strange Life of Ivan Osokin* and Kurt Vonnegut's *Player Piano* also address these twin issues of what can be done and what must be done.

⁴In addition to referencing the work of other theorists, the use of the term "fool" in this paper reflects some incongruity and playfulness in such serious matters as organizational analysis and design. For some audiences, the fool may be clothed in gray flannel and termed "devil's advocate" or "adversarial evaluator" or "process consultant" for more effective communication.

address a key problem for the system designer, "to extend the adventure beyond himself, to the client as well as to the decision maker" (Swanson, 1974).

The fool was also the person to speak the truth which the king, or designer, was overlooking. Leaders can help followers develop themselves (Burns, 1977), but leaders and designers often are immured from early disconfirming feedback while still subject to the later, more catastrophic environmental feedback which is too loud and strong to ignore (cf. Bennis, 1976).

I am not suggesting that one person per planning group be designated to wear the motley, cap, and bells, for in our rationalistic culture his/her foolishness and wisdom would be discounted. Rather, I recommend that the role of fool be recognized, accepted, and rewarded, with each designer playing the part as wisdom and humor request.

The role of the fool has previously been noted in the organizational literature, although often in different terms. To *initiate* a process of nondefensive communication (Gibb, 1961) or active listening (Rogers & Farson, 1979) may be evaluated by some as foolish and inappropriately noncompetitive. To choose to increase participation in decision-making rather than to minimize person-hours involved in the process may seem foolish, or may be a wise consideration of longer term and group cultural effects (cf. Vroom & Jago, 1974). To encourage the roles of "critical evaluator" and "devil's advocate" might transgress norms of group unanimity, but may also avoid the sulfurous pitfalls of groupthink (Janis, 1971).

When one is new to a group, one may see issues and questions to which old-timers have become blind (cf. Schein, 1979). Fritz Steele (1975) has discussed the several roles of the organizational consultant, including the foolish ones of "barbarian"—who says the unspeakable—and the "ritual pig"—who sacrifices its status and sometimes membership in the organization in the service of its later growth and change.

Kolb and colleagues (Carlsson, Keane & Martin, 1976; Kolb, 1976) have researched individual learning and group problem-solving styles. Parallel to the Myers-Briggs approach to types of perception and judgment (Myers, 1962), these frameworks can help organizational members realize that another's "foolish" data or decision may be a valuable complement to their own partial blindness. The role of the fool is simply that of bounded divergence. It is often both a difficult, and a critically important role.

The fool operated in several roles and guises at Hampshire College, albeit with marginal acceptance and ambivalent reward. Students were given a voice and vote in faculty affairs, faculty were given a voice and vote in administrative and Board affairs; but often these views were

effaced or simply tolerated rather than seen as valued and respected perspectives. An Office of Institutional Research and Evaluation was designed into the 1966 plans for the College, but not implemented until 1973, several years after the opening of the College. Although both qualitative and quantitative approaches can enrich understanding, the dominant faculty and student cultures often rejected quantification while the administration often defended its decisions on the basis of quantitative projections and a financial calculus. In keeping with its own contradictions in attempting to promote both individual freedom and social community, Hampshire College permitted and encouraged the divergent behaviors of the wise fool, but severely limited the extent to which that role was valued by the community.

The role of the fool is necessary in design of organizations, especially alternative organizations, because we so easily become ensnared in our own creations. A respected divergent voice can help planners and managers remember to question their assumptions, struggle with their denials and ideologies, and pay attention to the meaning of the language they use.

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