THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

CRITICAL SYSTEMS THINKING, THEORY AND PRACTICE: A CASE STUDY OF AN INTERVENTION IN TWO BRITISH LOCAL AUTHORITIES

Being a Thesis submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of Hull

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

SECTION TWO

THE RESEARCH PROJECT

SECTION THREE

REFLECTIONS

LIST OF FIGURES

Page

LIST OF TABLES

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I believe that achievement is a product of a transformation process, whose inputs include among other things opportunity, resources, goodwill, ability, etc. I would therefore like to express my gratitude to the following for availing me these inputs:

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SO HELP ME GOD

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ABSTRACT

This thesis reports an intervention informed by critical systems thinking. The intervention drew upon a variety of systems and operational research methods to systemically explore the problems facing housing services for older people. Stakeholders were then supported in developing a response to these problems in the form of an integrated model of user involvement and multi-agency working. The methods used in this study included Cognitive Mapping, Critical Systems Heuristics, Interactive Planning and Viable System Modelling. Following a description of the project and its outcomes, the author's practical experiences are used to reflect back on critical systems thinking. Five innovations are presented in the thesis:

First a new method called 'Problem Mapping' is developed. This has five stages: (i) interviewing stakeholders to surface problems and identify further potential interviewees; (ii) listing the problems as seen through the eyes of the various stakeholders; (iii) consolidating the list by removing duplicate problems and synthesising similar problems into larger 'problem statements'; (iv) mapping the relationships between problems; and (v) presenting the results back to stakeholders to inform the development of proposals for improvement. Reflection upon the use of this method indicates that it is particularly valuable where there are multiple stakeholders who are not initially visible to researchers, each of whom sees different aspects of a problem situation.

Second, Problem Mapping is used to systemically express the problems facing housing services for older people in two geographical areas in the UK. This shows how problems

in the areas of assessment, information provision and planning are mutually reinforcing, making a strong case for change.

Third, a process of evolving an integrated model of user involvement and multi-agency working is presented. The model was designed in facilitated workshops by managers from statutory agencies, based on specifications developed by a variety of stakebolders (including service users and carers).

Fourth, the strengths and weaknesses of Cognitive Mapping (one of the methods used in the project) are discussed. Significant limitations of this method are highlighted.

Fifth, contributions and reflections on the theoretical and practical basis of the research are presented. These among others focus on the theory of boundary critique, which is an important aspect of critical systems thinking. It is often assumed that boundary critique is only undertaken at the start of an intervention to ensure that its remit has been adequately defined. However, this project shows that it is both possible and desirable to use the theory of boundary critique in an on-going basis in interventions to inform the creative design of methods.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

This thesis sets out to explore the interaction between theory and practice in a real life problem context. The research covered by this thesis was conducted in an action research mode. This is research that adopts a more open ended process than a traditional social science approach (Schon, 1983): creativity according to context, and the feeding back of evolving insights into both theory and practice. This version of action research was grounded in critical systems thinking (CST), an approach to problem solving that is built on the principles of systems theory and those of "critical social theory" (e.g., Ulrich, 1988; Flood and Jackson, 1991a). It seeks to bring about improvement by promoting critical awareness and methodological pluralism.

Critical systems thinking has essentially evolved from the realisation that different systems methods do prioritise different ideals. The hard systems methods are preoccupied with the ideal of truth (comparing models with 'reality'); soft systems methodologies prioritise the ideal of rightness (planning the 'right' way forward) and constructivist/cognitive methods pursue the ideal of subjective understanding (Midgley, 1992a). It is based on explicitly emancipatory and pluralist principles: i.e. it is committed to improvement by addressing power issues, but also embraces a willingness to learn from different sociological paradigms (Jackson, 1991a). Critical systems thinkers believe that, if methods are indeed practical expressions of paradigmatic assumptions (Gregory, 1994), "ontological complexity" (the viewing of reality from

different paradigms) can only be addressed through the complementary use, and not isolation, of methods based in these paradigms (Midgley, 1992a).

The main stumbling block for all pluralist positions is that of philosophical incompatibility, known as paradigm incommensurability. While pluralism aims at working with many methods within a problem context, the paradigms within which the methods originally evolved make fundamentally different assumptions about the nature of 'reality' and how we access it. Idealist thinking (e.g., Berkeley, 1710; Kant, 1787) maintains that reality is a product of subjective knowledge; realist thinking (e.g., Popper, 1972a,b; Bhaskar, 1978) take the position that reality is directly accessible (albeit imperfectly); and critical thinking suggests that reality is a product of language, social roles and forces of power (e.g., Foucault, 1974; Habermas, 1984a,b).

Critical systems thinking states that it is possible to achieve a cross fertilization between paradigms (Gregory, 1992). Ideologies, beliefs and values cannot develop in isolation, but neither is there only one correct way of knowing. We have to accept that judgements about situations, including judgements about methods are grounded in practical contexts (Flood and Romm, 1996a). Interestingly this stance is also adopted by other writers outside CST: e.g. Gioia and Pitre (1990) and Weaver and Gioia (1994).

This thesis adopts the position of several writers (e.g., Habermas, 1973; Checkland and Scholes, 1990; Dewey, 1990 and Reason, 1991) that theory and practice mirror each other, and that it is realistically impossible to separate questions of justification from those related to application. Theory is always implicit in practice, and where practice is not successful, reasons can be explored by examining the underlying theory. In critical

systems research, this involves examining both the underlying theory as well as alternative theories that, if adopted, may help bring about improved practice (Romm, 1995). Thus, critical systems thinking encourages learning about theory and practice simultaneously - a principle aspired to in this thesis.

1.1 MOTIVATION FOR THE RESEARCH

Apart from an opportunity to improve a problem situation, I expected the research project to provide me with a wealth of experience that would serve as a source of insight into the development of systems methodology. In line with much thinking in action research, methods and methodological ideas evolving from this intervention could be further tested and refined in similar interventions later.

This research was partly motivated by my professional experiences. It represents one moment in a long professional journey in search of comprehensive, as well as liberating, approaches to intervention. During my twenty years experience in rural development work in Africa (as a manager, a trainer, and a researcher) I have increasingly become aware of the gap between the prerequisites of orthodox intervention approaches promoted by bureaucracies like multilateral development agencies, and the aspirations as well as constraints obtaining on the ground. I have also observed a growing sense of denial and helplessness among professionals and national governments, an unwillingness to take cognisance of this disparity, largely due to a lack of approaches based in an explicit alternative paradigm. The tendency, therefore, was to increasingly force local concerns into a format amenable to management using orthodox global approaches. What obtained in reality was a covert split between normative problems,

official problems and "real" local problems that grew over the years, unabated by successive development efforts.

An MA course in Management Systems at the University of Hull introduced me to systems methods, their structures and contexts of application. I was impressed by the capacity of some of these methods to cater for a wide range of assumptions about human beings and nature, incorporating a broad range of parameters and perspectives without recourse to econometric models. I was also impressed by their conceptualisation of human beings as agents with free will capable of generative and constructive processes. However, I was aware that even systems ideas do assume certain values and organisational contexts, and these need to be identified and their practical implications explored. CST advocates reflection on the assumptions implicit in different methodologies, so, for my Ph.D. research, I resolved to carry out a study informed by CST.

In order to explore the full gamut of themes discussed in CST, I looked for a problem context that would provide me with the opportunity to mix methods; focus on managing a diversity of world views; facilitate improvement; and address issues of critical awareness and boundary judgement. The project offered by my supervisor provided fertile ground for such research. It was about planning and quality assurance in the provision of housing services for older people. It involved a whole range of stakeholders: local government, health purchasing agencies, local service providers in the public and private sectors, frontline professionals, users and carers. I had a feeling that there would be rights, responsibilities, needs and expectations to be reconciled. It was likely that ethical and social aspects of priority setting and resource allocation

would surface, as well as issues of collaboration and effectiveness. I anticipated (based on my own experience in management) that differing organisational rules and regulations would present a considerable challenge.

The research project therefore provided a potential opportunity to develop a research process capable of allowing theoretical and practical reflection, and promoting (and acting on) the locally expressed views of stakeholders.

The research was based on the premise that researchers need to take responsibility for deciding research directions, but should consult with stakeholders in evolving these directions in order to secure legitimacy for research processes and outcomes. I agree with May (1993) that, as a researcher, my aim should not be to detach myself from the subject matter in order to undertake observational science (positivism), but rather to be committed and engaged as a pre-requisite to understanding social life. As Outhwaite puts it in a discussion of the German heuristic theorist Gadamer:

> Understanding is not a matter of trained, methodological, unprejudiced technique, but an encounter...a confrontation with something radically different from ourselves. (Outhwaite, 1991).

Contrary to positivism and empiricism, I take the position that "There is not a method or technique for doing research other than through the medium of the researcher." (Stanley and Wise, 1983).

1.2 AIMS OF THE RESEARCH

The main aim was:

- To explore the interactions between theory and practice within the paradigm of CST.

The following aims of the thesis were evolved through the research process:

- To clarify how boundary judgements are made in practice during intervention - especially how the theory of "boundary critique" (to be explained later) informs practice.

- To produce a critique of Cognitive Mapping (one of the methods drawn upon to inform the task of problem structuring), which was found to have significant limitations.

- To design a new problem structuring technique capable of systemically expressing the concerns of a diverse variety of stakeholders.

- Using the above, to systemically express the problematic situation facing housing services for older people.

- To facilitate the development of a model for the multi-agency management of housing services that is based upon the local requirements of stakeholders, including older people and their carers.

1.3 THE STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS

The thesis is structured in the following manner:

Chapter Two: This chapter introduces the emergence of CST by following the progression of management systems ideas from hard systems thinking (based on a neo-positivist rationality), through soft systems thinking (based in the interpretive paradigm), to critical systems thinking, which incorporates critique and reflective "praxiology"[1]. The chapter closes by identifying three phases in the development of CST, namely, the Early phase, the Consolidation phase and the New Directions phase.

Chapter Three: This chapter details the "early phase" of CST, starting with the critique of soft systems thinking. Ulrich's (1983) search for a methodology to deal with the normative implications of problem definition and systems design is reviewed here. Also covered is the drive towards methodological pluralism (Jackson and Keys, 1984; Jackson, 1987a) aimed at ensuring that all aspects of problem contexts, including coercive ones, are identified and addressed during interventions. The search for a philosophical foundation for CST also started in this phase with Jackson's (1985a) use of Habermas's (1972) theory of knowledge constitutive interests. The early phase concluded with a search for new ways forward, with both Jackson (1987b) and Flood (1989a) concluding that pluralism offered great opportunities for advancement.

Chapter Four: This gives an account of the "consolidation" phase in CST's development, a phase driven mainly by the work of Flood and Jackson. In this phase, CST was established as a substantive paradigm by Jackson (1991a,b) who identified five core commitments upon which it was founded. These were later consolidated into three

(Flood and Jackson, 1991a): complementarism, emancipation and critical awareness. A framework for practical application was also developed, and this was called Total Systems Intervention (TSI) (Flood and Jackson, 1991b).

Chapter Five: This gives an account of the present position of CST, the New Directions phase based on a shift towards post-modernism. Grand narratives are rejected and power comes to be seen as a more complex, multi-faceted social phenomenon. Central to the new thinking is a movement away from CST "commitments" towards "themes for debate". Thus, it is acknowledged that there are many views on CST that meet together in dialogue. Principle writers associated with this recent work include Midgley (1990a, 1995a, 1996), Gregory (1992, 1996) and Flood and Romm (1996a,b).

Chapter Six: This accounts for the choice of methods within the study. The framework for the selection and use of methods is the Creative Design of Methods (Midgley, 1990b, 1996). The rationale for its choice is explained in the chapter.

Chapter Seven: This chapter introduces the theoretical framework of the research key concepts and methods used in the research. This chapter explains the basis of the research work in the action research mode and provides a background to the theoretical framework of the research, the theory-practice cycle. There is emphasis on the interdependency between theory and practice. CST's own explanation is that all theoretical concepts encompass practical or normative implications while practical concepts also reflect theoretical or speculative implications (Ulrich, 1983). This is also reflected in Checkland's (1981) work. Methodological pluralism as advocated for within CST ensures improvement in that a problem context is appraised not on the basis

of one method but on a number of methods and their underlying philosophies. The theory of boundary critique is introduced here. This theory is central to CST and played a major role in informing practice in the study.

Chapter Eight: This chapter gives some background to the research project. It looks at legislative provision with respect to housing for older people and describes the research brief.

Chapter Nine: This introduces the first phase of the research project. An account is given of the process of reviewing the brief and getting the study started. The design of a new problem structuring method, Problem Mapping, is first discussed here.

Chapter Ten: Results of the first phase are given in this chapter. The presentation is in the form of a 'Problem Map', a diagram showing the links between problematic issues. The results show that the problems fall into three broad areas: those to do with the assessment of housing needs, those to do with information provision, and those to do with planning and management. A significant point that surfaces is that the different problem areas are intimately linked, and therefore a holistic approach to problem solving is essential.

Chapter Eleven: Gives a narrative account of the second phase of the research, the "planning" phase. It describes the various stages, processes and methods applied in this phase; changes made to the original brief; and their justifications. It shows how the planning was based upon criteria established by a broad range of stakeholders, thus ensuring local relevance and legitimacy.

Chapter Twelve: This presents the outcomes of the second phase of the research, which was principally the design of an integrated system of multi-agency working and user involvement with respect to housing services for older people. The chapter starts with a summary of the key attributes of such a system.

Chapter Thirteen: This chapter reflects on the theory practice intervention in this research in the form of contributions arising from this study. This chapter starts by reviewing contributions to the theory and practice of boundary critique. Reflections are made on how boundaries were determined in the context of this research project. From these reflections a conclusion is drawn that the principal means by which the theory of boundary critique can inform intervention is through the design of methods.

Cognitive Mapping is a constructivist method that was used in this study to inform problem structuring. The chapter reflects on the theory of Cognitive Mapping and its practice in this study. Experiences in the research showed that Cognitive Mapping can make a limited contribution to boundary setting, but is crucially deficient in failing to reveal the reasons behind the choices made by stakeholders. Indeed, use of Cognitive Mapping at all is dependent on stakeholders believing that they have choices open to them. In this study, many interviewees experienced no freedom of choice, and therefore use of the method foundered.

An innovative problem structuring method called 'Problem Mapping' was developed in this research, and this chapter reflects on its generalisability and possible future uses. The role of problem structuring within the broad process of problem solving is

reviewed. The advantages of Problem Mapping were found to be its use of concepts derived from participants' own accounts; its suitability in situations where stakeholders cannot all be identified in advance, and its ability to capture multi-dimensional problems, including different viewpoints.

Chapter Fourteen: This revisits the aims of the research and the paradigm within which it was conducted. It reflects on how CST impacted on the research process. A discussion of achievements of this research study, contributions to intervention theory and practice, and the identification of issues for further research, forms the rest of the chapter.

The full structure of the thesis is presented in Figure 1.1 below:

Figure 1.1 ***Structure of Thesis.***

		CHAPTER 1	Introduction
SECTION I	THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS	CHAPTER 2	The Development of Critical Systems Thinking
		CHAPTER 3	Critical Systems Thinking: The Early Phase
		CHAPTER 4	Critical Systems Thinking: The Consolidation Phase
		CHAPTER 5	Critical Systems Thinking: New Directions
		CHAPTER 6	An Account of the Choice of Methods
		CHAPTER 7	Theoretical Framework, Key Concepts and Methods
		CHAPTER 8	Background to The Research Project
SECTION II	THE RESEARCH PROJECT	CHAPTER 9	The Research Project: First Phase
		CHAPTER 10	Outcomes of the First Phase
		CHAPTER 11	The Planning Phase
		CHAPTER 12	Outcomes of the Planning Phase
SECTION III	REFLECTIONS	CHAPTER 13	Contributions to the Theory and Practice of CST
		CHAPTER 14	Discussion and Conclusion

The research was in practice very much affected by issues of expediency; the practical problems of identifying all relevant stakeholders in advance, the need to facilitate

dialogue, and secure comprehension and commitment by stakeholders. There was pressure to try as much as possible to fit into the work pattern of the various stakeholders as well as the time frame determined by the sponsoring agency. This imperative meant that fieldwork began immediately rather than following a period of familiarisation with appropriate theoretical literature especially that relating to the philosophy and methodology of research. This inevitably means that one never had much opportunity to broaden one's ontological, epistemological and therefore methodological inventory. This may have had the negative effect of limiting the range of options within the research practice.

The basis of this study in a real life problem context and the desire to capture authentic experience and present issues in the sequence they occurred has made it necessary to present content in the first person.

[1] The evolving of broad and feasible generalisations that can provide a rationally ordered set of recommendations.

SECTION ONE

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

CHAPTER TWO

THE DEVELOPMENT OF CRITICAL SYSTEMS THINKING

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Over time, systems thinking has developed from the paradigm of hard systems thinking, through soft systems thinking to critical systems thinking (CST). Each of these will be briefly described to show the context of emergence of CST, and then more detail about the transition from paradigm to paradigm will be provided. Note that, while I talk of "transitions", I do not assume (like Kuhn, 1970) that the old paradigms die out. Many people still practise hard and soft systems thinking, suggesting that paradigms coexist in time (as proposed by Burrell and Morgan, 1979). However, from within CST, a progression of ideas is visible. Those who do not accept the validity of CST might see the history of systems thinking differently.

2.2 HARD SYSTEMS THINKING

Hard systems thinking is grounded on empiricist philosophy and the functionalist sociological tradition. It is an approach "based upon the assumption that the problem task is to select an efficient means of achieving a known and defined end." (Checkland, 1978). It takes the world as consisting of systems which can be studied objectively and have a distinct purpose. It treats organisations as if they were machines pursuing unitary goals, usually those of their founders or those controlling them (Jackson, 1991b). It also assumes it is possible to arrive at a clear statement of the objectives of a system from

outside the system concerned. It aims at arranging the system parts so that its goals can be achieved with optimum efficiency. "In so far as rightness and subjectivity come into play at all, their exploration is always subodinate to the over riding ideal of truth", (Midgley, 1992a:164): solutions to problems can only be valid if they are based on a "true" picture of how things are. Hard systems thinking is characterised by a search for objectivity, quantification, systematic techniques and methods, optimisation, goal seeking and determining correct solutions to tangible problems (Jackson, 1985a).

According to Checkland (1975), hard systems thinking is comprised of three strands, the methodologies of "systems engineering" (Hall, 1962; Jenkins, 1969 etc), "systems analysis" (the RAND corporation etc.) and traditional "operational research" (OR) (Churchman, Ackoff and Arnoff, 1957; Blackett, 1962). Jackson (1991b) extends this list to include cost benefit analysis, planning-programming-budgeting systems, decision science and management cybernetics.

2.3 SOFT SYSTEMS THINKING

Soft systems thinking is said to be an advance over hard systems thinking in the way it deals with people and their perceptions, values and interests. Jackson (1985a) points out that soft systems thinkers, unlike natural scientists and hard systems researchers, do not conceive of objective features in social reality that are accounted for by positivistic theories. According to Jackson, soft systems thinking is based on the belief that social problems are not solvable by technical means, but must be addressed through debate and the pursuit of consensus (Checkland and Scholes, 1990, say "accommodation" rather than "consensus", because people do not have to be of one mind to agree a way

forward). Soft systems thinkers perceive systems as having an intersubjective existence, being a product of relationships between individual consciousnesses (Checkland, 1981). Jackson (1991b) observes that, by admitting that there are multiple perceptions of reality, and by seeking to explore ways of helping analysts deal with this, soft systems thinking extends the area within which systems thinking can be used to help with real world problem management. Oliga (1988) sees soft systems thinking as based on hermeneutics, inclusive of both naturalistic hermeneutics (which, while grounded on objectivism, still regards social reality as having distinctive characteristics) and historical hermeneutics (which rejects objectivism and defines social reality on the basis of the interpretation of the object).

According to Jackson (1985a), three soft systems methodologies make up the core of soft systems thinking. These are Churchman's (1968a, 1971 and 1978) Social System Design (SSD), Ackoff's (1974 and 1981) Interactive Planning (IP) and Checkland's (1972, 1975, 1981 and 1985) Soft Systems Methodology (SSM). While having some differences (i.e. in their conceptions of a system and their adoption or non-adoption of goal seeking models), their similarities are significant. They are all concerned with ill structured problems, and they advocate working with different stakeholder perceptions of systems rather than systems in the real world. They incorporate individual values within the process of problem reformulation, and they challenge the role of experts in the systems approach. According to Jackson (1991b), the soft systems perspective that underlies these methodologies rejects the positivism/functionalism of the organisations-as-systems approaches and hard systems thinking. He observes that they represent an epistemological break, a move towards a paradigm based upon another philosophical/sociological foundation that is consistently interpretive in nature.

2.4 CRITICAL SYSTEMS THINKING (CST)

CST has generally been defined as an approach to the conduct of research and enquiry which seeks to combine the insights of systems theory with those of critical social theory in order to promote a practice of research and intervention that is both flexible and responsive to real human situations (Ulrich, 1988). Oliga (1988) points out that critical systems thinking is based on emancipatory and complementarist principles: i.e. the commitment to improvement through addressing issues of coercion, but also a willingness to learn from the different sociological paradigms. In the context of contemporary social formations, it attempts to go beyond the alterable, historical, and essentially ideological limitations of the interests underlying empiricist and hermeneutic methodological approaches. Flood and Jackson (1991a) state that CST shares the soft systems thinkers critique of the hard approaches, but is also able to reflect more fully upon the circumstances in which such approaches can be properly employed. It is said to enhance overall competence within the field of management

2.5 FROM HARD SYSTEMS THINKING, THROUGH SOFT SYSTEMS THINKING, TO CRITICAL SYSTEMS THINKING

I will now give more details of the transition between paradigms, as seen from within the paradigm of CST. Hard systems methodologies are said to have gained prominence in the second world war when operational research was applied to improve technical planning and decision making in military contexts (Flood and Jackson, 1991a). The ideas generated were typically quantitative. After the war these ideas were extended to public enterprise, organisation, community and societal problems.

However, as the occurence of complex problems involving strategic issues with behavioural and social aspects increased, dissatisfaction with hard systems thinking grew. Critical systems thinkers in particular criticised hard systems thinking for being limited when confronted with human systems that were complex, subjective and riddled by power disparities (Jackson, 1987b; Keys, 1987). It was argued that social systems do not have an objective existence in the real world, and in fact their objectives cannot be easily determined (Jackson, 1985a). Hard systems thinking fails to appreciate the purposefulness of human beings as the main occupants of social systems (Checkland, 1981). Its search for "regularities and causal relationships in the interactions between behaviours" (Jackson, 1985a), made it inappropriate for the creation of intersubjective understanding. Oliga (1986) sees hard systems thinking as linked to the ideology of economic individualism which is oblivious to unequal relations so common among "free individuals." Checkland (1978 and 1981) argues that, by virtue of its assumptions, hard systems thinking has a limited domain of effective application; i.e. when there is already a clear view of the goals to be achieved. It became evident that, in the majority of managerial situations, the formulation of objectives forms a substantial part of the problem to be addressed, and narrowing down differing perceptions of participants about objectives can at times be difficult, predisposing a situation to coercion by the powerful members. In conclusion, therefore, it was argued that hard systems thinking possesses an inherent inability to deal with subjectivity; is unable to handle extreme complexity; and is invariably conservative in terms of ideology. In an attempt to address some of these inadequancies, soft systems thinking was developed.

Soft systems thinking is said to have gained prominence in the 1970s and 1980s (Flood and Jackson, 1991a). Checkland (in the United Kingdom) and Ackoff and Churchman (in the United States of America) initiated work aimed at extending the use of systems ideas to ill structured management problems. Soft systems thinking is said to encompass a theory that is of particular relevance to human affairs, especially in cases where the identification of problems is at issue.

Later on, however, it transpired that, just like hard systems thinking, soft systems thinking was seen to have a limited area of effective and legitimate application (Jackson, 1991b). Soft systems thinkers were accused of basing their work upon a consensus view of society and being essentially managerialist and reformist (Rosenhead, 1976; Bryer, 1979; Thomas and Lockett, 1979; Jackson, 1982 and 1983). They tended to locate their work at the level of ideas without due consideration for the structural origins of such ideas. They assumed that the social world is basically consensual, ignoring the fact that it can be rife with asymmetry of power, structural conflict and contradiction (Flood and Jackson, 1991a). This is borne out by the fact that the sole validation criterion for soft systems methodologies is open debate leading to democratic consensus (or accommodation) between participants in a problem situation (Jackson, 1985a). Soft systems thinking was seen as lacking a critical social theory essential for comprehending and interrogating social arrangements. According to Jackson (1982) and Flood and Jackson (1991a), the interpretive theory underpinning soft systems thinking is inadequate for understanding and acting in social situations encompassing disparities in power and resources. Fuenmayor (1990) observes that soft systems thinking has an instrumental and regulative interest, whereas Oliga (1988, 1989a,b) observes that it has only made an ontological break, but not an epistemological break, with empiricism: that

is, it differs from empiricism only in the assumptions it makes about the nature of social reality,[1] but not in its methodologies for validating such reality. It therefore becomes evident that there is need for a more radical and critical approach to producing and verifying social systems theory and practice (Jackson, 1985a).

Critical systems thinking came out of a search for systems thinking grounded on a coherent critical theory (Flood and Ulrich, 1990). Jackson (1991b) points out that the aim in critical systems thinking is to harness knowledge of social reality by examining it against different sociological paradigms. In the following three chapters, a review of the development of CST will be given. Obviously, any historical overview is necessarily partial, influenced among other things by the purpose of the review. The account given here is aimed at giving the reader insight about the evolution of the paradigm within which this study is based.

A number of previous authors have undertaken reviews of CST. Ulrich's (1988) analysis is aimed at charting a historical development of CST from back in the mid-sixties when C. West Churchman was working on his book "The Systems Approach and its Enemies" (Churchman, 1968b). Schecter (1990, 1991) and Jackson (1991a) construct their reviews around a set of commitments guiding CST. Schecter identifies three commitments (critique, emancipation and pluralism) while Jackson works around five commitments (critical awareness, social awareness, complementarism at the theoretical level, complementarism at the methodological level and human emancipation). Midgley (1992b) gives what is basically a chronological account of the development of CST, beginning from the integration into systems thinking of Habermas' (1973, 1974, 1979a) three human interests, through the idea of pluralism, the introduction of emancipatory

methods, to the development of meta methodologies. Midgley (1995b) re-examines the development of CST for the purpose of exploring a philosophy and a paradigm that can underpin the theory and practice of mixing methods.

This study divides the development of CST into three phases: the Early Phase, the Consolidation Phase and New Directions. It is worth noting that CST, as it currently stands, is a product of diverse strands of thought which, though driven by "practical philosophy's emancipatory utopia" (Ulrich, 1988), are not necessarily identical. Chapter five (focusing on "New Directions") takes this observation as its starting point, and emphasises the need for researchers to make their own particular vision of CST explicit (no single consolidated vision having come to dominate the literature). It is the pluralistic vision of CST presented in chapter five which provides the paradigmatic orientation for this thesis.

2.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter has endeavoured to introduce the evolution of critical systems thinking out of earlier forms of systems thinking. The following three chapters will look at the three stages of development within CST, highlighting the key issues considered within each stage. It is hoped that this exercise will give a snapshot of how far critical systems thinking has attempted to address issues of practice.

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[1] i.e. reality as the creative construction of human beings as opposed to a hard independent existence.

CHAPTER THREE

CRITICAL SYSTEMS THINKING: THE EARLY PHASE

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Critical systems thinking (CST), is a way of conducting research and intervention that encompasses *critical awareness* i.e. the questioning of the status quo and its basis; *improvement* in which broad issues are defined without necessarily determining local issues, in a manner that is subject to review while taking into consideration issues of power; and *methodological pluralism* which promotes the application of a broad range of methods in a manner that is theoretically consistent, informed by the strengths and weaknesses of the methods in reference to the problem context (Midgley, 1996).

This chapter will demonstrate that the early phase of CST emerged out of a number of concerns, among which was the need to integrate social theory (particularly Habermas's, 1972, 1974 and 1979a) into systems thinking. The review will be restricted to the period starting from 1980, for this is when the development of CST really gathered momentum.

Systems theory is said to have consistently assumed that human beings are little different from the components of other types of systems (Bryer and Kistruck, 1976). This assumption influenced the functionalist model adopted by hard systems thinking. Soft systems thinking was therefore an advance over hard systems thinking. As pointed out in the previous chapter, Jackson (1991b) observes that, by admitting that there are multiple perceptions of reality and seeking to explore ways of helping analysts deal with

this, soft systems thinking extends the area within which systems thinking can be used to help with real world problem management. Subsequently, however, people detected flaws in soft systems thinking, as it was not underpinned by a critical theory. It also failed to address power relations that tend to prejudice mutual understanding, and hence consensus (Jackson, 1982). Indeed Fuenmayor (1985, 1989) points out that, contrary to a popular line of analysis, soft systems thinking is limited, not because of its interpretivist stance, but because it lacks a fundamental theory that accounts for individual perceptions while questioning the status quo and securing individual freedoms.

3.2 THE ORIGINS OF CST

In the United Kingdom, the early phase of CST started off with reflections on soft systems methodologies. Three methodologies bore the brunt of the critical reflection that took place. These are Churchman's (1968a, 1971 and 1978) Social Systems Design (SSD), Ackoff's (1974 and 1981) Interactive Planning (IP), and Checkland's (1975, 1981 and 1985) Soft Systems Methodology (SSM). As we argued in chapter two, all three are concerned with ill structured problems; they advocate working with different stakeholders' perceptions of systems rather than the system in the real world; and they incorporate individual values within the process of problem reformulation, while challenging the role of experts in the systems approach.

The debate in this phase was kicked off by Mingers (1980) (most probably informed by Burrell and Morgan's, 1979 work). Advocating the grounding of any intervention in an explicit social theory that acknowledges the complexity of the world within which

interventions take place he compared and contrasted Habermas' (1973) critical theory with Checkland's (1972, 1975) Soft Systems Methodology (SSM). Mingers started off by stating that SSM is not functionalist, and has, in fact, elements of critical theory in its foundations. In demonstrating similarities between the two, Mingers observed that both attempt to propose the same two-fold classification of human actions: some actions are goal directed, while others are aimed at achieving mutual understanding. SSM integrates these in its analysis of human activity systems, while Habermas argues that they should be viewed as distinct. Secondly, they both fault the systems analysis approach to real world problem solving for its commitment to technical rationality, encompassing the control and manipulation of non-human objects and processes on the basis of economic and analytic reason. As a solution to the above problem, they both advocate the incorporation of the domain of values within rationality. Thirdly, they both aim at uniting theory and praxis, developing a rational approach to the realm of communicative interaction for the purpose of bringing about change in the world, and helping people to solve their problems through elucidation. Finally, Mingers observed that both SSM and critical theory submit to the rationality that judgement of the validity of a critical social theory rests with the actors in a problem situation, their interests and values. He points out that SSM pursues validity judgements by increasing the awareness of actors in a problem situation, spelling out the consequences of particular Weltanschauungen (W) and demonstrating the possible validity of competing Ws, leading to decision making on values.

Mingers is not oblivious to the differences between SSM and Habermas' critical theory. He observes, for instance, that "Habermas goes beyond the heuristic analysis of practical questions to provide a theory of the distorting and repressive efforts of society on the

Communication domain". He further observes that Habermas' political stance is radicalist, encompassing a critique of society for the emancipatory benefit of its members, whilst Checkland's primary concern is problem solving within the status quo and without assuming political change.

Mingers further states that SSM lacks a critical social theory. For instance, it fails to account for the acquisition of Ws and the means of changing them. It also lacks a theory at the psychological level, essential for an appreciation of the difficulties of changing people's ways of thinking. This, according to Mingers, is, in fact, what led Habermas to assert that any consensus that is achieved by interpretive methodologies is likely to be false since perceptions and comprehensions are based on systematic distortions created both by society and a subject's own psychological development.

Mingers concludes by observing that, in practice, SSM has generally been used in a conservative manner, privileging the views of those in positions of power and authority. However, he views this, not as resulting from an inherent defect of the methodology but, as a reflection of the sponsorship of respective interventions. He feels that a conscious effort towards distortion free communication could help address this problem.

This effort to compare and contrast one of the major soft systems methodologies with critical theory triggered a debate in search of a theorised and coherent grounding for systems thinking. Jackson (1982), for instance, is very critical of Mingers' (1980) comparison between Checkland's Soft Systems Methodology and Habermas' critical theory. He observes that, while Checkland had identified his methodology as belonging to both the phenomenological and hermeneutic traditions (Checkland, 1978 and 1981),

it actually belongs, together with the work of Churchman and Ackoff, in the interpretive sociological paradigm. As a result, all three approaches suffer from the weaknesses inherent in this paradigm. They adopt a subjectivist approach to social science. They do not deal in objective social facts but regard the social world as a product of individual perceptions:

> Human beings use concepts to structure their notion of social reality and in acting in accordance with their notion of social reality produce the objective social world the functionalists study. (Jackson 1982)

Jackson (in line with Burrell and Morgan, 1979) states that a second feature of the interpretive paradigm is that it is implicitly regulative. It accepts the social world as it is, focusing on human subjectivity at the expense of contentious issues of conflict. It is therefore implicitly reformist rather than radicalist. Also, unlike the functionalist paradigm,[1] the interpretive paradigm has no theory which offers an account of the social world in systems terms. Such a theory, he notes, would have to question the systematic nature of the interpretations individuals use in constructing the social world.

Jackson observes that the aforementioned weaknesses of the interpretive paradigm limit the effectiveness of soft systems methodologies, and in fact underline their need for a critical social theory. He identifies that the subjectiveness of the methods do condition, to a large extent, the regulative nature of their assumptions. They do not take cognisance of the objective features of social reality, "The highly structured 'resistant,' social world studied by functionalist social scientists----." Jackson points out that the free discussion and debate among stakeholders, on which these methods are premised, is in real life undermined by gaps in intellectual, political and economic resources between groups in the wider society. Likewise, Weltanschauungen are not so easily changed because they

are tied up with other social facts, political and economic conditions. Changes in Weltanschauungen may have to follow changes in these other social realities. He also observes that the three soft systems methodologies fall far short of the requirements of the model of communicative competence proposed by Habermas (1970b, 1976a, 1979a). As a result, they aid a social process in which the basic features of the status quo are duplicated. Jackson asserts that the conservative, regulative outcomes that obtain from the application of these methodologies are in fact manifestations of intrinsic, fundamental, critical defects.

Returning to Mingers' (1980) comparison, Jackson argues that the social theory of Habermas and Checkland's Soft Systems Methodology ought, in fact, to be placed in different paradigms. While both works acknowledge the two theoretical faces of human action, one purposive rational (hence open to change) and the other natural (i.e. physiological, hence not amenable to engineering), Checkland does not state how the two can be identified, and he accounts for them using taken for granted Weltanschauungen. His method focuses on consensus-based action without accounting for false consciousness. Habermas, on the other hand, by incorporating positivism (the need for hard enquiry) in his theory, is able to relate Weltanschauungen to the prevalent social arrangements, and by advocating critical reflection is able to uncover the difference between Weltanschauungen that are superficial and those which are rooted in social reality.

> So the fact that Habermas is prepared to offer a social theory which takes account of the objective features of the social world (even while accepting that these result from the actions of human beings) makes a fundamental difference to the paradigm in which his work should be located. (Jackson, 1982)

The fact is, however, that Checkland also accepts some hard enquiry, but only as a subset of soft, taking the validity of Weltanschaungen for granted before it is used.

Secondly, Jackson points out that, while both Checkland and Habermas embrace the subjective aspects of social life (hermeneutics), only Habermas avails participants with the opportunity to unveil the underlying causes of their problems. This he does by evolving both a theory of distorted communication as well as a theory of an evolving social structure that gives rise to the distorted communication.

For Jackson, the difference between SSM and critical theory is not based on Habermas' radical political views, as is assumed by Mingers (1980), it is in the theories underlying their works.

> Habermas recognises that though the social world is created by man, it is not 'transparent' to him. It escapes him, takes on objective features and constrains him. Man is still in the grip of unconscious forces and his actions still have unintended consequences. In these circumstances hermeneutics cannot be the sole method appropriate to the social sciences. There must also be a positivist moment in social inquiry in which the objective features of the social world, when men do appear to act as things, can be studied. There is need too for a critical moment (corresponding to an 'emancipatory' interest). The hope is to reduce the area of social life where men act as things and to increase the realm of the hermeneutic where rational men's intentions become realised in history. (Jackson, 1982)

3.3 TOWARDS CRITICAL SYSTEMS IDEAS

From 1982 onwards, Jackson became very active in the development of critical systems ideas and was later joined by Flood and others. Meanwhile, Ulrich was also doing the same, independently but motivated by similar inadequacies in contemporary systems

thinking. Ulrich (1983) set out to develop a methodology that dealt with the normative implications of problem definition and systems design. He developed Critical Systems Heuristics (CSH) whose critical basis is the provision of means to reflect upon the presuppositions that enter into social systems designs. According to Midgley (1992b), Ulrich's was the first work to explicitly identify the term "critical systems".

Ulrich (1983) was concerned that the concept of rationality that underlies most contemporary systems theories and systems methodologies has its roots largely in the conventional analytical, reductionist models of science. For Ulrich, the two strands of reason identified by Kant (1788), theoretical reason (concerned with defining what is true) and practical reason (concerned with defining what is right), pose a major challenge to social scientists.

> Reason is theoretical, according to Kant, when it produces understanding or knowledge of what is or what happens, it is practical when it helps us to determine what ought to be or what ought to be done i.e. when the problem involves our will. (Ulrich, 1983)

It is a challenge because there is no satisfactory philosophy that facilitates the making of validity judgements in the area of practical reason. As a result, such judgements have to be based on nothing other than subjective criteria.

Ulrich concludes from a review of attempts to address the problem of practical reason that the philosophy of science has split into two camps. Some authors adopt a purely analytical approach (e.g. Albert, 1971; Popper, 1972a,b and Spinner, 1974) while others have adopted a dialectical position (e.g. Horkheimer, 1937; Adorno, 1957; Lorenzen, 1969; Wellmer, 1970 and Offe, 1972). The analytical philosophers believe that knowledge is by nature value free, and thereby dismiss the relevance of practical reason.

The dialectical philosophers accept Kant's two dimensions of knowledge but do not sufficiently address the validity question.

> Neither side has thus far realised the Kantian program of a practical reason that would critically justify itself. One need not elevate oneself to the status of the arbiter in order to observe that on the one hand the scientists [Popper, et al] operationalise practical reason by reducing it to theoretical-instrumental reason, while on the other hand their opponents [Adorno, et al] insist on the irreducible character of practical reason without having shown how practical reason can be practised. (Ulrich, 1983)

Ulrich observes that traditional systems science has taken the analytical route, and this needs to be moderated by CSH. Following dialectical thinkers, Ulrich claims that the criterion of validity for any enquiry using practical reason has to be its normative acceptability to all concerned citizens. The search is for a critical solution to the problem of practical discourse. Such a solution does not have to validate the truth and/or rightness aspects of proposed designs, but only to challenge the illusion that there is one right way. Through Critical Systems Heuristics, Ulrich advocates an emancipatory purpose for all research in human interactions and social organisations. By implication, research should deliberately aim at promoting the interests of the affected and the involved. These are identified through the making of critical boundary judgements.

Following dialectical thinkers (Harbermas in particular), Ulrich sees the legitimacy of knowledge and enquiry as intricately connected to values. To him, therefore, epistemological value-neutrality is not tenable. On this basis he criticises Weber's (1907) assertion that means ought to be separated from ends, with the ends being value-laden while the means are neutral. Ulrich's (1983) objection goes as follows:

> Counter to what the German sociologist Max Weber (1907) assumed in his decisionistic model of the relation of science (theory) to politics (practice), decisions on means cannot be kept free of normative implications by referring all value judgements to the choice of ends; for what matters is not the value judgements that an

> inquirer consciously makes (or not) but the life practical consequences of his propositions (regardless of whether they concern 'means' or 'ends') for those affected.

For Midgley (1992a,b), the above reference to "life-practical consequences" is absolutely central to critical systems thinking because, as Ulrich (1983) points out, the mere acceptance of the relevance of value judgements in directing research is not enough. It is important that the value judgements aim at securing the interests of those involved in, or affected by, research, as well as at declaring an emancipatory goal.

The research method adopted, as well as the stated ends, will determine to a great extent its practical consequences on participants. To Kant's (1787) assertion that there can be no absolute truth in the realm of theoretical reason (because perception of the whole is restricted by our knowledge constructs), Ulrich matches with the claim that there can be no absolute right or wrong. We should only endeavour to be critical all the time; "to make transparent to ourselves and others the value assumptions underlying practical judgements, rather that concealing them behind a veil of objectivity."

Practical reason requires that the standards of value of all the affected, be they involved or not, converge. Ulrich points out that planning can qualify as rational if the majority of those affected can take part competently and rationally. This competency, however, cannot be based solely on logic, facts, or expertise, but is based on the principle of democratic consensus. This condition entails the generalizability of the standards of value or norms underlying an action in question: i.e. people should seek consensus based upon the *"general good"*. To address this, Ulrich advocates embedding comprehensiveness of designs within a framework of practical discourse; the non-

discursive, goal-oriented dimension is to be complemented by the communicative consensus-oriented dimension of rational practice.

Contemporary philosophers such as Lorenzen (1969), Lorenzen and Scheumer (1975) and Habermas (1971, 1973, 1975, and 1979a) have developed "ideal" models of practical discourse. They provide essential insights into the conditions that would allow us to justify disputed validity claims. The problem is that these models, because they are ideal designs for rational discourse, are impractical. They assume ideal conditions of rationality that will always remain counter-factual. In fact, according to Ulrich (1983), they remain close to Kant's "monological approach" (which critical theorists tend to criticise) in that they presuppose what they are supposed to produce, namely rational argumentation; the ability and the will of all participants to argue cogently and to rely on nothing but the force of the better argument. They do not show how a discourse can be rational even though not everyone affected can become involved. Most importantly, they do not take into account the inevitability of argumentation break-offs: i.e. the premises and conclusions with which justification stops. "They neglect the important task of constructing conceptual frameworks for social reality" (Ulrich, 1983). According to Ulrich, Habermas has not yet closed the gap between rational discourse (pure communicative action) on practice and lived social practice (real life experience). Ulrich points out that we should not require systems methodologies to be able to secure the conditions of unconstrained discussion, they can only seek to lay open its inevitable lack of complete rationality.

For Ulrich (inspired by Churchman's (1968a,b; 1971; 1979a,b) 'dialectical' systems approach), the most fundamental concept of his Critical Systems Heuristics is the *"context of application"*. He defines this as:

> that section of the natural and social world which is to be considered as relevant when it comes to justifying a design's or a proposition's normative content, the value judgements flowing into it and the life practical consequences it may have for those affected by its implementation. (Ulrich, 1983; 1987).

> the context of application is never given objectively, it needs to be determined by judgement from the total universe of facts and value implications that might be considered. It cannot therefore be justified by reference to experience alone. (Ulrich, 1993).

As has been indicated earlier, a critical solution to the problem of practical discourse does not have to validate the empirical and/or normative content of practical propositions, but only prevent an objectivist illusion in dealing with such validity claims. To achieve this, Ulrich chooses a set of twelve questions to guide critical reflection on the normative content in systems designs. By means of these questions, hidden boundary judgements can be exposed in systems designs and the broad decisions of technical experts can be questioned. Interests of the affected and the involved are also identified through the making of critical boundary judgements. CSH is widely regarded as the only explicitly emancipatory methodology that the systems movement has produced (Schecter, 1991).

The main innovation by Ulrich is said to be his integration of critical and systems ideas (Midgley, 1992a). A truly rational enquiry qualifies as critical if it establishes boundaries within which critique can be conducted. In CSH each idea is regarded as inadequate on its own. Critical thinking without established system boundaries risks indefinite expansion beyond meaning (as everything becomes relevant). Systems

thinking without the critical idea, on the other hand, risks limited boundaries resulting in impoverished investigations based on taken for granted assumptions.

3.4 METHODOLOGICAL PLURALISM

Subsequent to Ulrich's work, many authors focused on methodological pluralism. In 1984, Jackson and Keys developed a "System of Systems Methodologies" (SOSM), a grid consisting of four categories of problem contexts. Without recourse to epistemological foundations, they examined the inter-relationships between different methodologies and their relative abilities to solve problems within various real world contexts. Jackson and Keys (1984) observe that aspects which make problems more complex originated either from the nature of decision maker(s) or the nature of the system(s) in which the problem is located. Decision makers and systems are therefore two aspects of problem contexts that have a strong bearing on the nature of problems.

Expanding on the system dimension, they point out that the classification of a system as complex or simple depends on individual perceptions, the purpose for intervening in a system, the number of elements in a system and the regularity of their interactions. A complex system, they state, is likely to have a large number of elements with many interactions. Based on the work of Vemuri (1978), Jackson and Keys explain that complex systems consist of more complicated problems because they are only amenable to partial comprehension, and they are governed by probabilistic laws making accurate prediction of the outputs of a proposed solution impossible. Such systems continually adapt to their environment and are therefore not stagnant. They are also dominated by behavioural problems making any solution to system problems highly dependent on the

values of the actors within a system. Simple systems, on the other hand, consist to a large extent of easy problems because they can be fully observed, they are based on distinct laws of behaviour, they do not adequately respond to the environment, they pursue unitary goals and are not directed by the behaviours of the actors within them.

Jackson and Keys classify decision makers within given problem contexts as being unitary or pluralist. They identify decision makers as unitary if they pursue the same goals for an entire system and make their decisions on the basis of those goals. They are pluralist if they do not share the same goals and make decisions based on different objectives. According to Jackson and Keys (1984), in a pluralist problem context, a solution is unlikely to be acceptable to all decision makers across the board. A solution can only be arrived at, either through some compromise among decision makers about overall objectives, or by imposition of a solution by a subset of decision makers with sufficient powers. In the later option they note that pluralism is likely to be compromised and ethical issues raised.

By cross referencing the "*system*" axis of simple and complex states with the "*decision makers*" axis of unitary and pluralist states, Jackson and Keys identify four categories of problem context to which they align methodologies as follows:[2]

Mechanical Unitary: The context is unitary in nature and consensus prevails about the goals being pursued. Problems within this context are appropriately addressed using the techniques of classical OR, including System Engineering (SE) and System Analysis (SA). This is what Checkland (1978) classifies as "Hard systems thinking", an approach

"---- based upon the assumption that the problem task they tackle is to select an efficient means of achieving a known and defined end" (Checkland, 1978).

Systemic Unitary Contexts: These are complex and probabilistic but with complete unanimity on the goal(s) of the system. Problems in this context are best dealt with by cybernetic tools; eg Beers' (1979) Viable Systems Model (VSM). Jackson and Keys point out that the evolution of socio-technical systems thinking was a response to the need to deal with problems of systemic unitary contexts. The principle of socio-technical systems thinking is that effective achievement of a primary task of a system is through the joint optimisation of a technical subsystem as well as the social-psychological sub-system. As the complexity of the system grows (the specific tasks with inputs to the primary task) it is best to devolve, so that they are under the management of semi-autonomous work groups (Rice, 1958).

Mechanical Pluralist Contexts: The systems in this category are simple but with divergent views amongst decision makers on the goals of the system. The methodologies relevant to this category are Churchman's Social Systems Design and Mason and Mitroff's (1981) Strategic Assumptions Surfacing and Testing (SAST). These focus on the relationships between decision makers in a problem context and not on the interactions between components of a system.

Systemic Pluralist Contexts: These consist of systems of intertwined problems. They are systems with purposeful parts that may well be pursuing conflicting goals. Appropriate problem solving methodologies for this context are those that assist in resolving conflicts among goals. These include Ackoff's Interactive Planning and

Checklands Soft Systems Methodology. Jackson and Keys point out that systemic pluralist problem contexts are cases of a special type because, by implication, the above methodologies can be employed in all the four categories of problem contexts. This, however, would be inefficient in some places as it would mean pursuing an already existing consensus on objectives, or reducing complexity that is non-existent. (Jackson and Keys, 1984).

According to Midgley (1995a) this classification system was seen at the time as offering prospects for choosing methodologies on the basis of a diagnosis of a problem context. It also provided the basis for carrying out the mixing of different aspects of methodologies. Jackson and Keys (1984) allude to this in the following statement.

> Some problem contexts will, of course, not fit exactly into any one of the --- categories. Faced with such an intransigent problem context, the problem solver may still gain benefits from the analysis. It will be possible using the analysis, to see how a particular methodology might be extended by making use of aspects of other approaches. For example, a problem solver who is armed with a Soft systems methodology appropriate for a systemic-pluralist context may find it possible to 'harden up' his methodology for a problem context which has some mechanical-pluralist aspects. The resolution of conflict over objectives may be helped by the use of a quantitative approach to aid the decision makers in investigating the effects of their own preferred solutions relative to the solutions of others. (Jackson and Keys, 1984).

Jackson and Keys identify this analysis as a starting point for a co-ordinated research program designed to enhance the understanding of different problem contexts and their appropriate problem solving methodologies. They observe that no one problem solving methodology is equally effective in all the four problem contexts identified, and difficulties could arise if methodologies are employed indiscriminately.

Jackson (1987a), developing the research programme of methodological pluralism, presented an expanded version of the System of Systems Methodologies in which the participants axis has three states: unitary (a perception of full agreement between participants), pluralist (a perception of disagreement between participants) and coercive (a perception of disagreement that is suppressed due to power relations). The systems axis remains with two states: simple (easy to understand) and complex (difficult to understand). The classification of systems and participants results in a six-celled matrix when combined, giving rise to six categories of problem context. See figure 3.1 below.

		System	
		Simple	*Complex*
	Unitary	Simple-Unitary: key issues are easily appreciated, and general agreement is perceived between those defined as involved or affected	Complex-Unitary: key issues are difficult to appreciate, but general agreement is perceived between those defined as involved or affected.
Relationships between Participants	*Pluralist*	Simple- Pluralist: key issues are easily appreciated, but disagreement is perceived between those defined as involved or affected.	Complex-Pluralist: key issues are difficult to appreciate, and disagreement is perceived between those defined as involved or affected
	Coercive	Simple- Coercive: key issues are easily appreciated, but suppressed disagreements are perceived between those defined as involved or affected	Complex-Pluralist: key issues are difficult to appreciate, and suppressed disagreements are perceived between those defined as involved or affected

Figure 3.1 ***The Systems of Systems Methodologies.***

Source: Midgley (1995a) adapted from Jackson (1987a)

This matrix, Jackson said, implies the need for six types of problem solving methodology. Jackson suggests that Ulrich's critical perspective would be most suited to simple coercive contexts, while an approach based upon radical structuralism was more appropriate for systemic coercive contexts. However, at the time, such a systems approach did not exist.

3.5 PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS

Another concern in the Early phase was to underpin methodological pluralism with an adequate epistemological theory. This started with Jackson's (1985b) search for a philosophy to support the idea of matching problem solving methodologies to ideal type contexts. Jackson first looked at Checkland's (1983) classification schema in which three types of entity were identified which could be thought of as systems:

Type 1 Systems are situations or phenomena characterised by interconnections which are part of the regularities of the universe. Examples are biological systems or systems of physical or chemical reactions. Such systems are the domain of the natural sciences.

Type 2 Systems are situations characterised by interconnections which derive from the logic of situations. Arrangements to manufacture or assemble products, or situations dominated by a decision about to be taken to achieve a known objective.

> Type 3 Systems are situations in which the interconnections are cultural, situations dominated by the meaning attributed to their perceptions by autonomous observers. (Jackson, 1985b).

For Jackson (1985b), the above classification improves understanding of the nature of organisations as open socio-technical systems. "Organisations seem to be Type 3 systems providing a context for Type 1 and Type 2 systems".

Jackson extrapolates that organisations, being the very basis of the socio-cultural life of the human species, are also the medium of social labour, social interaction and the exercise of power. He observes that investigations of characteristics of organisations requires a minimum of three dimensions. Methodologies are needed that are suitable for the technical pursuit of goals in changing environments, for the interaction of organisational participants, and for the analysis of power in the organisational setting.

For an underlying philosophy, Jackson refers to Habermas, specifically his 1972 and 1974 writings on epistemology:

> According to Habermas there are two fundamental conditions underpinning the socio-cultural form of life of the human species- 'work' and 'interaction'.
>
> 'Work' enables human beings to achieve goals and to bring about material well being through social labour. The importance of work to the human species leads human beings to have what Habermas calls a 'technical interest' in the prediction and control of natural and social events. The importance of 'interaction' calls forth another interest', the practical interest'. Its concern is with securing and expanding the possibilities of mutual understanding among all those involved in the reproduction of social life. Disagreements among different groups can be just as much a threat to the reproduction of the socio-cultural form of life as a failure to predict and control natural and social affairs.
>
> While work and interaction have for Habermas------ pre-eminent anthropological status, the analysis of power and the way it is

> exercised is equally essential. Habermas argues, for the understanding of all past and present social arrangements. The exercise of power in the social process can prevent the open and free discussion necessary for the success of interactions. Human beings therefore also have an 'emancipatory interest' in freeing themselves from constraints imposed by power relations and in learning through a process of genuine participatory democracy, involving discursive will formation, to control their own destiny. (Jackson, 1985b).

Jackson describes the three interests as forming the basis of knowledge seeking and the use of the System of Systems Methodologies as supporting the management of problems. With reference to knowledge gathering methods, Jackson observes that when we have an interest in prediction and control of the environment (a technical interest), the appropriate systems approaches to use are those with a positivist orientation (e.g. traditional, scientific, mechanical, functional and cybernetic methods).

An interest in advancing mutual understanding (a practical interest), is best addressed by interpretive approaches. While Jackson notes that interpretivism is underpinned by principles of hermeneutics and phenomenology, he laments that there is no fully fledged systems methodology which addresses the practical interest by facilitating understanding of the social world as a system, from a hermeneutic or phenomenological perspective.

For an interest in removing coercion and exposing false consciousness (an emancipatory interest), Jackson identifies historical reconstructive (e.g. Marxist) and psycho-analytic methods, but again he observes that no such methods are available in systems science. He further observes that an appropriate systems methodology would have to embrace Lukes (1974) three dimensions of power. In the first dimension, power is easily detected, with the second dimension the conflict between groups is not obvious to

outsiders, and in the third dimension it is extremely covert, only visible to those exercising it.

In 1985b, Jackson still did not explicitly acknowledge Ulrich's work. In 1988, however, Jackson acknowledged Ulrich's CSH and identified it as an emancipatory methodology. Jackson saw the opportunity for advancement arising from the convergence of ideas, notwithstanding individuals' preferences and the issue of paradigm incommensurability. He also regarded the works of Oliga (1988) and Banathy (1984 and 1988) as complementing his own efforts at providing guidelines for integrating and employing methods, on the basis of complementarism, to the analysis and management of organisations.

3.6 ENHANCED EPISTEMOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Taking up Jackson's earlier work, Oliga (1988) observed that new systems methodologies had been developed mostly at the practical level of real world problem solving. In contrast, he examined the methodological foundations of systems methodologies, incorporating epistemology into the analysis. Oliga points out that Morgan's (1983) philosophy of science and theory of society is based on the belief that social research is directed by collective ontological assumptions regarding the researcher's view about the empirical basis of the social world and human subjectivity. As a result, each of the four paradigms in Burrell and Morgan's (1979) framework (see figure 3.2) generates theories, perspectives and methodological approaches that are fundamentally different from those in the other paradigms.

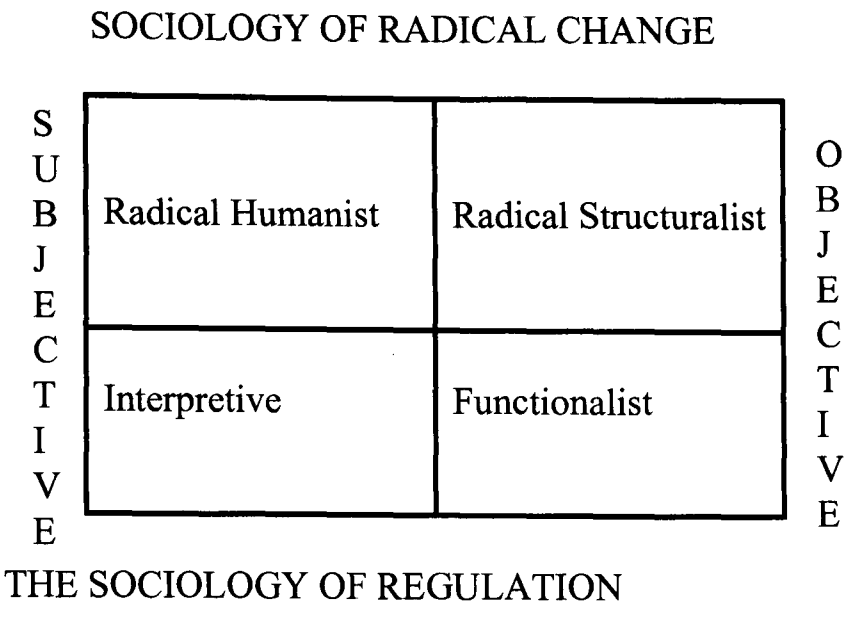

Figure 3.2 ***Four paradigms for the analysis of social theory*** (from Burrell and Morgan, 1979)

For Oliga, Habermas' theory of knowledge-constitutive interests (1972) presents an advancement from the inter-paradigmatic incommensurability position of Burrell and Morgan. Rather than merely explaining the different paradigmatic categories, it aligns them with interests that are seen by Habermas (1972) as singularly universal and consistent (ontological) forms of activity (Habermas, 1972; Giddens, 1977 and Keat, 1981).

Oliga then highlights the three methodological foundations behind three different modes of enquiry and practice: namely empiricism, hermeneutics and critique. He states that empiricism is to a large extent underwritten by positivism, and a positivist methodology for social sciences is likely to be weakened by what Habermas (1972) calls its *"false objectivism"* (not recognising the value basis of inquiries).

Oliga further differentiates two versions of the hermeneutic or interpretive methodology: the "*naturalistic*" methodology, alternatively called '*hermeneutics* as method', and the historical hermeneutic methodology. The naturalistic methodology, he says,

encompasses a variety of specific approaches: Phenomenology, Ethnomethodology, Existentialism and Transcendental Phenomenology. It is grounded on objectivism, but also recognises social reality as having distinctive characteristics. It believes that social phenomena are a product of acts of men while natural phenomena are essentially independent from human action. Historical hermeneutics, on the other hand, addresses the weaknesses identified in empiricism. It is a negation of objectivist perspectives in both empiricism and hermeneutics-as-method. While hermeneutic philosophy regards the interpreter and object as connected by a context of tradition (so that the interpreter has a preconceived understanding of his object and is therefore unable to comprehend it as it is, but only on the basis of his own framework) in historical hermeneutics understanding precedes interpretation, which encompasses only the analysis of options that are reflected in the understanding. Oliga points out, however, that historical hermeneutics, by taking for granted the validity of tradition, authority and language, develops an inherent weakness. This is because, by implication, it assumes that communication contexts are distortion free. Critique, Oliga points out, takes care of this weakness.

Oliga states that critique aims at reconciling the objectivity of the historical process with the purposes of its actors in order to realise emancipatory potential. It seeks to eliminate obstacles to comprehension that may not be obvious to the individuals or groups involved. Through the assimilation of explanatory and interpretive tasks, critique is able to clarify the critical issues emerging in the two "*radical*" paradigms, radical humanist and radical-structuralist, defined by Burrell and Morgan (1979) "Communicative distortions, false consciousness, and other ideological distortions are placed in the wider political, social-structural and material conditions of existence". (Oliga, 1988)

In conclusion, Oliga draws attention to the contingency of the methodological implications in the classification frameworks by Jackson and Keys (1984) and Banathy (1987). He points out that Banathy's classification, which is based on matching specific systems methodologies to system types, runs the risk of the system types being taken as concrete, as structures in their own right independent of system actors thereby overshadowing the problem situation. Jackson and Keys' classification, on the other hand, faces the problem of structures being imposed on problem contexts. Oliga recommends that any 'contingency' framework be examined on the basis of its origin and purpose so as not to compromise critical thinking.

Advancing the debate on pluralism from methodological considerations to epistemological coherence, Flood (1989a) reflects on Jackson and Keys' (1984) System of Systems Methodologies. He argues that this does not address the ontological and epistemological differences between functionalism and interpretivism, resulting in an incoherent epistemology (paradigm incommensurability) at a theoretical level, even if not at the methodological level.

Flood states that, while a validation procedure based on universal rules and logic is required, it is difficult to develop in a socio-political context in which efficiency and effectiveness are valued above all else, and where there is manifest psychological and cultural complexity (Flood 1989b). He further notes that selecting methodologies for problem contexts is difficult because different schools of systems thought, i.e. hard and soft, believe that their methods are best for the same problem contexts, despite their being grounded on opposing theoretical foundations. For the same reason, Flood states

that it is not possible to have an epistemologically neutral framework for methodology choice: "there cannot be measures of the same standard between paradigms."

Flood concludes by indicating that there is need for concrete evidence that paradigm incommensurability can be addressed by a meta-paradigm as proposed by Jackson (1988). This is, for him, the only possibility for advancing pluralism.

3.7 FURTHER ADVANCES IN THE DISCUSSION OF METHODOLOGICAL PLURALISM

Having worked on the System of Systems Methodologies, Jackson (1987a) turned his attention to the meta-issue of defining methodological pluralism. He speculated on potential developmental strategies for management science, reflecting on the weaknesses of traditional management science and the opportunities offered by alternative approaches founded on different assumptions. Jackson isolated four categories of methodological utilisation based on Reed's (1985) account of possible redirections in organisational analysis:

Isolationism: The privileging of only one approach while discarding all others.

> The isolationist strategy pictures the different strands of management science as continuing to go their own way, developing independently on the basis of their own presuppositions and with minimal contact between the strands. (Jackson, 1987a).

Jackson stated that isolationists are concerned that ideas from alternative approaches could contaminate their own approach. The intellectual justification for isolationism is

said to be based on paradigm incommensurability. Explaining paradigm incommensurability, Kuhn says

> the proponents of competing paradigms practice their trades in different worlds--- the two groups of scientists see different things when they look from the same point in the same direction. (Kuhn, 1970).

The implication, Jackson explains, is that as advocates of different strands of management science belong to different paradigms, they cannot effectively communicate with one another as they are likely to talk from different philosophical standpoints and on different wavelengths. The branch of critical management science that allocates radical management approaches to itself, and those that maintain the status quo to other management approaches, was identified by Jackson as advocating isolationism.

Flood (1989b) splits this isolationism into methodological isolationism and theoretical isolationism. He criticises methodological isolationism for its reductionist approach. While carrying the possibility of some change in the adopted method, it nevertheless impoverishes interventions. Theoretical isolationism is more acceptable to Flood, its only weakness being that of promoting a single world view and hence constraining communication with practitioners from other perspectives.

Imperialism: This involves concentrating on one main approach with others playing a supplementary role as and when necessary.

Jackson notes that the imperialist strategy is based on there being a supreme brand of management science that can act as the basis for advancement of the discipline. This

brand is open to aspects of other strands so long as they enhance the superiority and integrity of the favoured approach. Imperialists are said to account for other approaches from the perspective of their own dominant approach.

According to Jackson (1987a), Checkland (1981 and 1985) adopts an imperialist strategy by classifying the area of the systems movement relevant to management science into two parts, hard systems thinking and soft systems thinking, and describing the hard approach as a subset of the soft. Beer (1972), by allocating major control problems in more complex, probabilistic systems like economies, brains and companies to cybernetics, and simpler control problems to statistics and operational research, also exhibits an imperialist strategy.

Flood (1989b) further breaks down this category into imperialism by annexation and imperialism by subsumption. In imperialism by annexation, one key methodology is employed which calls upon parts of other methodologies to address specific aspects. "In this sense there is no final and complete inter-methodological partitioning, however, intra-methodological partitioning is necessary in order that annexation may be carried out." In imperialism by subsumption, one methodology is applied in all contexts, but calls upon other whole methodologies in sub-roles to deal with specific aspects. "--- if the 'what' had been decided through use of the 'mother' methodology, a 'how' methodology may then be drawn into process-----." Flood observes that while imperialism by subsumption holds some promise, imperialism by annexation is unacceptable as it represents extreme isolationism. It deforms subsumed methodologies to conform to its dominant world view, hence it foregoes learning from other perspectives.

Pragmatism: This is a hands on, practical approach to mixing and matching methods, not informed by theory. Note that, although the same word is used, Jackson's "pragmatism" is different from American pragmatism which is prepared to offer a theoretical justification for taking a practical approach (and has influenced the work of both Habermas, 1972 and Churchman, 1979a). Jackson's pragmatism completely discards theory.

According to Jackson the aim of the pragmatist approach is to promote management science on the basis of practical results even if this involves employing contradictory strands of argument. Pragmatists are said by Jackson to believe that the growth of management science practice should not be held back by theory development.

Pragmatists say that theory is too underdeveloped to be of much help with the complex social problems managers face (Naughton, 1979 and Vickers, 1978). The identification of proven techniques should be the objective of systems research. Jackson states that the pragmatist strand is more manifest in traditional management systems and soft systems thinking, while organisational cybernetics and critical management science are more informed by theory.

Pluralism: This promotes the choice and complementary use of methods, explicitly guided by theory. Jackson elucidates that the pluralist stance is that of supporting the development of the various strands of management science, with mutual support between theoretical and practical advances.

> Arguments stemming from the different assumptions employed by the various strands will continue, but will be conducted with mutual respect since it will be recognised that different approaches

> address different (if inter related) aspects of the management task. (Jackson, 1987b).

Jackson states that the aim of pluralism is to comprehend the strengths and weaknesses of the different strands of management science. The focus is on developing a meta-theory that can guide theoretical development as well as inform analysts on the choice of approach during interventions. The System of Systems Methodologies (SOSM) developed by Jackson and Keys (1984) and Jackson (1987b) is said to be the most explicit way of formalising this position. Pluralists therefore believe in unity through diversity within the field of management science.

Both Jackson (1987a) and Flood (1989a,b) conclude that pluralism is the most progressive approach. Jackson predicts that isolationism will lead to fragmentation of the different approaches of management science, each retreating further into its own paradigm boundaries. The imperialist strategy only promotes cohesiveness of management science through a process of domination, yet there are significant differences in the insights provided by the different philosophical paradigms. Removing these differences means compromising on the richness within the field of management science. The pragmatist approach, Jackson notes, restricts advancement by reducing social practice to technological development. It also risks uninformed practice that is subject to manipulation and limits the opportunities for exchanging knowledge.

Jackson states that pluralism, by acknowledging that all of the different strands of management science have respective roles in the pursuit of the anthropologically based cognitive interests of the human species (Habermas, 1972), supports the case for dialogue among the different approaches. Pluralism acknowledges the strong points of

the respective strands of management science, promoting their appropriate combination in tackling different problems. Jackson therefore maintains that it is only through the pluralist approach that the full potential of management science can be realised.

3.8 EMANCIPATION

Finally, Flood (1990a) also criticises isolationism, but emphasises emancipation. He observes that, in critical management science, emancipation is a key consideration regardless of how a research context is perceived: coercive or not. He states that the fundamental idea of emancipation is that investigations of problems arising from human relations need to safeguard the interests of all those involved and affected. Flood and Ulrich (1990) state that applied research can never access objectivity. An objective, authentic interpretation of social reality can only be approximated by way of emancipation from hidden assumptions. This fits in with Midgley's (1989b) assertion that a research design should, as far as possible, be a product of the perceptions of all known stakeholders, taking power relations into account.

3.9 CONCLUSION

In this chapter it has been demonstrated that the early phase in the development of CST involved a break with soft systems thinking, its implicit isolationism and neglect of objective social conditions. This led to the introduction of ideas aimed at introducing social theory and metaparadigmatic thinking to systems practice, as well as achieving a departure from isolationism to pluralism. The result was an explicit commitment to critique, emancipation and methodological pluralism, and an introduction of

frameworks and/or methodologies by which these could be pursued. The basic thinking in this phase was still embedded in modernism: i.e. the search for a single truth about methodology. In the next chapter I will look at how the various ideas introduced in the Early phase were consolidated and pragmatised to contribute to the practical development of critical systems thinking as a substantive strand of systems practice.

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[1] This is a paradigm that works on the basis of regularities in the relationship between sub-systems and the whole.

[2] Note that the terms simple and complex are interchangeable in this context with mechanical and systemic respectively.

CHAPTER FOUR

CRITICAL SYSTEMS THINKING: THE CONSOLIDATION PHASE

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter an account of the evolution of CST was given. This started off with a drive to reinforce systems thinking with a critical social theory. It progressed through the development of critical systems ideas aimed at questioning the normative implications of systems designs, particularly issues of power; through the realignment of systems methodologies using the ideas of methodological pluralism; to the call for a specifically emancipatory systems practice. This chapter looks at the Consolidation phase, a phase that is focused on the coherent development and advancement of the thinking evolved in the Early phase. It has to be pointed out right at the start, however, that the ideas in this chapter are based on the consolidation work carried out by Flood and Jackson. This, above everything else, is because of the wide-spread influence the work of these two researchers has had in the systems community. There were other authors with slightly different visions as to how CST ought to evolve (e.g. Midgley, 1989a,b; 1990a,b; 1992a,b; Gregory 1989, 1990 and 1992; Wooliston, 1990, 1991 and 1992), but these have not received widespread attention until recently, when their insights have been picked up and developed to inform the "New Directions" described in the next chapter.

The starting point is Jackson's "five commitments" which were evolved specifically to consolidate CST into one coherent whole, a substantive paradigm. Jackson (1991a,b)

observed that critical systems is distinguished from other strands of systems thinking by its adherence to five commitments: critical awareness, social awareness, complementarism at the theoretical level, complementarism at the methodological level, and a dedication to human emancipation.

4.2 THE FIVE COMMITMENTS

4.2.1 Critical Awareness

According to Jackson, CST advocates an approach to intervention that is self-consciously critical (Jackson, 1991a). This comes from an examination of the conditions within which a particular approach is most suited, and involves comprehension of the merits and demerits of theoretical principles underlying systems methods, techniques and methodologies, and can be facilitated by the use of such frameworks as Burrell and Morgan's (1979) grid of sociological paradigms. It also involves interrogating the implications of, and values embodied in, systems designs, as can be facilitated by the use of Ulrich's (1983) Critical Systems Heuristics.

4.2.2 Social Awareness

This promotes the identification of likely social consequences arising from the employment of particular systems approaches in real life situations, and also the identification of organisational and societal imperatives that privilege particular systems theories and methodologies in specific circumstances (Jackson, 1991b).

4.2.3 Complementarism and Informed Development at the Theoretical Level

This calls for having an open mind to methodological partnerships and taking a theoretically grounded look at all strands of systems thinking: functionalist, structuralist, interpretive and emancipatory. This is achieved by dampening the issue of paradigm incommensurability. It implies the classification of systems methodologies, realigning their rationalities in a complementary and theoretically consistent way so as to maintain a critical stance. It amounts to availing practitioners with the opportunity to compare and contrast systems methodologies in given situations, allowing them to understand the effects of employing each methodology. The selected philosophy to ground complementarism at the theoretical level is Habermas' (1972) human species dependent knowledge constitutive interests (as reviewed in the previous chapter).

4.2.4 Complementarism at the Methodological Level

Complementarism at the theoretical level is said to lead to complementarism at the methodological level; i.e. in practical interventions. This it does by resurfacing the strengths and weaknesses of the existing strands of systems thinking in terms of their potential for problem solving, and social consequences arising from their applications, and makes possible their deployment according to their inherent theoretical principles and relevant human interests. This requires a framework (meta methodology) that respects the qualities of each method and provides ".... a full understanding of each individual systems approach, to describe procedures that critical systems practitioners can follow in trying to translate their thinking into action in the real world". (Jackson, 1991a).

4.2.5 Human Emancipation

This is realised through the adoption of an emancipatory stance by application of emancipatory systems methodologies (Jackson, 1985b; Oliga, 1990; and Ulrich, 1983) within the wider framework of Habermas' theory of knowledge constitutive interests.[1] The aim is to avail individuals with the maximum realisation of their potential by evolving and applying methodologies appropriate for each of the interests.

Examining interpretive systemology (Fuenmayor, 1985 and 1989) and Critical Systems Heuristics (Ulrich, 1983), Jackson (1991b) states that unless a systems approach demonstrates commitment to all of the five elements discussed above, it cannot qualify as critical systems thinking. In his view, interpretive systemology and Critical Systems Heuristics fail in this regard. It must be said however that there is no single method that inherently demonstrates commitment to all five elements.

4.3 THE THREE COMMITMENTS

Following publication of Jackson's (1991a) work on the five commitments, Flood and Jackson (1991a) consolidated the five into three: complementarism, emancipation and critical awareness. Other authors describe these commitments with slight variations; methodological pluralism, emancipation and critical awareness (Midgley, 1995b); pluralism, emancipation and critique (Schecter, 1991).

Complementarism

The intention is "to reveal and critique the theoretical (ontological and epistemological) and methodological basis of systems approaches, and to reflect upon the problem situations in which approaches can be properly employed and to critique their actual use" (Flood and Jackson 1991a). Flood and Jackson advocate critically aligning methodologies with contexts of use, and grounding this with Habermas' epistemological theory of universal human interests in prediction and control, mutual understanding and freedom from oppressive power relations; the theory of knowledge constitutive interests.

Emancipation

The aim here is "to develop systems thinking and practice beyond its present conservative limitations and, in particular, to formulate new methodologies to tackle problem situations where the operation of power prevents the proper use of the newer soft systems approaches" (Flood and Jackson, 1991a). Critical systems thinking seeks to secure for all individuals the full nourishment of their capacities by improving the standards of work and life in the organisations and societies in which they interact (Jackson, 1991a).

Critical Awareness

The intention of this is "....to reflect upon the relationship between different organisational and societal interests and the dominance of different systems theories and methodologies" (Flood and Jackson, 1991a). This supports methodological pluralism,

critical use of methodology and the commitment to emancipation. Midgley (1995a) points out that "It is through ethical critique that power relations can be understood and 'improvement' defined".

4.4 FROM THE FIVE TO THE THREE COMMITMENTS

Flood and Jackson have never really accounted for the reduction from Jackson's (1991a,b) five commitments to the three commitments above. One author who has taken on this task is Midgley (1996). He observes that complementarism at the methodological level and complementarism at the theoretical level can be fused into a single commitment: the commitment to complementarism. This is because methodologies encompass theoretical assumptions. Jackson (1991a,b) alludes to this when he states that complementarism at the theoretical level leads to complementarism at the methodological level. Midgley further states that, in the new set of three commitments, the original commitment to social awareness (defined as an appreciation of the likely social effects of employing various systems methodologies) is implied in the commitment to emancipation which guarantees that research is directed towards securing improvement.

4.5 TOTAL SYSTEMS INTERVENTION

As part of the effort to consolidate CST, and simultaneously to show its direct relevance for managerial practice, Flood and Jackson (1991b) went on to develop a meta methodology called Total Systems Intervention (TSI). This is referred to as a "practical face to critical systems thinking." TSI is said to be able to judge other intervention

methodologies as to their comprehensiveness or lack of it. It therefore helps guide the choice of methodologies in a complementary and theoretically grounded manner.

Later, Flood (1995a) updated and revised TSI, and this is reviewed in the next chapter. However, for the purpose of understanding the Consolidation Phase of CST, the focus will be on Flood and Jackson's (1991b) first version. In this version TSI works on the basis of three elements: systems metaphors, the System of Systems Methodologies, and systems methodologies themselves. There are three phases to TSI; creativity, choice and implementation. Within the three phases are said to be embedded seven principles as follows:

1. Organisations are too complicated to understand using one management "model", and their problems too complex to tackle with the "quick fix".

2. Organisations, their strategies, and the difficulties they face should be investigated using a range of systems metaphors.

3. Systems metaphors which seem appropriate for highlighting organisational strategies and problems can be linked to appropriate systems methodologies to guide interventions.

4. Different systems metaphors and methodologies can be used in a complementary way to address different aspects of organisations and their problems.

5. It is possible to appreciate the strengths and weaknesses of different systems methodologies and to relate each to appropriate organisational concerns.

6. TSI sets out a systemic cycle of inquiry with iteration back and forth among the three phases.

7. Facilitators, clients and others are engaged at all stages of the TSI process.

(Flood and Jackson, 1991b)

Following Morgan (1986), the creativity phase works on the basis that each of the methodologies of TSI reflects a particular metaphor of organisation. Different metaphors are said to highlight different aspects of an organisation's functioning. The organism metaphor, for instance, focuses on organisational structure, while the prison metaphor highlights political aspects of an organisation (Flood and Jackson, 1991b). In this phase, stakeholders in an organisation (the involved and the affected) collectively evolve the major contentious issues. These are then explained using systems metaphors. The result of this phase is the identification of a major metaphor, and possibly a number of subordinate metaphors, that are effective in clarifying the problems that are confronting the organisation.

The choice phase is aimed at selecting an appropriate methodology or group of methodologies by mapping the metaphors from the creativity phase onto the System of Systems Methodologies (SOSM). Flood and Jackson (1991b) advise that the choice of

systems methodologies should be influenced, rather than directed by, the SOSM. They conclude by submitting that

> The most probable outcome of the choice phase is that there will be a dominant methodology chosen, to be tempered in use by the imperatives highlighted by dependent methodologies. (Flood and Jackson, 1991b).

Implementation then follows choice. Flood and Jackson (1991b) assert that

> The task during the implementation phase is to employ a particular systems methodology (or systems methodologies) to translate the dominant vision of the organisation, its structure, and the general orientation adopted to concerns and problems into specific proposals for change.

The process of TSI has been described as a "multi-directional activity cycle" (Midgley, 1995a). Flood and Jackson have emphasised that

> Any kind of systematised use of TSI would be unacceptable and will lack in main emphasis that which we wish to promote - i.e. Creativity. (Flood and Jackson, 1991b).

TSI addresses the paradigm problem, the observation that systems methodologies are grounded in different and irreconcilable philosophical positions, through recourse to Habermas' (1972) theory of knowledge constitutive interests (see the previous chapter, where the use of this theory to underpin the System of Systems Methodologies was discussed). The philosophy underpinning TSI is said to be CST, as it is committed to complementarism, and demonstrates critical awareness by providing many images of organisations and promoting consciousness of the implications of different views. It is also said to promote human emancipation by giving balanced attention to human issues and technical concerns, and by exposing coercive contexts.

4.6 CONCLUSION

Within the Consolidation phase, CST was fairly prescriptive, with the way of seeing being primarily influenced by the proposed commitments. The Consolidation phase had primarily to do with pragmatising CST (in TSI) and with the alignment of the different strands of critical systems thinking around a set of commitments. Work from this phase is contained in a book of seminal papers in critical systems thinking edited by Flood and Jackson (1991a). However, despite assurances by the two authors that they respected other views, the attempt to establish a definitive vision did worry some researchers within the systems thinking community. For instance, in a review of the above volume, Midgley (1993) expressed concern that the consolidation of CST undertaken by the two authors could close off further development of the paradigm. Fortunately this has not happened, as is evident in the work to be reviewed in the next chapter.

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[1] It is accepted that the other two interests of work and interaction are precursors to the emancipatory interest.

CHAPTER FIVE

CRITICAL SYSTEMS THINKING: NEW DIRECTIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

The 1990s have seen a dramatic shift in critical systems thinking. The crux of this shift is a movement away from CST "commitments" towards "themes for debate" (Midgley, 1995a), allowing for more plurality of definitions. Also, there has been a move away from generic classifications of methodologies to a focus on the need for personal reflection on choice-making. It is argued that methods cannot be pigeon holed regardless of the situation. Finally, there has been a move towards postmodernism, reflected in a suspicion about Habermasian meta-theory and a complication of the view of power that is taken.

5.2 ARGUMENTS ON PLURALISM

As pointed out in the preceding chapter, the early ingredients for this shift were already present in writings that received little attention while Flood and Jackson's consolidation was being promoted between the late 1980s and early 1990s. For instance it is felt by others (Oliga, 1990 included) that the allocation of power issues within simple problem contexts was rather simplistic. Mingers and Gill (1997) later points out, with respect to Flood and Jackson's system classification, that Ulrich's CSH was not only meant for

addressing coercive problem contexts but also problems of defining the system in question.

Gregory (1990) faults the System of Systems Methodologies for promoting only one perception of each methodology. She states that the key characteristic of a critical social enquiry is that it encompasses both positivistic and interpretive aspects, hence Habermas' (1972) tri-partite perspective which embraces a positivist aspect, an interpretive aspect and an emancipatory aspect. She goes on to find SOSM deficient as a pluralist framework, and therefore not critical because it encourages choice between positivism and interpretivism rather than the use of both. This agrees with Tsoukas (1993) who writes:

> To say following Habermas, that "work" leads "human beings to have a 'technical interest' in the prediction and control of natural and social affairs" (Flood and Jackson, 1991b) hence the need for positivism - is only half true. The other half is that "work" is fundamentally, and inextricably, linked to "interaction" (the practical interest) and "power" (the emancipatory interest) in ways that a discourse addressing "work" alone inevitably makes assumptions about the other two anthropological interests. (Tsoukas, 1993)

Gregory (1992) uses the phraseology "discordant pluralism" to describe an alternative form of methodological pluralism that is inclusive of differences between methodologies rather than that which highlights only the 'fit' between methods into complementarist frameworks (Jackson, 1987a; Flood and Jackson, 1991b). She talks of a "constellation" of methodologies based on individual perceptions. She then grounds this with her theory of Critical Appreciation. This theory isolates four dimensions of critical research practices: Empirical-Analytic (based on experiment and observation), Historical-Hermeneutic (based on two way communication with others), Self-Reflection

(revealing ones own assumptions) and Ideology-Critique (revealing assumptions at the level of society). See figure 5.1.

For Gregory (1992), all these four approaches ought to be incorporated into research for it to be considered critical. These dimensions are not aligned through a meta-theory, and no methods are ascribed to any of them. Individual researchers have the freedom to interpret the theory of critical appreciation using whatever methodologies and methods they want, taking cognisance of both the differences and perceived similarities between them. Since no single method encompasses all four aspects, however, interventions must inevitably draw upon and mix different methods so that a holistic approach is attained.

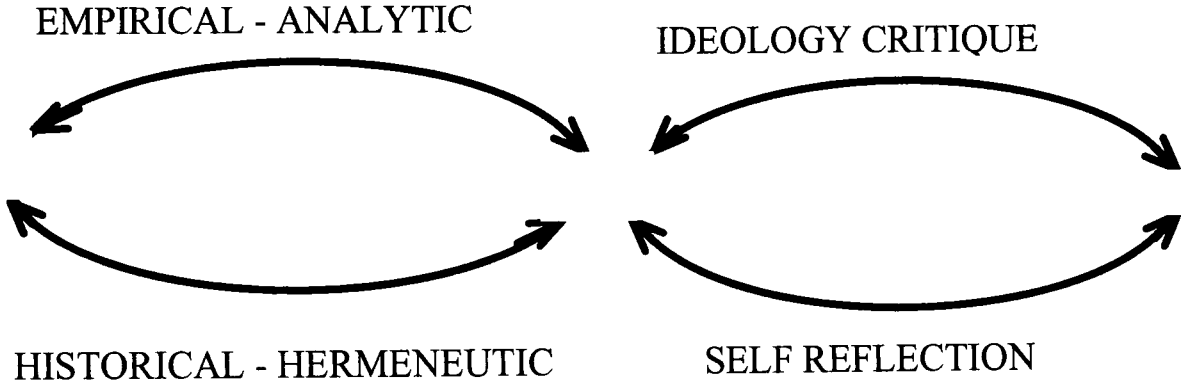

Figure 5.1 ***The Critical Appreciation Process***

Source: Midgley, 1995b

Gregory proceeds to underpin her critical appreciation process with a philosophy of self-society dynamics. This highlights the two way relationship between self and society. While the individual and her acts have an impact on society, social processes both

change and limit the knowledge available to an individual, hence the range of informed actions that can be taken. Self and society therefore constrain and facilitate each other. This translates into the declaration that self-reflection and ideology-critique are both essential. Self-Reflection assists the individual to appreciate her position in sustaining or changing social processes. Ideology-Critique promotes comprehension of the way social processes influence consciousness. Empirical-Analytic and Historical-Hermeneutic studies are also essential as they both enable human beings to transcend and develop their understandings beyond their current constructs. However, Gregory (1992) affirms that, without self-reflective activity and ideology critique, observation and communication cannot be used to reconsider the context within which they are perceived.

Midgley (1990b) advocates methodological partitioning (later called the "creative design of methods" in Midgley, 1996) to enhance creativity in interventions. For Midgley, most researchers using the Systems of systems methodologies have, by habit, defined their research on the basis of a single category of context, resulting in the adoption of a ready made systems method. However, in practice research problems are not so readily discernible as to fit into a single category of context. He advocates, as a progressive way forward, the design of methods as against a single choice between "off-the-shelf" methodologies. Methods have to be combined systemically when tackling complex issues. This involves understanding the problem situation in terms of a series of "systemically interrelated research questions, each of which might need to be addressed using a different method or part of a method." The research questions do not have to be predetermined, they can be developed as research progresses and comprehension is enhanced. A major point in the creative design of methods is that the final method that

evolves is more than the sum of its parts (Midgley, 1996). So it is not just an incremental collective of different methods: "a synthesis is generated that allows each individual research question to be addressed as part of a whole system of questions."

According to Midgley, the specifics of the research design will, to a large extent, be influenced by the ideology of the concerned researchers. This is why Mingers (1997) calls for a retreat from abstract methodologies to a focus on the actual agent(s) that is (are) going to apply them; his commitments. Midgley (1989b and 1990b) highlights the importance of a partnership through dialogue between a researcher and stakeholders in evolving research questions. He explains that the stakeholders must also be allowed the confidentiality necessary for them to identify controversial issues including issues of power.

5.3 POSTMODERNIST ARGUMENTS

Flood (1990b) observes that, by postmodernist standards, complementarism is conservative due to its explicit rationalism. He states that, while modernisim assumes objective knowledge and the neutrality of language, postmodernism believes that language can be an agent of domination. Hence the need to free suppressed knowledge's (embodied in language), thereby making all knowledge available for interrogation against the full epistemology that embraces systems practice. This is the basis of Flood's (1990b) liberating systems theory.

Flood seeks to integrate Foucault's (1974, 1980) ideas (what Dreyfus and Rabinow (1982) call Interpretative Analytics) with Habermas' (1972, 1974) theory of knowledge

constitutive interests. Habermas' (1972) perception of the "emancipatory interest" assumes that power is owned by individuals who then use it to control others. It is unpalatable and dominating. The domination is evident through discernible social relations and their ideological justifications. Individuals need emancipation, therefore, both from the actual power relations and the ideology that underlies them. On the other hand, Foucault has a distinct conception of power. To him, power does not belong to individuals but is based in the growth of forms of knowledge which influence the structuring of social relationships. The suppression of an individual by another is said to be simply a surface manifestation of a whole process of knowledge development in which some activities are accepted as normal. Midgley has interpreted these two views as follows:

> On the one hand, for Habermas, the ability for human beings to make truth claims is a vital aspect of the rational practice of exposing ideology. On the other hand, for Foucault, knowledge and power are so intimately linked that there can be no acceptable criteria for the establishment of truths. (Midgley, 1995b)

Flood notes that, unlike Habermas, Foucault's definition of power-knowledge is not based on a link between knowledge and ideology. He maintains, however, that this does not necessarily mean that the ideas of the two authors are incommensurable. This is because both Habermas' idea of challenging ideology and Foucault's emphasis on interrogating truths constitute critique. They both reflect on power and subjugation, and they both question the superiority of instrumental and scientific rationality over other forms of reasoning. Mingers (1997) apparently also sees complementarity between Foucault's (1988) four categories of techniques that apply to our understanding and action, and Habermas' three knowledge constitutive interests. Flood argues that a joint assault by knowledge constitutive interests and interpretive analytics is required to challenge the different aspects of instrumental rationality.

Flood (1990b) has endeavoured to integrate the contrasting perspectives of Habermas and Foucault on the basis of two of the themes of CST, namely critical awareness and methodological pluralism. He articulates that, to be critical, one has to have the option of comparing and contrasting different knowledges. According to Foucault, the liberation of suppressed knowledges is central to critical behaviour, due to the fact that there are some forms of knowledge that influence social relationships and there are others that are suppressed by such social relationships. Habermas' analysis, on the other hand, provides the opportunity to critique liberated knowledges using the three forms of rationality associated with the three human interests. The effect of one dominant form of knowledge promoting one interest can be confronted by the growth of knowledge relating to the other interests. Flood (1990b) explains this as follows:

> Interpretive Analytics [the label given to Foucault's perspective by Dreyfus and Rabinow (1982)] can release rationalities, thus helping to grow diversity. Habermas' critical theory accepts openness and conciliation and welcomes this diversity. Knowledge-constitutive interests then deals critically with the tensions between rationalities" (Flood, 1990b).

The contradictory views on the nature of power held by Foucault and Habermas are reconciled as follows.

> Via the notion that truth is dependent on power and that there is a need to liberate discourse. We then employ Habermas' ideal by looking for the truth of judgement according to our interest, explicit ideology and critical analysis. In this process, however, we drop the idea that truth comes about from the force of the better argument. (Flood, 1990b).

Flood thus concludes that the difference between Foucault and Habermas' work is settled by the acceptance that what is true is influenced by power. For him, what counts is the exposition of norms to critique. Foucault's and Habermas' rationalities can therefore be integrated by the introduction of rules that ground systems practice and

within which statements can be justified. Flood points out that LST does this by spelling out emancipatory rules for discourse and analysis. It is worth pointing out, however, that the resulting integration has been said by Jackson (1991b) and Midgley (1995c) to have compromised Habermas' view of power.

Wooliston (1992) further advances the post modernist redefinition of citical systems thinking by incorporating the ideas of such thinkers as Derrida, Lyotard and Nietzsche. In calling for an ongoing systemic re-definition of pluralism he points out that CST ought to respond to three main themes: marginalization of knowledge; fiction as knowledge; and the will and representation of knowledges. To these themes he allocates four dimensions: dialectical forms; cross dialectics; cross-generics; and pluralism. From a juxtaposition of the three main themes on a horizontal axis and the four dimensions on a vertical axis he comes up with twelve positions that need to be addressed by critical systems thinkers. He advocates "a structure that maintains and does not neutralise meaning", pointing out that CST is a process and not a final position. Like Flood (1990b), Wooliston (1993) highlights the interdependency of rationalities and counter rationalities.

5.4 TOWARDS A CST BASED ON DEBATE

In the New Directions, CST is perceived as an ongoing debate on a number of themes (Midgley, 1995a). There is no attempt to consolidate the different perspectives into one grand static position, as this would go against the spirit of critical reflection and debate. The switch over to this position was identified in Midgley (1995a). Midgley came up with six criticisms of old CST and proposed the means for addressing these. He aspired

to evolve a new vision of CST by reflecting on Churchman's (1968a,b, 1971 and 1979a,b) and Ulrich's (1983) work on boundary critique. It will be recalled from the Early Phase that Jackson (1987a) and Flood (1989a,b) interpret methodological pluralism as classifying methodologies according to contexts of application on the basis of Habermas' theory of universal human interests in prediction and control, mutual understanding and freedom from coercive relationships. In the Consolidation phase, Flood (1990a) further submitted that methodological pluralism is based on a meta-paradigm. Midgley (1995b), however, observes that this does not hold since the assumptions about human knowledge underpinning this position (drawn from Habermas, 1972) are not compatible with those underlying other systems paradigms. He therefore states that CST does not sit above other paradigms but offers a new paradigm. Midgley further faults Habermas' (1972) theory of knowledge-constitutive interests for privileging the interests of human beings in predicting and controlling the natural and social worlds at the expense of maintaining a balanced and sustainable eco-system.

In the commitment to critical awareness, Flood and Jackson (1991a) emphasise assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of methodologies, seeking clarifications of the context of application and exposing the ethical issues underlying systems practice. Midgley (1995b), however, observes that the method for achieving this in a way that deals with power relations has not been identified. He further notes that Flood and Jackson's interpretation of methodological pluralism prevents them from exercising the commitment to critical awareness in situations where coercion does not surface at the onset of an intervention. He observes that the lack of a method for pursuing critical thinking when coercion is not immediately evident (the System of System Methodologies would suggest a hard or a soft method) carries the risk of practitioners

uncritically adopting commissioning organisations' agendas in interventions. This translates into the uncritical establishment of boundaries without considering the implications for an organisation's wider environment.

Midgley also observes that the explicit commitment to human emancipation (Jackson 1991a) ignores the non-human environment, thus risking far reaching effects which could rebound on human beings. Finally, Midgley states that, in addressing the commitment to emancipation there is need to clarify the idea of progress "implied in the concept of emancipation, and whether it can be accounted for in absolute or near absolute terms." This is important especially if we take cognisance of the fact that progress in some areas can have dysfunctional effects in others.

In attempting to address the above issues, and evolve a new vision of CST, Midgley (1995b) comes up with a number of proposals. As a starting point he proposes that boundary critique should always facilitate entry into interventions. It should also be used in post intervention reflections. He therefore advocates expressing the commitment to critical awareness through the use of the ethical critique of boundary judgements. This, he states, ought to be complemented with a refinement of the theory and practice underlying boundary critique. Likewise, the bias towards human emancipation at the expense of the environment could be corrected by giving priority to the making of critical boundary judgements. Also changing the commitment to human emancipation to one of "improvement" could further clear the air. Midgley (1995b) observes that commencing every intervention with the ethical critique of boundary judgements would guarantee that the interpretation of the commitment to improvement would be left to the participants identified by the critically adopted boundaries (including the researchers).

As for the problems inherent in Flood and Jackson's interpretation of methodological pluralism, Midgley (1995b) advocates dropping Habermas' theory of knowledge constitutive interests with its implied acceptance of human domination over non-human life, and embracing in its place Habermas' later work on validity claims (1976a; 1984a,b). The later works provide a philosophical grounding for methodological pluralism that is not based on the notion that human beings have an inherent interest in "predicting and controlling" all aspects of the planet.

Midgley (1995b) concludes by emphasising that, if CST is built on theoretical assumptions, it is inevitable that it will be incommensurable with other theoretical positions. Therefore it cannot be metaparadigmatic. He therefore questions the consolidated version of CST (presented in the previous chapter) on the basis of its constituent commitments, its perception of pluralism and its underlying philosophy. Mingers' (1997) own argument is that critique should no longer be based on a discovery of universal and unnecessary limits, but rather on an exploration of the contingency and flexibility of contexts and boundaries.

5.5 RETHINKING TSI

Responding to criticisms of the theory and practice of TSI, Flood (1995a,b) produced a new version, referred to here as TSI(2). While TSI(2) is still a meta methodology consisting of three major phases (creativity, choice and implementation) its structure is recursive. Within each of the phases all phases of the approach are replicated at a micro level. There is also enhanced flexibility in TSI (2). To begin with, the creativity phase is not limited to metaphorical analysis. Any other appropriate methods (e.g. brainstorming

and idea writing) may be incorporated to enhance analysis of the problem situation. This also includes the generation of personal metaphors ("divergent metaphorical analysis") as well as the creation of time and space for creative thinking ("ergonomics of reflection"). It also makes provision for the creation of hitherto unknown methodologies that can be incorporated into the inventory of TSI practice. In the choice phase the System of Systems Methodologies no longer features, as it has proven difficult for practising managers to understand. In its place is a simple framework that categorises four areas of intervention by systems practioners: namely, organisational process, organisational design, organisational culture and organisational politics. Flood (1995a) states that there is a domain for which each systems method is most useful. What is important, therefore, is to align methods with appropriate domains. He also emphasises that it is important, when addressing any particular domain, to consider how it impacts on other domains and to take appropriate action. Methodology choice is thereby enhanced in two ways: by an improvement in the creativity phase leading to it, and in the potential for expansion of the choices available.

To liberalise TSI further, Flood (1995a) identifies three modes with which TSI(2) needs to be applied. First is the problem solving mode in the course of interventions; second the critical reflection mode, in which the whole TSI process is used to evaluate interventions post-operatively (feeding the results back into the process itself); and finally, the critical review mode in which the TSI process is employed to evaluate other methodologies so as to investigate their usefulness within the repertoire of TSI. Flood (1995b) further proposes that alternative frameworks to the one that categorises the four domains of organisation, suitable to local cultural needs or to individual preferences, can be developed using the TSI process. In TSI(2), the researcher is at liberty to mix

methods flexibly and is not restricted to working with whole methods only. On the basis that methods and methodology are different, Flood (1995a) states that, so long as a researcher adheres to the principles of a methodology, use of an aspect of a method or a combination of methods does not contravene the validity of an intervention. This concords with the creative design of methods (Midgley, 1996).

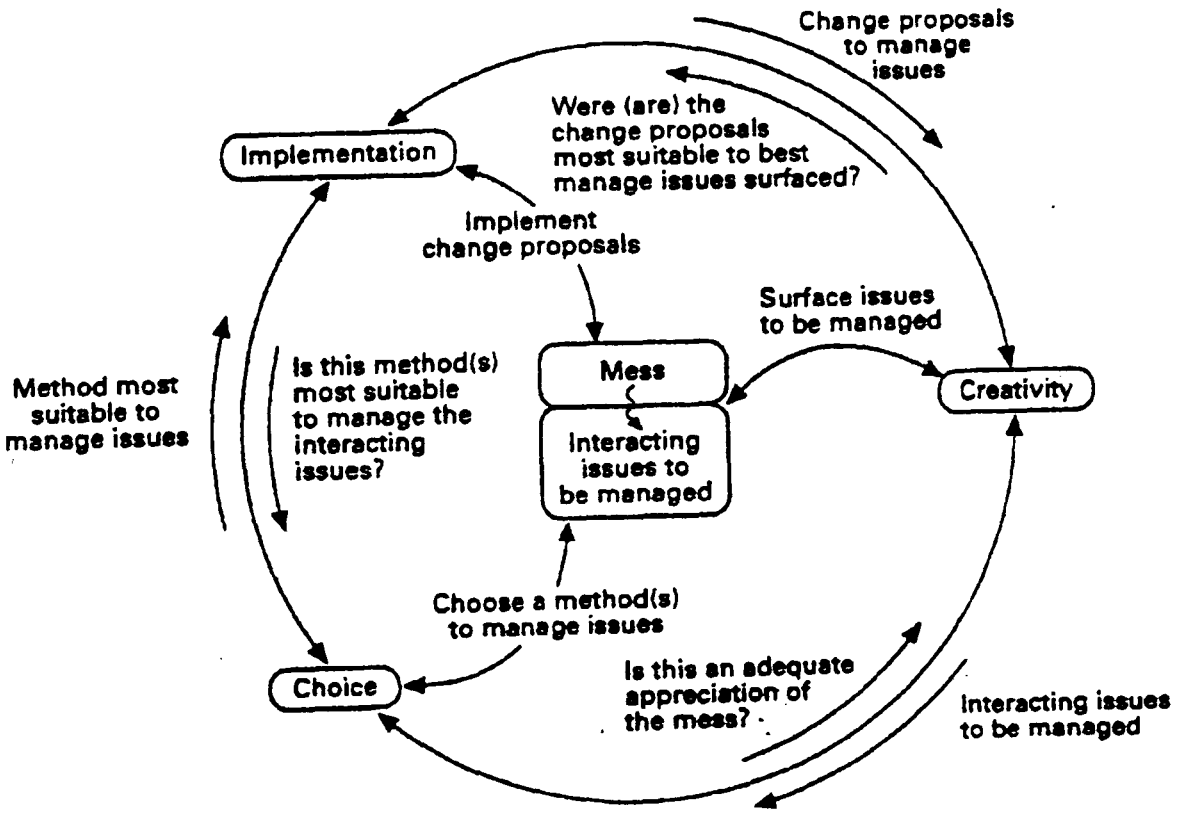

Figure 5.2 ***The Process of TSI (2)***

(from Flood, 1995b, p.178)

5.6 DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT

TSI(2) has been augmented by the idea of Diversity Management (Flood and Romm, 1996a). In this the paradigm problem is addressed from the position that the adoption of methodological pluralism invariably starts from the researcher's own perceptions. Flood and Romm (1996a,b) observe that TSI puts into practice methodological guidelines for implementing critical systemic modernism. Its limitation, however, is that it prejudices the choices people have to make, especially with regards to the selection of models and methodologies, and it prescribes for people the meaning of emancipation. They state that critical modernists (Habermas, etc.) aspired to develop a form of knowing that reflects opportunities through speech for consensual modes of human relationship. Post modernists, on the other hand, adopt the stance that every act of knowing is a product of local and temporary consensual agreement between current actors. Flood and Romm (1996a) find the observation that consensus is relative to time and place valuable because, for them, the prospect of forced agreement is as unprogressive as the absolute relativism of the *"anything goes"* variety. They hope to achieve an improved understanding of complementarism by drawing upon Foucault's postmodernist work and Habermas' modernist research. Like Midgley (1995c), they observe that the earlier effort through liberating systems theory was flawed, primarily because it ignored the role of the critically reflective individual who needs to be conscious of, and take personal responsibility for, adopted choices, without falling back on "facts" or a supposedly universal consensus. They put emphasis on the importance of making judgements when confronted with dilemmas. The response to these shortcomings within the framework of citical systems thinking is what Flood and Romm (1996a) have labelled Diversity Management.

Flood and Romm (1996a,b) describe their approach to management as "a deliberate decision to pursue what is positive and ignore what is negative in both modernism and post modernism." For them it is a new position on complementarism that advances the management of seemingly insoluble theoretical issues that question the rationale for complementarism. Diversity Management is said to have advanced from emphasising the diversity of management models, methodologies and theories, to managing the selection of models, methodologies and theories.

In their approach, Flood and Romm (1996a) support argumentation only in situations where choice is made and accounted for while adhering to patterns of action. They adopt as standards the ability and freedom by actors to choose, and the relevance of the choices made to the involved and the affected. To them, Diversity Management is a metatheory which explains theory based in action. They state that differences between theories and methodologies (as ways of perceiving the world) need to be taken into consideration, and their critical differences accepted. For them, taking cognisance of these differences offers the opportunity for re-orienting the overtly opposing theoretical and methodological alternatives. "Subsequently methodology and/or theory choice making encompasses recognition of and value in a diversity of positions".

The validity of knowledge, they state, is not determined by an adopted or improved theoretical position, it is based on its significance for practical ideas in action. The identified goals cannot be supported on the basis of securing total consensus, or with reference to the "truth" of the situation. Flood and Romm point out that

> This points to the idea that alternative positions do not meet outside of the process of people attempting to make sense of the variety in terms of criteria which themselves do not offer universal standardised ways of comparing. Choices can be defended on the grounds that they

> incorporate a degree of sensitivity to other options as well as an effort to encounter these without thereby subsuming them in a prefavoured language (hence the partial commensurability of positions, which suggests that processes can be chosen on the basis of some form of reasoning in relation to alternatives). (Flood and Romm, 1996a).

Within the concept of Diversity Management, Flood and Romm (1996a) state that interveners ought to be aware that what they know about how to approach a situation is in fact part of the situation. Taking a decision on the means of understanding a situation reflects perceptions of what can possibly be pursued within a given context. The key ideas in Diversity Management are triple-loop learning, individual choice making and the oblique use of methods. These are explained below.

Triple loop learning proposes three distinct centres (loops) of learning. The first centre is concerned with operational questions: *"Are we doing things right?", (How should we do it?).* The second centre focuses on issues of debate, asking the question *"Are we doing the right things?", (What should we be doing?).* The third centre of learning is concerned with issues of power, asking the question *"Is mightiness determining what is right or rightness being enforced by mightness?".* The three loops link together so that learning through one loop can inform learning through the others. The models, methodologies and other approaches that support the trilogy provide the means for learning within each loop. This is said to facilitate action that is reflexive, intelligent and responsible among practioners.

Diversity Management and triple loop learning are said to be ideals aimed at nurturing in individuals an understanding of the value of differences. People decide, according to their perceptions of core issues, whether to approach issues as needing structural alteration, requiring open debate, or dominated by tactical plays of power. Flood and

Romm (1996a) assert that, while each represents a different perspective, they can be applied without inconsistencies depending on the context and preferences of the involved. They add that the question of which models and methodologies to use, and how to use them, is determined within the interventionist's conception of the circumstances of which the interventionist should be regarded as an inherent part.

Flood and Romm talk about paradigm (in)commensurability to emphasise that paradigms can be seen as either commensurable or incommensurable, depending on the focus of analysis. Belief in total commensurability hides the important differences between perspectives that make choice meaningful. This also touches on the cultural influence and temporal nature of cognition. The wholesale acceptance of incommensurability also constrains choice making by enforcing isolationism, while a willingness to learn about methods and methodological principles from other paradigms enhances choice. The management of (in)commensurability between the loops is very much dependent on a recognition that knowledge judgements about situations cannot be divorced from the making of practical choices. A critical approach cannot be justified solely from a theoretical basis. The order in which the loops are mixed should be determined by the interventionist's reflections on the variety of core issues adopted before choosing a loop. Standards of choice making will in turn reflect the adopted perspective.

> As diversity management states, choice of model(s) and or methodologies is local in time and space, is widely informed, provisional and always open to further choice. (Flood and Romm, 1995b).

While, within triple loop learning, purposes of design, debate, or might-right management can be served by activating one of the loops in a dominant role,

alternatively action can be achieved by redirecting the purpose of a model or methodology on the basis of principles and purposes not provided for by its usual theoretical underpinning. Flood and Romm (1996a) have called this the oblique use of models and methodologies. In situations where a direct approach to might-right issues is not practicable, the oblique use of models and/or methodologies from loop 1 or loop 2 may be more preferable. Flood and Romm (1996a) proceed to suggest that any model or methodology can be applied obliquely to pursue the purpose of a loop not related to its normal theoretical underpinning. Using models and methodologies obliquely implies the insight and skilful implementation of principles from one approach in the practice of another. For Flood and Romm (1996a), therefore, the oblique application of models and methodologies broadens the possibilities for choice making.

Midgley (1997) has argued, however, that what Flood and Romm call the oblique use of methods is in fact their creative design. He states that what actually happens is that both sets of methodological purposes or principles are synthesised giving rise to a total method which is different from the sum of their contributory parts.

> It is not simply a matter of "stitching" methods together in an additive fashion; a synthesis is generated that allows each individual research question to be addressed as part of a whole system of questions. (Midgley, 1997).

5.7 COMPLEXITIES OF POWER

Finally, there is a more complex view of power (compared with that adopted in the Early and Consolidation phases) emerging with Valero-Silva's (1994, 1995) use of Foucault, and Flood and Romm's (1996a) pluralistic understanding of power. Valero-

Silva's interpretation of Foucault's position is that power does not belong to individuals. It is not location specific and is not a property of a given phenomenon, but a way in which certain actions may structure the generation of other possible actions. Power is therefore a property of relations and not an entity. The concept "power" encompasses much more than physical power, repression and domination. In Valero-Silva's interpretation of Foucault's work, the emphasis is on power relations resulting from the structure of knowledge production processes within a society. For Flood and Romm (1996a), however, the above description of power is only one relevant perspective. They evolve a typology of power that implies different variations of emancipatory practice that can be employed through triple loop learning. It throws light on the different possible intervention practices for improved management of power. Within the given structure are three arenas of discourse addressing the three issue areas of structuralism, inter-subjective decision making, and might-right management. This is explained below.

Structuralism is said to be concerned with power issues embodied in organisational and process design. At issue here is the seeking of design solutions to potential or actual abuses of power. In contrast, inter-subjective decision making deals with power issues that have a bearing on processes of debate, where the way forward has not yet been determined. Important here is the way actors evolve and apply rules, and use resources and authority to influence the making of decisions. The assumption here is that it is individuals who possess power. Power is seen as something to be used in the course of interaction, and its exercise is determined by the participants' conceptualisation of events. Might-right management, on the other hand, is said to be concerned with neutralising social practices that can result in designs that have no relevance to, or input by, the affected. The aim is to transform relations that are sustained by knowledge

production processes within society that seal off the possibility of alternatives. Valero-Silva's interpretation of power fits in here.

The three arenas of discourse provided by Flood and Romm (1996a) are said to offer alternative conceptions of power as well as throw some light on potential responses to abuses of power. This calls for, and makes possible, informed choice making, taking on board the differing consequences of theories of power. Flood and Romm (1996a) therefore argue for interventionists to loop between alternatives within the different arenas of discourse so as to better appreciate the dilemma as well as the obligations that go with managing the exercise of power.

5.8 CONCLUSION

The "New Directions" embrace a pluralism of perspectives within CST as well as aspects of postmodernist thought. The continued robustness of the field of CST can only be enhanced by researchers opening up to the rationalities of other perspectives. Responsibility for this lies squarely on the shoulders of individual researchers and is specific to time, locality and context. Flood and Romm's (1996a,b) observation fits in very well here. Like Midgley (1995b), they state that CST is not a closed paradigm but rather a debate on issues and themes. Rather than focusing on choosing the right methodology in the right circumstances, CST now emphasises careful analysis of purposes, boundaries and available options for evolving well adapted processes of enquiry: CST is dynamic. See table 5.1 (overleaf) for a summary of the transition from the Early phase, through the Consolidation phase, towards these New Directions.

Table 5.1 ***The Development of Critical Systems Thinking***

EARLY PHASE	CONSOLIDATION PHASE	NEW DIRECTIONS
• Integration of Critical Social Theory • Methodological Pluralism • Introduction of emancipatory ideas	• Underpinning CST with five Commitments • Streamlining the five commitments into three • Pragmatising CST through TSI	• Discordant pluralism • Creative Design of Methods • Rethinking TSI • Post modern influence • CST as a debate around themes • Choice enrichment (by enhancing the inter-dependency of rationalities and counter-rationalities) • Diversity management • Pluralistic understanding of power.

It is the work outlined in this chapter that underpins the approach in the research project described in this thesis. It focuses on the importance of boundary judgements; the role of the researcher in dialogue with participants in deciding ways forward; participation and the issue of stakeholder marginalisation; and the creative design of methods. In section two of the thesis, my approach to this research and its outcomes are discussed in some detail.

CHAPTER SIX

AN ACCOUNT OF THE CHOICE OF METHODS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

Critical systems thinking encompasses methodological pluralism as one of its key principles (see chapters two to four). This short chapter justifies my choice of one particular version of methodological pluralism, the Creative Design of Methods

6.2 FRAMEWORKS FOR SELECTING AND USING METHODS IN CRITICAL SYSTEMS PRACTICE

Within CST there are a number of frameworks for inter-relating methods. I will briefly discuss three that currently feature in the systems literature. These are Total Systems Intervention (TSI), the oblique use of methods and the Creative Design of Methods. Others have been reviewed in chapters two to four, and Midgley (1995a) provides a comprehensive review of all the CST positions on methodological pluralism developed between 1984 and 1995. Each of the positions discussed below has to deal with the problem of paradigm incommensurability (the problem that the various systems methods originated in different paradigms, making it possible to argue that methodological pluralism is philosophically contradictory). Their answers to this problem will also be discussed.

6.2.1 Total Systems Intervention (TSI)

The pluralism underlying the early version of TSI is operationalised in each of the three phases of the meta methodology: creativity, choice and implementation. In the creativity phase, different metaphors are used to solicit different world views of the problem context. This highlights issues and problems confronting the organisation. The outcome of the creativity phase is the identification of dominant and dependent metaphors. The essence of this is accounted for by Flood and Jackson as follows:

> The outcome (what is expected to emerge) from the creativity phase is a 'dominant' metaphor which highlights the main interests and concerns and can become the basis for a choice of an appropriate intervention methodology. There may be other metaphors which it is also sensible to pursue into the next phase. The relative position of dominant and these 'dependent' metaphors may indeed be altered by later work. (Flood and Jackson, 1991b).

In the choice phase the System of Systems Methodologies (SOSM) is used to facilitate the identification of appropriate methods. As we saw in chapter two, the SOSM is grounded on an epistemological theory developed by Habermas' (1972), the "Theory of knowledge constitutive interests". The outcome of the choice phase is that a dominant methodology is identified whose application will be complemented by dependent methodologies. TSI combines the use of *methodologies* and not methods.

In TSI (2), Flood (1995a) sought to improve on the original TSI. A basic framework consisting of four domains of intervention (i.e., organisational process, organisational design, organisational culture and organisational politics) replaces the SOSM. Systems methods are then simply aligned with their domains of most effective use. The domains themselves can be further liberalised to reflect local cultural needs as well as practitioner preferences (Flood, 1995c). The emphasis is no longer on relating whole methodologies

together: the distinction between methods and methodology is acknowledged. Flood (1995a) maintains that, so long as a researcher adheres to the principles of a methodology, use of an aspect of any other method, or a combination of methods, does not contravene the validity of an intervention.

The problem of paradigm incommensurability is dealt with in TSI (2) by the observation that any attempt to embrace methodological pluralism requires the adoption of assumptions that other methodologists may not ascribe to. So TSI (2) does not claim to use other methodologies in the ways that their creators intended (indeed, Flood renames them all). What is possible is the growth of learning about methods and methodological principles between researchers, facilitating choice of intervention approaches on the basis of circumstances and the wishes of the researcher and participants.

I did not use TSI (1) in this study because, despite its iterative nature, it asks for the problem context to be diagnosed in advance of the choice of methods. There are two problems with this in the context of my research project: (1) using metaphors with participants suggests that the researcher knows who they should be from the beginning, which was not the case ; (ii) TSI (1) focuses on the choice of whole methodologies, but this work was so complex that I already guessed that I would have to synthesise a variety of parts of methods. TSI (2) would have been better from this point of view, but it had not been written when I started my practical project.

6.2.2 The Oblique Use of Methods

The oblique use of methods involves redirecting the purpose of a model or methodology using principles and purposes not provided for by its inherent theoretical underpinning (Flood and Romm, 1996a). The originators of this approach, Flood and Romm (1995a), are particularly concerned with practical problems associated with managing coercive situations. They therefore set out to demonstrate that a whole range of methods, including some "hard" ones, can be used to address coercion. What is important is that the intervenor should adhere to emancipatory principles without losing sight of the goal of addressing power relationships. The oblique use of models and methodologies therefore implies a deep comprehension and tactical application of principles from one approach in the practice of another. The net effect of this is the broadening of the range of possibilities for choice making.

Paradigm incommensurability is addressed through an acknowledgement that methods and methodologies can look either commensurate or incommensurate depending on the focus of analysis. Therefore, Flood and Romm (1996a) talk about "paradigm (in)commensurability" to indicate that both views should be taken into account. There is no need to resolve the issue: it can simply be expressed as a kind of postmodern tension that we can learn from.

As with TSI (2), I did not apply the oblique use of methods in this study because it was published after I had already started my research. Even so, I would be hesitant to use it even now: first, it would appear to require a detailed knowledge about, and practical skills for using, systems methodologies that few researchers at the start of their careers

actually have; second, Midgley (1997) argues that the oblique use of methods is a less well worked out version of the Creative Design of Methods (discussed below). This was already available when I started my research.

6.2.3 The Creative Design of Methods

With the Creative Design of Methods (Midgley, 1990b, 1996, 1997), the objective is the design and development of methods as against the selection and use of whole methodologies. What is advocated is a synthesis of methods that evolves distinct emergent properties. Sets of methodological purposes or principles are synthesised too giving rise to a total method that is "different to the sum of its parts" (Midgley, 1997).

In practice, research questions are evolved as the problem context unfolds and understanding improves. Boundary judgements are explored to facilitate this unfolding Midgley (1995b). The researcher decides on the direction after consulting with stakeholders and without sacrificing the task at hand for the sake of given methodological and theoretical positions.

Paradigm incommensurability is addressed with an acknowledgement that critical systems thinking is setting out to define a new paradigm (Midgley, 1990a,b). Therefore, there is no claim that the methods and principles used in the Creative Design of Methods will have exactly the same meanings as they had in their original paradigms.

The Creative Design of Methods therefore assumes that synthesis at the levels of both principles and methods is an essential aspect of understanding critical, flexible and responsive intervention.

I found this stance more plausible (than alternatives like TSI (1) that were around at the time) in that problem contexts do not come pre-packaged into paradigms, and a practitioner's skills and insights have to evolve as part of the research process. The Creative Design of Methods also provides a more flexible way of mixing methods than other early CST ideas (e.g., the SOSM). It also incorporates reflection on boundary judgements (Midgley, 1995a), which I thought would be extremely helpful if different views of the problem situation needed to be explored. I therefore chose the Creative Design of Methods as my approach to methodological pluralism within CST.

6.3 CONCLUSION

The purpose of this brief chapter was simply to justify the use of Creative Design of Methods in my practical research. The latter is detailed in section two of the thesis.

SECTION TWO

THE RESEARCH PROJECT

CHAPTER SEVEN

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK, KEY CONCEPTS AND METHODS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

Section one and the previous chapter elaborated on the theoretical basis of the research. This and subsequent chapters in section two focuses on the research process. To begin with, this chapter gives a description of the theoretical framework, key concepts and methods that were employed in the intervention so as to better prepare the reader for the narrative that follows in subsequent chapters.

7.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As has become clear from section one, critical systems thinking encompasses a number of principles including those of basing research on the needs and interests of participants in a problem context, regarding the researcher as an inherent part of the research context, seeking improvement and legitimacy through active involvement of participants within a problem context and achieving progress through cycles of action and reflection that make possible the evolving of knowledge grounded in practical experience. This qualifies it as an action research approach. The key to understanding action research is that theoretical and practical work inform and develop each other. This study is therefore based on the framework of a theory-practice cycle: a process in which each

application has the potential to enrich theory, and each theory has the potential to enrich practice. See Figure 7.1.

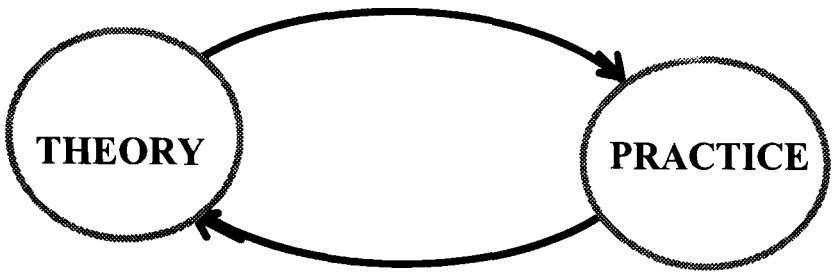

Figure 7.1 ***Theory-Practice Cycle***

7.2.1 The Primacy of Theory or Practice?

Oquist (1978) states:

> The pragmatist epistemology posits that the objects of knowledge are defined by active operations. By this method of defining objects it no longer makes sense to ask whether theory or practice is primary in the process of producing knowledge in that they are not in opposition. (Oquist 1978).

At best a theory is a provisional way of seeing, and not a fixed way (Levin, 1996). Strong (1991a,b) argues that we should cycle from theory to observation and then back to theory in an unending effort to evolve robust and useful concepts (Strong talks about "observation" rather than "practice" because he writes about the cycle in the context of traditional scientific rather than action research). Dewey (1938) opposes any separation between theory and practice. He maintains that the only way one can ultimately defend knowledge is through showing its links to practice. This is supported by Checkland and Scholes (1990) as the logic for testing the validity of the theory on which SSM is based, and also by Reason (1991) writing about Cooperative Inquiry. Habermas (1974) talks of "praxis" with reference to the idea of the unity of theory and practice. Similarly, Marx

(in Rubinstein, 1981) claims that thought or theory cannot be seen as separate from practice, as some abstract standard or contemplative ideal. It arises from practice, and is developed and modified by it.

Levin (1996) explicitly states that, in knowledge construed through praxis, the focus of attention is practical reasoning. He follows Habermas in arguing that what qualifies as normative in modernity is communicative praxis understood as a process of raising ever further relevant questions: "---normative "action" is never totally objectified or expressed." Like Habermas, Levin questions the feasibility of separating questions of justification from those related to application. Habermas further declares that knowledge about norms and principles is not yet at a level that can facilitate prediction of likely action in a given situation. His conclusion is that the process of normative application escapes the procedure of generalisation that is common to traditional science. Levin (1996) is clear in this respect: he states that in dealing with a situation holistically, there is no room for generalisation. All knowledge is context specific. The assumption here is that dealing with a situation holistically must involve practical (normative) reason. Hence, Elden, Rupert and Chisholm (1993) say that problems should be defined by system members who experience them. This is how improvement comes to be defined in critical systems thinking.

7.2.3 Theoretical Pluralism

One objection to the theory-practice cycle described here has been raised by Romm (1996a). She says that, if the researcher becomes trapped in a theory-practice cycle, the two simply confirm each other: the practice is seen via the theory, and unsurprisingly it

conforms to theoretical expectations. Her solution to this problem is to reflect on multiple theories as part of praxis. Theories can then be compared in terms of how they construct practice. Disconfirming evidence does not come from "raw data" about practice, but from understanding that an alternative theory might produce a preferable, or more useful, account of it.

This critique is also applicable to the relationship between systems methodology and practice (Romm, 1995). Using one particular methodology predisposes the researcher to construct problems in a way that the methodology can tackle. Romm therefore advocates looking at problem situations through multiple methodological lenses before problem solving.

My own understanding of the theory-practice cycle takes account of Romm's concerns. While my research has been conducted within the theoretical perspective (paradigm) of CST, it has drawn upon a variety of methods and their associated rationalities. Therefore, not only has it been possible to consider the practice through different lenses, it has also been possible to reflect back on CST in the light of these theory-practice interactions. This more complex understanding of the theory-practice cycle is represented in Figure 7.2.

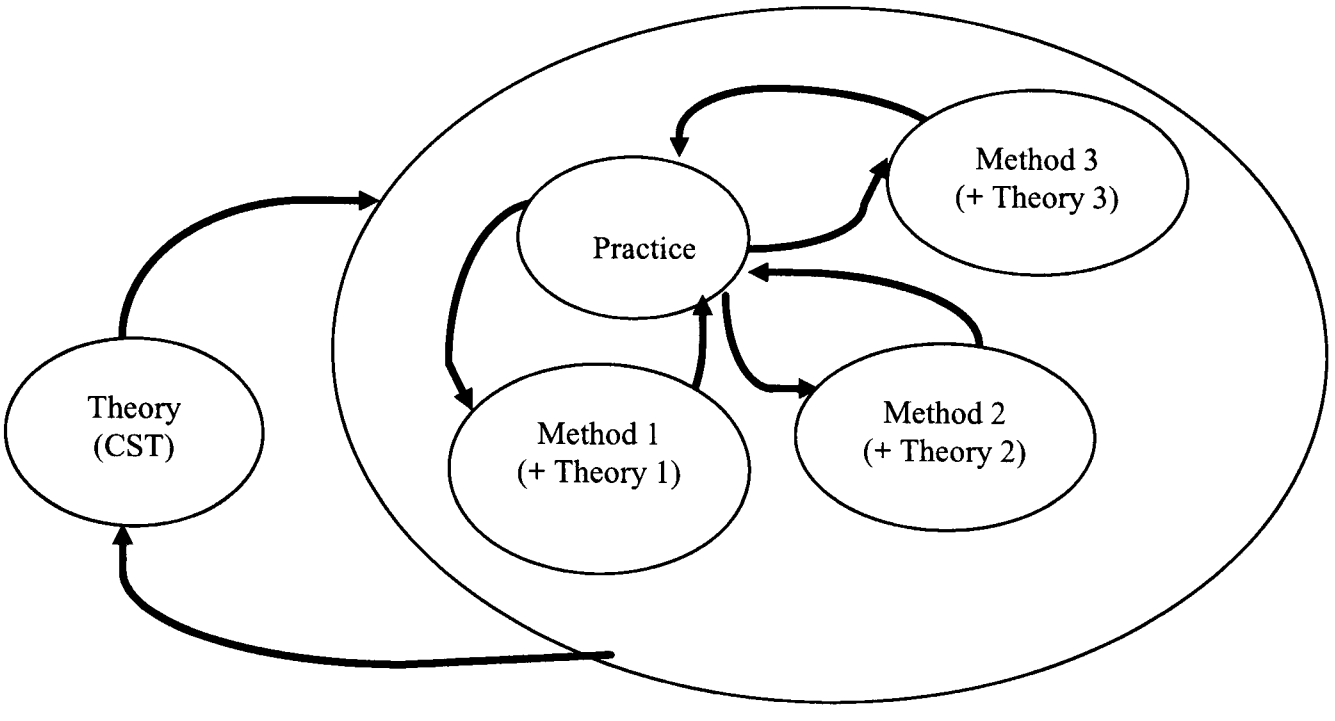

Figure 7.2 ***Multi-paradigm Theory-Practice Cycle***

This theory-practice idea has influenced the structuring of this thesis in that section one presents CST, which informed the practice that is written up in the current section two. Then, I reflect on the events within this cycle drawing out my original contributions.

7.3 BOUNDARY JUDGEMENT

Many of the issues in this research project were conceptualised in terms of boundary judgements. I will now reflect on this concept, which is central to critical systems thinking. This has already been touched upon in section one, but more details will now be given.

The theory of "boundary critique" (Midgley and Munlo, 1996) asserts that it is important for researchers to take into consideration a broad range of stakeholder views in formulating problems. Whenever we apply the systems concept to some section of the

"real world", we cannot help but make strong *a priori* assumptions about what is to belong to the system in question and what is to belong to its environment (Ulrich, 1988). These assumptions are called boundary judgements. Churchman (1979a) observes that boundaries define both the knowledge to be considered pertinent when improving a system as well as the people who generate that knowledge. Midgley (1995b) notes that boundaries determine who the researcher will talk to and how the initial remit of the work will be defined. There is therefore a link between boundary judgements and the issue of legitimacy in interventions. Jones (1982) has complained that there is scant guidance in the literature for the determination of system boundaries. Consequently, he observes that choosing a boundary often seems arbitrary, and the merits and demerits of a particular description of a system are difficult to discuss. This section looks at the philosophical foundations and practical guidelines for making boundary judgements.

7.3.1 Theoretical Background

Any application of a methodology requires that the context of application be defined. In other words, boundaries must be chosen (Ulrich, 1988). The systems concept, when used in a relatively *a priori* sense (i.e. as a convenient tool to refer to some phenomenal reality that may be of interest to a social planner), requires that boundary criteria be defined; everything within the boundary can then be said to belong to the system, while everything outside the boundary belongs to the system's environment (Ulrich, 1983). Further, critical employment of the systems idea is essential for questioning the prevailing objectivist model of science. According to Ulrich (1983), problems exist to the extent that someone has them: they cannot be defined from a totally uninvolved point of view, for implicit in the definition of a problem is its ownership. Although

problem definitions need to be justified with reference to facts, determining a problem requires going beyond these. It is important for a decision maker to endeavour to judge the value content, the political and ethical adequacy, of alternative problem definitions. Midgley (1992c) therefore asserts that "in critical systems research two needs in particular are stressed, first the need to be critical about defining system boundaries and second, the need to establish boundaries within which critique can be conducted". The tension between creating boundaries and critiquing them reminds us that we always have an incomplete, non-neutral view of a situation.

A number of other authors have also emphasised the importance of boundary judgements to systems research. Jones (1982) has alluded to the fact that the use of boundary judgements is of some communicative value, in that it makes the choice of a social systems design challengeable and defensible, allowing for the emergence of improved perceptions. This is supported by Ulrich (1988), who affirms that the issue of rationally determining and justifying the norms contained in recommendations or plans for action is best addressed by arguments over boundary judgements. The normative implications of designs can be traced, for instance, by explicating the kinds of boundary judgements (or whole systems judgements) that flow into the definition of a system. Indeed, Ulrich has gone so far as to suggest that, if boundaries are ignored, the systems concept remains empty.

7.3.2 Philosophical Foundations and Practical Guidelines

Over the coming pages I will detail the views of key authors who have written about boundary judgements: Churchman, Jones, Ulrich and Midgley.

C. WEST CHURCHMAN

Churchman (1968a,b; 1970 and 1979a,b), although writing prior to the use of the term "critical systems thinking", is said to have provided many of the philosophical insights that have informed the perspective (Midgley, 1995b). He is an idealist and an anti-positivist. He is an idealist in the sense that he is concerned with reflecting on the sources of deception in empiricist models. The basic theory of idealism is that we do not experience independent reality, but that the principles of order in our experiences are *a priori* ideas that create "reality" (Ulrich, 1983). Before Churchman, it was generally assumed that the boundaries of a system were coterminous with the structure of reality.

Churchman (1970) articulates that studies of social systems have to deal with three way relationships between decision makers, clients or beneficiaries, and practitioners. The practitioner has an obligation to consider and determine what system boundaries are to be used. Churchman (1979b) advocates a "sweep in process" in order to avoid the "environmental fallacy": the tendency for practitioners to define and solve problems without considering the problem environment. The decision maker is usually confronted by many forces, values and attitudes. The practioner has to take up the task of understanding these influences. To his question "How can we design improvement in large systems without understanding the whole system?", Churchman (1968b) responds by expressing that a professional needs to be conditioned to the fact that every human problem is basically non-comprehensive, and the attempt to reformulate and resolve it changes the problem and causes it to lose its substance: "Uncertainty is an intrinsic quality of a problem." (Churchman, 1970). He declares that the most important feature of the systems approach is that it is committed to ascertaining not simply whether the

decision maker's choice leads to his desired ends, but whether it leads to ends that are defensible in terms of the "general ethic": "The problem of systems improvement is the problem of the ethics of whole systems." (Churchman, 1968b). The concept of an ethics of whole systems refers to the observation that the ethical value of a design or action cannot ultimately be measured except in terms of the improvement of the whole relevant system. This is derived from Kant's principle of moral generalisation (Ulrich, 1983). Defining morality as the force which takes us beyond the boundaries of the system which is directly relevant to our lives, Churchman gives the following moral principle: "make only those decisions which treat humanity as an end and never as a means only."

Isolating the client or beneficiary of the system is another problem area for Churchman. This is because assuming that the client is the person who pays the bills for professional service, or that it is the paymaster's responsibility to designate the client and his interests, raises moral questions. There is a danger of misdirecting services; the social system may serve people who do not deserve it. In the case of an industrial firm, clients may include employees, shareholders, customers, and interested sections of the public. To achieve an adequate definition of "client", as with defining the "whole system", we need to "look at it from as many perspectives as possible" (Churchman, 1970).

While the "sweep-in process" mentioned earlier involves continually expanding the system boundaries, Churchman (1971) is aware of the need to provide a framework for deciding how the system (and client) should ultimately be defined. He suggests that the following categories should be considered. According to Ulrich (1983), these were derived from Kant:

- Client
- Purpose
- Measure of performance
- Decision maker
- Components
- Environment
- Planner
- Implementation
- Guarantor
- Systems Philosopher
- Enemies of the systems approach
- Significance

The above categories are intended as first sign posts for identifying stakeholders and their concerns. Consideration of them takes the form of a learning process which Churchman (1971) calls a "process of unfolding". Ulrich (1988) notes that the process of unfolding enriches the basic idea of the "sweep-in process" by embedding it within a framework of practical discourse. It therefore furnishes the critical counterpart to the "sweep-in process" and its endless quest for comprehensiveness. Churchman's idea is to employ the categories for tracing the different interpretations and valuations to which one and the same set of data about the problem situation lends itself, depending on the observer's worldview and needs. A possible guarantee for an adequate definition of improvement is to expose ourselves to rational argumentation with radical "enemies" of our ideas.

LYN JONES

Jones (1982), again writing before the birth of critical systems thinking, also attempts to produce guidelines on boundary judgements. Like Churchman, he approaches the issue by reflecting on the systems concept per se. He distinguishes two points of view about systems: the positivist view and the phenomenological view. The positivist view assumes that out there is a real world independent of the observer. Within this view Jones identifies two streams: the strong systems positivist, who assumes that not only do the phenomena exist out there, but so do systems; and, the weak systems positivist who assumes that the phenomena exist out there, but linking them together in a system is an act of perception, consciously or unconsciously undertaken by the observer (see also Buckley, 1967; Eden and Harris, 1975). In contrast, the phenomenological point of view does not start from the assumption that a real world exists, but that what does exist are people's perceptions. A system is seen as the construct of an observer, not a property of an independently existing world (see also Checkland, 1981). Jones himself is a weak systems positivist: while he assumes that phenomena exist in reality, he ascribes their description in systems terms to the conscious or unconscious perception of the analyst.

Jones (1982) asserts that the process of mapping out a system is neither linear nor logical (in an analytical sense of the term). He states that the perception of a system depends on insight and inspiration, and can be reached by trial and error. The process of defining a system is often an iterative one, where new links are added or excluded at succeeding stages.

Jones presents three simple guidelines for setting system boundaries. These guidelines require that an analyst makes explicit certain assumptions about the purpose of the study; the client's power to take action; and the network of relationships between elements. The guidelines are: first, that all behaviour of interest be specified, and that elements displaying this behaviour be deemed to be within the system; second, all elements under the direct influence of the client be specified and included within the system; and third, all paths of relationships connecting elements under direct influence of the elements displaying the behaviour of interest be included within the system. Everything else should be considered external. Because, for Jones, the elements are real (even if the system definition is not), he does not have to struggle with the same moral dilemmas as Churchman. For Churchman (1979b), the identification of elements themselves has a human (hence moral) dimension. Here we see a clear distinction between the two authors, graphically illustrating the difference between the positivist and phenomenological positions that Jones identifies (although Churchman would probably not call himself a phenomenologist, his basic philosophy does fit into Jones' definition).

WERNER ULRICH

In terms of Jones' categories, however, Ulrich is neither a positivist nor a phenomenologist. He adopts an explicitly critical perspective. His core message is that the boundary judgements influencing any plan must be examined through a systemic and critical approach which he calls Critical Systems Heuristics. For Ulrich (1983) (inspired by Churchman's 1968b, 1971, 1979a,b, 'dialectical' systems approach), the most fundamental concept is the "context of application". He defines this:

> as that section of the natural and societal world which is to be considered as relevant when it comes to justifying a design's or a proposition's normative content, the value judgements flowing into it, and the life practical consequences it may have for those affected by its implementation. (Ulrich 1983; 1987).

He further adds that:

> ...the context of application is never given objectively, it needs to be determined by judgement from the total universe of facts and value implications that might be considered. It cannot therefore be justified by reference to experience alone. (Ulrich 1993).

Ulrich (1983) acknowledges that, according to a widely held understanding of the systems idea, systems thinking means an effort to look at the whole of an issue. He observes, however, that the holistic notion, although it represents an epistemologically necessary idea, is not realisable. Practically, such an understanding of the systems idea would require a never ending process of expanding the boundaries of a problem definition. It is because we can never really be comprehensive in "sweeping-in" (Churchman 1979a) the problem environment that we need to bound the problem. Ulrich (1983) is, however, concerned with the concept of rationality that underlies most contemporary systems theories and systems methodologies. He observes that its roots are largely the same as those of the conventional analytical-reductionist models of science, which are based on the theoretical component of Kant's (1787) ideal of rationality (theoretical reason being about what is, in contrast to practical reason which is about what ought to be).

In the ideal type of the controlled experiment, for example, it is assumed that the inseparability of problems from their environments can at least be temporarily suspended. The experimental sciences rely on the understanding that the ideal of complete rationality can be approximated by the best possible control of external

interference's. The laboratory setting renders theoretical reason practicable. Ulrich observes that this is scientism, and it is impoverished in that it identifies the limits of reason with theoretical reason alone (Ulrich, 1988). The standards of excellence in social research, however, cannot be the same as the standards of excellence in the physical sciences. In the former, objectivity is said to be a characteristic not of the data, but rather of the design of the inquiring system as a whole.

Ulrich (1983) also observes that, in practice, subjectively rational action tends to produce consequences that affect individuals not involved in decision making. Their way of being affected does not necessarily have to correspond to their standards of value: in fact, the action in question may even appear irrational to them. Hence, according to Ulrich, any action the consequences of which are not certain to remain limited to those involved sees itself faced with the question, "How can the involved claim rationality for their action even though not all the affected may benefit or agree with the costs imposed upon them and some may seriously be harmed?". How can conflicts of interest among the involved and the affected be resolved? There is a need to seek a form of rationality that meets the intent of this question. According to Ulrich (1988), neither the instrumental rationality of systems tools nor the merely subjective rationality of ordinary citizens contesting the life practical consequences that the systems rationality may impose upon them, meets the standard of practical reason (about what ought to be). Practical reason requires that the standards of value of all the affected, be they involved or not, converge. Ulrich (1983) also points out that the group of those actually or potentially affected can never be delimited in advance with certainty.

Ulrich (1983) also talks about what Kant calls the *a priori* component of knowledge. The term *a priori* refers to that which goes "prior to", or is presupposed in an observation or a thought. An *a priori* concept, according to Kant, is one that is logically presupposed in, rather than derived from, an experience. An *a posteriori* concept, on the other hand, is one that is derived from experience: that is to say, it is obtained from a number of particular but similar perceptions. *Absolute a priori* concepts represent knowledge absolutely independent of all experience. According to Ulrich, to say that a concept is absolutely independent of experience means that it has no empirical content. Ulrich, paraphrasing Kant, explains that, when we apply an *absolute a priori* concept, we impose it upon the objects of experience "according to our plan" and thereby produce a new conceptual object. Ulrich then talks of *relative a priori* concepts. These are not independent of all possible experience in a given situation. Such concepts can be given empirical content, though this empirical content must be determined prior to the situation in question. Kant (according to Ulrich, 1983) talks of a *relative a priori* concept (or judgement) when it is not derived from experience here and now, but from a universal rule, a rule which is itself, however, borrowed from prior experience.

Determining the system in question is therefore not a matter of arbitrary definition. It takes both value judgement and empirical knowledge to draw the boundary in a meaningful way. Such a boundary judgement, according to Ulrich, amounts to both a theoretical and practical (normative) proposition about the "real world" context in question. Because such a judgement is made up of both the practical experience and values of the analyst, it is inevitably made before the systems concept can meaningfully be applied to describe the situation. Hence both the boundary judgement and the systems concept it defines must be regarded as *relatively a priori* to any empirical statements

about the system in question (Ulrich 1983). This means that we cannot hope to justify propositions unless we reflect on the assumptions that went into them.

Synthetic judgements (judgements whose negation is possible and are justified by an external but related concept) can be validated by reference to experience only if they are *a posteriori* (i.e. made after empirical experience). However, when they are made before meaningful experience, they can be justified only by reference to good reasons, i.e. by theoretical or practical reason. Ulrich (1983) therefore states that boundary judgements must be understood as synthetic, relatively *a priori* judgements. They are synthetic rather than analytic in that they cannot be justified purely logically; they are *relatively a priori* rather than *a posteriori* in that they cannot be justified empirically. The challenge is how we can, by means of reason, go beyond our objects of possible experience to determine the truth in the light of the not given. How can we demonstrate that the *a priori* component of our knowledge is a valid source of knowledge rather than a source of deception? In response to this, Ulrich states that a critically heuristic approach has to reflect on the *absolute a priori* concepts (e.g. totality) that may be presupposed in its *relative a priori* (logical) concepts, so as to discover the sources of possible deception in its reliance on *relative a priori* concepts. Thinking is always influenced by some standpoint but it does not have to be dictated by it.

To address the issue of boundary judgement, Ulrich is then faced with the challenge of achieving the generalisability of the standards of value or norms underlying action. Contemporary practical philosophy has argued that the underlying critical idea of submitting value premises to the generalisation principle (Churchman, 1979a) is also a necessary criterion for rational practical discourse. Ulrich proposes a complementary

role between the system idea and the critical idea. A genuinely rational enquiry needs to be critical by exposing its assumptions for validation. It also needs to be systemic by defining the boundaries within which such assumptions can be questioned.

Having criticised systems science for using the systems idea only in the context of instrumental reason, to help decide how to do things and referring to a set of variables to be controlled, Ulrich sets out to use the ideas of Popper, Habermas and Kant to develop the systems idea for use as part of practical reason, to help decide what ought to be done.

For Popper (1972a,b), the only rational application of theoretical reason is in instrumental reason which helps us to decide how to do things. As far as social systems design is concerned, therefore, reason can only help us with technical questions such as the most efficient means to achieve predetermined ends. Rational discussion about ends, and even about the value content of means, is apparently not possible. The central question of practical reason, "What ought we to do?", is placed by Popper beyond the scope of critical reflection. Ulrich, however, wishes to give the question of "What We Ought to Do" central importance. He therefore sets out to develop a methodology, Critical Systems Heuristics (CSH), which can be used to explore and justify boundaries by means of debate between stakeholders. He bases this task on a reconstruction of Kant's philosophy.

In his attempt to account for the kind of knowledge we have about the world, Kant was particularly concerned about *synthetic a priori* concepts. First are two pure forms of intuition; space and time, present in the very "----possibility of things as appearances"

(Jackson, 1985c). Second are twelve categories: pure concepts of understanding necessary to connect perceptions together (Churchman's twelve categories, stated earlier, were based on those offered by Kant). Finally, there are three 'transcendental ideas': the World, Man and God. These transcendental ideas reveal to us the necessarily conditional character of our understanding of the totality. Ulrich (1983) adapts Kant's work to planning and systems design. The cosmological idea of the world as the unity of the conditions of all appearances yields a critical standard for reflecting on the deceptiveness of our knowledge; the psychological idea of man, which in the practical employment of reason becomes the moral idea, and which can be understood to refer to the unity of the thinking and acting subject, yields a critical standard for reflection on the moral imperfections of our actions; and the theoretical idea of God, as the unity of the conditions of all objects of thought in general, yields a critical standard for reflecting on the deceptiveness of our hopes or beliefs namely, if we make these the unreflected guarantor of improvement (Ulrich, 1983).

Ulrich further states that the moral idea is the practical equivalent of the systems idea, in that it requires an agent to reflect on the total group of individuals who might be affected by his or her action. The moral point of view has a place both in systems rationality and in social rationality. Certain assumptions in the form of boundary judgements inevitably influence any social systems design. Ulrich reflects on which of these synthetic (i.e., relying on empirical content) relatively *a priori* concepts have heuristic necessity. Concepts are heuristically necessary only if, by making them explicit, it becomes possible to reflect critically upon the presuppositions entering into planning and social systems design. The concepts fulfilling this requirement are arranged on the basis of the pattern set out by Kant. Building on Churchman's work,

Ulrich adds to Kant's space and time the concept of purposefulness as an extra dimension necessary to map social reality. Twelve critically heuristic categories are established around a fundamental distinction between those 'involved' in any planning decision (client, decision maker, planner) and those 'affected' but not involved (witnesses). Three quasi-transcendental ideas are developed (the systems idea, the moral idea and the guarantor idea) as critical standards against which the limitations of particular social system designs can be compared. These concepts should enable any existing social system to be examined with a view to discovering the norms, values, etc., that went into its design. The list can be presented either as a table of critically heuristic categories (as in Churchman, 1978) or as a checklist of boundary questions. Ulrich (1983) asserts that we can determine the boundary judgements that are constitutive of social maps and designs if we can give a systematic list of the social actors to whom the planner must refer in order to understand their normative content. Ulrich (1993) asserts that conceiving boundary judgements in terms of basic categories has the advantage of relating the boundary judgements back to their origin in a reconstruction of Kantian *a priori* science, within a framework of communicative practical philosophy. The boundary questions facilitate the systematic identification and examination of justification break offs.

Specifically, the twelve boundary questions are organised into four groups. The first group asks for the sources of motivation flowing into the design in question: Who contributes the necessary sense of direction and values? What purposes are to be served? Given a tentative planning purpose, whose is it? The second group examines the sources of control built into a design: Who contributes the necessary means, resources and decision authority (i.e. power)? Who has the power to decide? Ulrich (1983)

believes the issue of power is fundamental to social enquiry and planning, as it is linked to the intentionality of human agents. The third group of questions is to trace the sources of expertise assumed to be adequate: Who contributes the necessary design skills and the necessary knowledge of facts? Who has the know-how to do it? Ulrich cautions that the term "expert" should not be understood in the narrow scientistic sense; it is to include whoever has relevant knowledge, experience or skill to contribute to the planning process. It is not to be singularly associated with instrumental reason, but with practical reason as well. The fourth group helps reflect on the sources of legitimation to be considered: Who represents the concerns of the affected? Who contributes the necessary sense of self-reflection and responsibility among the involved? How do the involved deal with the different world views of the affected? In short, the first group of boundary questions asks for the value basis of the design, the second for its basis in power, the third for its basis in know-how, and the fourth for its legitimation.

Ulrich then has to work out how to make validity judgements in the area of practical reason. How, by making use of these concepts can particular social systems designs be validated and accepted for implementation? Here, Ulrich requires some sort of participative debate to provide the final justification for practical knowledge. *A priori* concepts of practical reason imply: first, that the suggested boundary questions represent mere forms of judgements, that is they are in need of being substantiated with respect to both their empirical and normative content; and second, they can help to fill critically-heuristic categories such as client, purpose etc. with empirical and normative content, but not to justify this content. The boundary judgements identified or postulated therefore remain dependent for their justification on a discursive process of consensus

formation, a rational discourse among the involved and the affected (Ulrich, 1983, chapter five.)

Contemporary practical philosophers such as Lorenzen (1969), Lorenzen and Schweumer (1975) and Habermas (1971, 1973, and 1975) have developed ideal models of practical discourse. They provide essential insights into the conditions that would allow us to comprehensively justify disputed validly claims. The problem is that these models, because they are ideal designs for rational discourse, are impractical. They assume ideal conditions of rationality that will always remain counter factual. In particular, they do not show how a discourse can be rational even though not everyone affected can become involved. Most importantly, they do not take into account the inevitability of argumentation break-offs: i.e., the premises and conclusions with which justification stops. Ulrich states that we should not require systems methodologies to be able to secure the conditions of unconstrained discussion: they can only seek to lay open its inevitable lack of complete rationality. The basic supposition of Critical Systems Heuristics in this regard is that any use of expertise presupposes boundary judgements with respect to the context of application to be considered. No amount of expertise or theoretical knowledge, however, is ever sufficient for the expert to justify all the judgements upon which his or her recommendations depend.

When consensus is not possible over boundaries, witnesses discontented with the proposed improvement can apply Ulrich's twelve boundary questions in a polemical way to challenge the planners. To this end, Ulrich (1983) points out that concerned citizens will have to master two tasks of argumentation. Firstly, they must be in a position to demonstrate that the boundary judgements of the involved are not objectively given, but

result from the normative assumptions they make. Secondly, they should be able to translate their own subjective experience of being affected by the boundary judgements in question into rational, cogent argumentation.

When planners refuse to involve the affected, Ulrich (1983) claims that the latter can embarrass them into reconsidering involvement. Ordinary citizens without any special expertise can accomplish this by means of the "polemical employment of boundary judgements". Kant (in Ulrich, 1983) is quoted as calling "polemical" an argument that is directed against a dogmatically asserted validity claim and which does not depend for its cogency on its own positive justification. A polemical argument is advanced merely in hypothetical fashion, to show the dogmatic character of an opponent's pretension of knowledge. The witnesses, for instance, can question the normative validity of maps or designs by pointing to the questionable basis of the underlying boundary judgements (systems idea), to the moral deficiency of value premises and consequences (moral idea) or to the likelihood of implementation failure due to possible resistance on the part of the affected (guarantor idea).

The search is for a critical solution to the problem of practical discourse. Such a solution does not have to validate the empirical and/or normative content of practical propositions, but only to prevent an objectivist illusion in dealing with such validity claims. Using the concept of *a priori (*vs. *a posteriori)* judgements in practical reason; understanding of argumentation break-offs as boundary judgements; and the concept of the polemical employment of boundary judgements, Ulrich (1983) has sketched out, as a practical tool relying on these concepts, a "purposeful systems assessment of designs with respect to their normative implications."

Ulrich (1987), in providing guidance on how to make boundary judgements in practice, advocates examining the boundary questions in terms of both the "is" and "ought" modes. This is because, while the "is" questions describe the actual (or potential) whole systems implications of a design, the "ought" questions yield a vision of the "ideal" situation. As far as the problem of *a priori* boundary judgement is concerned, Ulrich (1983) states that, when we are dealing with the "ought" questions, these judgements cannot be justified by reference to what is empirically the case. The rightness of boundary judgements in the "ought" mode is contingent on the acceptability of their life-practical implications for the different groups of stakeholders. A combined unfolding of both the "is" and the "ought" questions makes it possible to trace the normative content of proposed designs in the light of a variety of stakeholder views, without any illusion of objectivity (Ulrich, 1988). It thus renders the critical intent of the questions evident and possible, allowing for the interdependence of theoretical and practical reason. This also draws attention to possible sources of failure or conflict in the design (Ulrich, 1988).

Jackson (1985c), however, challenged the practicability of Ulrich's approach to making boundary judgements on the basis that it borders on isolationism; it does not delve into the structure underlying the *"status quo"* and, gives no mechanism for addressing pseudo dialogue. It is also significant that examples of studies that have used boundaries other than the traditional organisational one, mostly deal with multi-agency interventions (Midgley, 1995c). In these, boundaries are "owned" by no individual institution. Midgley has also called for:

> a move away from the mechanical application of critical systems heuristics where participants in inquiry simply answer the twelve heuristic questions in the form of a list, towards a situation where they become an integral part of the whole inquiry process, interwoven where appropriate with other systems methods.

This is the approach adopted in the project to be reported in subsequent chapters.

GERALD MIDGLEY

Churchman and Ulrich base the determination of boundaries on ethical considerations. Midgley (1992c) adopts the same stance, but wants to bring to the fore the fact that the way boundary conflicts between stakeholders are settled can sometimes result in the marginalisation of some stakeholder groups or their concerns. In discussing the concept of boundary judgement, Midgley (1992c) points out that a system boundary defines what is included in the system and implicitly what is excluded. What is marginal, however, can only be defined with respect to a second boundary because, if there were no outside limits, there would be no way to differentiate what is marginal from what is excluded. What is excluded is invisible: it is seen to exist only by implication, given that we always acknowledge the theoretical presence of a wider system. Marginalisation therefore implies the use of more than one system boundary, even if one or more of these boundaries is being employed tacitly or unconsciously in a given analysis. Midgley therefore presents a systems language of primary and secondary boundaries. The primary boundary is that which is most obvious (i.e. the one based around a traditionally defined organisation, a society, a particular ecosystem, etc.). "The secondary boundary is that which allows recognition of the pertinent existence of elements outside the system being defined that are nevertheless seen to affect it". Midgley labels elements seen to be lying between the two boundaries as marginal (see Figure 7.3).

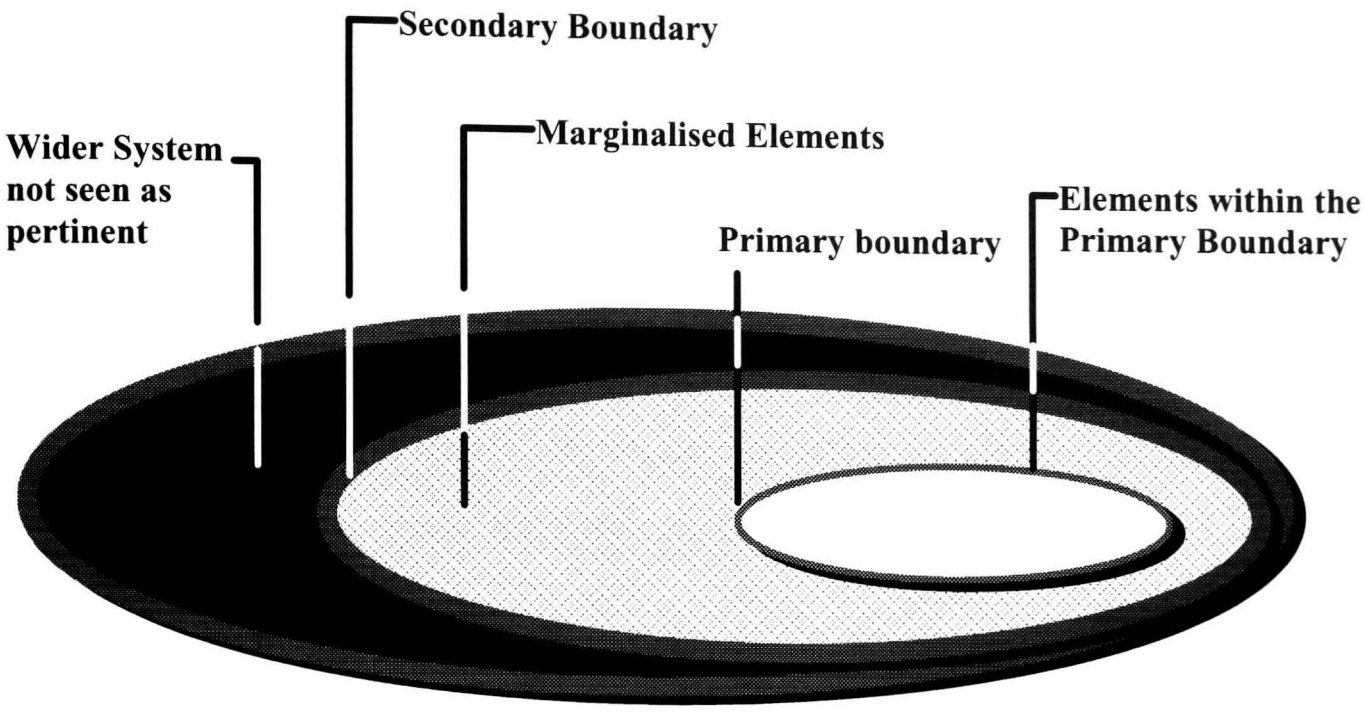

Figure 7.3 ***Marginalisation***

(Source: Midgley, 1992c.)

Adapting Habermas (1984a,b), Midgley (1992c) points out that we act as though there are three essentially interrelated 'worlds' of understanding; the objective natural world, the normative social world and one's individual world. These give rise to the ideals of truth, rightness and subjective understanding, respectively. In order to make practical choices between boundaries, we must therefore be guided by inquiry using these three ideals. Midgley states that exclusion of one or more of them from rationality impoverishes choices because boundaries get determined on the basis of tacit knowledge alone, without the benefit of being informed by rationally generated theory. He maintains that when a system boundary is said to have a particular ideological root, the origins of these roots reflect certain ways of seeing things and these ought to be available for critique.

Midgley suggests that when the primary and secondary boundaries carry different ethical implications, a tension is set up. Because most ethical issues and associated boundary judgements can be said to have roots in culture, we are able to find evidence for cultural reactions to the ethical tensions that arise. Midgley points out that these cultural reactions involve the imposition of value judgements on elements that are marginal to boundary definitions, i.e., marginal elements come to be characterised as either sacred (valued) or profane (devalued). When marginal elements are seen as profane, elements within the primary boundary acquire a sacred status by implication and the primary boundary, with its inherent ethics, is reinforced. Midgley further states that when marginal elements are seen as sacred, what is defined solely by the primary boundary becomes profane by implication, and the secondary boundary, with its associated ethics, comes to the fore. Thus conflict between the two ethical boundary judgements is resolved by the imposition of either a sacred or a profane status on marginal elements. However, he is not explicit how this is achieved in practice, though he does point out that the process whereby ethical tensions give rise to sacredness and profanity is marked with social ritual: "This is behaviour that exhibits certain stereotypical elements involving the symbolic expression of wider social concerns".

An observation of the process of ritual, according to Midgley, gives an indication of where sacredness or profanity are assumed, and hence where ethical conflicts related to marginalisation might be found. Where consideration of primary and secondary boundaries does not give rise to obvious issues of rightness, the sacredness and profanity may not come to the surface of consciousness, although they might nevertheless be acted out unconsciously. Knowledge and boundaries cannot therefore be regarded as value-free according to Midgley, "because there are rightness implications

in the choices individuals make between system boundaries", whether or not those individuals are aware of them.

Referring to Douglas (1966), Midgley (1992c) stresses that sacredness and profanity make sense only in the context of the wider system. In this respect, Midgley and Munlo (1996) propose that it will sometimes be prudent to involve people not classified as affected or involved, but with an alternative perspective that is of relevance to a given intervention. In the context of this study, of interest is the profane status ascribed by some agencies to others, and to older people's own preferences in relation to service provision.

7.3.3 Summary

In the foregoing review of the theory of boundary critique, four more or less interrelated positions have been highlighted. With respect to the making of critical boundary judgements, Churchman emphasises the importance of sweeping in both stakeholders and issues. In contrast, Jones proposes limiting the focus to elements under direct influence, elements displaying the behaviour of interest, and the paths of relationships connecting the two categories of elements. Ulrich, however, advocates dialogue between all those involved in and affected by the intervention, while Midgley highlights the importance of taking account of marginalised people and issues in the process of establishing boundaries. Chapter thirteen (in section three) will highlight contributions made to the theory of boundary judgement in the context of this research project.

7.4 PROBLEM STRUCTURING

Many issues facing organisations today are complex and ill structured (MacCrimmon and Taylor, 1976; Weick and Bougon, 1986 and Volkema, 1988). These issues therefore do not lend themselves to structuring and formulation by quantitative models, nor simple intuitive problem solving (Rosenhead, 1992). Making sense of these ill structured problem situations in order to define the problem to be solved is complicated by the difficulty in specifying and understanding the relationships between relevant problem variables or elements (Volkema, 1983, 1988). However, because the definition of the problem ultimately affects the direction of all the subsequent problem solving activities, it is crucial that a "good" problem definition is developed (Mitroff and Tureff, 1974; Mintzberg, Raisinghani and Theoret, 1976). This is due, at least in part, to the strong relationship that exists between the representation of a problem and the domain of solutions and ideas that the representation can produce (Drucker, 1945; Judson and Cofer, 1956; Maier and Burke, 1967; Kohler, 1969; Posner, 1973; Simon and Hayes 1976; Tversky and Kahneman, 1981; Robinson and Swink, 1994).

Many definitions of a "problem" exist. It has been defined as a conflict (Drucker, 1945), an obstacle (Maier, 1970), an accepted task that a person does not know how to carry out (Simon, 1976), dissatisfaction with a purposeful state (Ackoff and Emery, 1972), and the difference between what one has and what one wants (de Bono, 1970), to name but a few. Jackson (1975) says that "a problem is said to exist if an objective has been defined and an obstacle exists to prevent its realisation."

An example of a problem is when an organisation wishes to reflect its users needs, but the obstacle to attaining this objective is an inadequate mechanism for identifying those needs. Finlay (1994) explains that the term "problem" is not simply restricted to threats, but includes any situation, actual or forecast, that is at variance with a preferred and attainable state.

Many systems theorists have claimed that a pre-requisite for tackling problems is a model of the overall situation in which the problem shows itself. Ackoff (1974) argues that managers are usually in a mess: they face a set of interacting problems. Without knowledge of the overall situation, action may make the problem worse; or the symptoms of a particular problem may be made to disappear, but the 'cure' causes other problems to surface.

Basadur (1982) describes a continuum of problems from "easy-to-define" to "difficult-to-define". Simon (1960) identifies three types of problems: well structured; semi structured; and ill structured. Massey and Wallace (1996) observe that a characteristic of ill structured problems is that, very often, the structuring and formulation of these problems are confounded by the multiplicity of individuals and groups with various and sometimes conflicting interests. These individuals and groups may have very different perspectives about the nature of the problem to be solved, thereby making sense of a given situation in very different ways. Mason and Mitroff (1981) have called these 'wicked problems'. They are characterised by interconnectedness to other problems; complexity with recursive feedback; uncertainty in a dynamic environment; ambiguity dependent on viewpoint; conflicting trade-offs associated with alternative solutions; and societal constraints upon proposed theoretical solutions.

Basadur (1994) points out that, after a problem has been identified, it goes through a second phase called "problem formulation", where it is refined, conceptualised and structured. Problem structuring has been defined by Pitz, Sachs and Heeuborth (1980) as the activity of identifying the relevant variables in a problem situation and the important relationships among those variables. Simon (1960) viewed the decision making process as consisting of four phases: intelligence, design, choice and review. The intelligence phase organises and performs the activity of problem finding and formulation. Problem structuring has been reported as the main activity of this phase (Simon, 1960; Dickson, Senn and Cherveny, 1977; Goslar, Green and Hughes, 1986; Cats-Baril and Huber, 1987; Raggard, 1996).

PHASE	STAGES
Structuring	Problem Detection Problem Definition
Understanding	Detailed System Design Exploring Courses of Action Decision Taking
Action	Implementation of Change Review

Figure 7.4 ***Phases and Stages in Tackling a Problem***

Source: Finlay, 1994.

Rosenhead (1996) lists a number of approaches or examples of problem structuring methods. These include Hypergame analysis (Cropper, 1986), an interactive approach to taking action in conflict situations; Interactive Planning (Ackoff, 1981), a method for designing a desirable organisational future and ways of bringing it about; Metagame Analysis (Howard, 1993), an interactive method of analysing cooperation and conflict among multiple actors; Robustness Analysis (Rosenhead, 1980), an approach that focuses on maintaining useful flexibility under uncertainty; Soft Systems Methodology,

(Checkland, 1981; Checkland and Scholes, 1990), a general methodology for system redesign; Strategic Assumption Surfacing and Testing (Mason and Mitroff, 1981), a method for tackling ill structured problems where differences of opinion about what strategy to pursue are preventing decision; Strategic Choice, (Friend and Hickling, 1987), a planning approach centred on managing uncertainty in strategic situations; and Strategic Options Development and Analysis (Eden, Jones and Sims, 1983), a general problem identification method that uses Cognitive Mapping as a modelling device for eliciting and recording individuals' views of a problem situation.

Rosenhead's list of problem structuring methods (above) is extremely broad, and includes methods for deriving solutions as well as defining problems (e.g., SSM). For the purposes of this chapter, however, the focus is only on methods that play a diagnostic rather than a problem solving role. There are said to be a number of technical attributes that unite the family of such problem structuring methods. These include the ability to identify an alternative interpretation; the employment of representation relationships; symbolic manipulation; and strictly limited quantification within a systematic framework (Rosenhead, 1996). Other common features concern the process of the engagement through which analysis assists decision making (Eden and Radford, 1996): this process is usually participative and interactive. Little or nothing happens in backrooms or black boxes: those who must take or recommend decisions are participants in, or executants of, the analysis. The purpose of the analysis is to "elicit relevant knowledge and to reflect it back in structured form in an interactive process of problem construction." (Rosenhead, 1996). Virtually all problem structuring methods are designed for use by groups, although they have been widely appropriated as individual aids for problem clarification. According to Rosenhead, the rationale for this

is that if the problem situation involves multiple interest groups and plural rationalities under conditions in which no group can impose its will, the negotiation of a way forward must involve representation of these parties.

7.4.1 The Purpose of Problem Structuring

Problem structuring is said to be part of a decision analysis cycle, helping to identify uncertain variables along with their relationships (Corner and Corner, 1995). Rosenhead (1996) states that problem structuring methods provide decision makers with systematic help in identifying an agreed framework for their problems. The result is either a well defined project that can be addressed using conventional or traditional methods, or a clarification of the situation that enables those responsible to agree on a course of action (Rosenhead, 1996).

Eden (1994) observes that problem structuring processes help ensure that we have not focused too early on one definition of the system rather than another. It is about understanding and managing the complexity of problem definition (Eden, 1994). Problem structuring does not "choose" the correct problem statement for the stakeholder(s). It creates a meaningful visual representation of the problem so that the stakeholders can consider how to strategically approach the ill-structured "mess". The stakeholders must then consider which problem definition(s) they believe will best lead to an improvement of this "mess" (Basadur 1994).

The concern is with finding methods to help clients reflectively and systematically make explicit, analyse, and add to their own theories about their world so that they may devise

ways of acting to meet their objectives. Within this context the role of quantitative modelling is often less useful for capturing fully, meaningfully and usefully, the clients' particular and personal images of their world than qualitative modelling alone (Eden, 1981).

7.4.2 Advantages of Problem Structuring Methods

Problem structuring methods have great potential for aiding participation. Rosenhead (1989) suggests that people without previous experience of using a particular graphical technique are often able to adopt the language readily and use it to formalise a model. Lay people can generally express their judgements more meaningfully this way, compared with traditional representation in text (MacCrimmon and Taylor, 1976; Weick and Bougon, 1986; Volkema, 1988). Furthermore, Larkin and Simon (1987) demonstrated that a graphical representation can shorten the time it takes for an individual to visualise their problem interpretations. Strasser and Titus (1987 and 1985) found that, when discussions are based solely on ill structured verbal instructions, they tend to be devoted to a reiteration of information that is most common to all participants. Given this, groups will be unaware of unshared information that could potentially expand the groups' perspective and lead to a richer problem understanding. However, explicit attention to visually representing a problem serves to alleviate this. These methods of representation can also capture differing perceptions of the situation, to help generate a consensus or to facilitate negotiations (Rosenhead, 1996). Rosenhead (1996) goes further to observe that, where no one can give orders, having an "optimal" solution is of little use, especially if it is the optimal solution to only one party's version of the problem. In addition, problem structuring methods provide a deeper

understanding of the consequences of tackling one or more problems in isolation from others, and also of considering the consequences each problem has for others in the context of the complete issue.

7.4.3 Problem Structuring Methods in the Context of CST

There are a number of problem surfacing and structuring methods that are frequently applied within CST. This section will discuss a few of these to provide some further context for this research.

7.4.3.1 *Rich Picture*

This is a visual representation of the situation people currently find themselves in. It is usually a mess of numerous drawings and arrows showing the interconnections between the various facets of the situation. The term originates from Soft Systems Methodology (SSM) (Checkland, 1981; Checkland and Scholes, 1990). Checkland (1981) suggests building a rich picture by examining a problem situation for elements of structure (i.e. physical layout, power hierarchy, reporting structure, and the pattern of communications, both formal and informal) and process (i.e. the basic activities of deciding to do something, doing it, monitoring both how well it is done and its external effects, and taking appropriate corrective action), and looking at the relationship between the two - the climate. Many problems are said to be problems of mismatch between structure and process. Studying the structure, process and climate can reveal a number of things about a problem situation. For example:

> (i)The structure and process may interact in a way that does not bring about equilibrium. (ii) The situation, even in a state of equilibrium, is not

> considered optimal by some or all of the "stakeholders" - the various groups with an interest in the problem situation. (Ho and Jackson, 1987).

Ho and Jackson (1987) further point out that boundaries should be explicitly selected together with their potential environments. What constitutes an environment is determined by means of the following diagnostic questions:

> (i) Is the factor in question related to the objective of the system?
>
> (ii) Can I do something about it?
>
> (Churchman, 1979a).

If the answer to the first question is "Yes", but the answer to the second is "No", it can be assumed that the factor is in the environment.

Checkland and Scholes (1990) state that the way of gathering information for display in the rich picture has changed since Checkland published his first book in 1981. It now incorporates critical aspects and a new understanding of the intricacies of power. The analysis is in three stages. Analysis 1 considers the intervention itself and the role of client(s), problem solver(s), and problem owners. Analysis 2 takes a cultural view of the social system, looking at social roles, norms of behaviour, and what values are used in judging role performance. Analysis 3 examines the politics of the problem situation and how power is obtained and used.

7.4.3.2 *Metaphors*

The importance of metaphors in problem surfacing was first popularised by Morgan (1986), and both Flood and Jackson (1991b) and Flood (1995a) drew upon his work in creating Total Systems Intervention. Morgan observes that when it comes to management and problem solving, everyday assumptions can stop people from penetrating beneath surface events to get deep into organisational dynamics. Flood (1995a) concludes that everyday thinking for this purpose is a trap. Insight is facilitated by working out the details of an alternative way of conceptualising organisational problems. Alternative perceptions are sought by combining divergent thinking (concerned with perceiving situations from various angles) and convergent thinking (which diagnoses problems by highlighting their interacting nature and major areas of concern).

According to Flood (1995a), methods for creative thinking fall into two categories, those that spark off ideas and those that evolve images. Idea generation is said to stimulate an increase in individual thoughts about problems for further evaluation. Image generation functions by picturing and portraying whole situations in different ways, which are evaluated as the images develop. The two forms of creative thinking are said to be complementary.

In the organisation theory literature, there are many different metaphors that can be used to describe organisations, each of which yields an alternative understanding of their character and functioning. Morgan (1986), discussing different "images of organisation", talks about "psychic prisons", "machines", "organisms", "brains",

"cultures", "political systems", "flux and transformation", and "instruments of domination". Choosing to see an organisation in any of these ways will obviously affect the approach adopted to studying it or seeking to change it. Jackson (1991a) has pointed out that systems methodologies also rest upon metaphorical understandings of the nature of systems, the most common being the "adaptive whole system" metaphor articulated by Atkinson (1984). Jackson (1991b) and Flood and Jackson (1991b) go on to define the following five core metaphors:

Machine Metaphor

Various strands of organisation theory unite in treating organisations as if they are machines. The three most influential are the Administrative Management Theory (Fayol, 1949); Scientific Management Theory (Taylor, 1947) and Bureaucracy Theory (Weber, 1907). The machine model views an organisation as an instrument designed to achieve the purpose of the people who set it up or who control it. It is constructed of parts combined according to management principles in a way that should enable maximum efficiency to be achieved. Decision making is assumed to be rational. Control is exercised through rules and a strict hierarchy of authority. Information is processed according to the arrangement of tasks and by exception reporting up the hierarchy.

Organismic Metaphor

The view of organisations as organisms portrays them as complex systems made up of parts existing in close interrelationship. Because they are like this, organisations can only be studied as wholes. The primary aim of organisations as systems is to ensure their own survival. Both formal and informal aspects of organisations are granted attention in the organismic model. Moreover organisations are seen as open systems, having to take action in response to environmental changes if they want to maintain a steady state. If organisations are like organisms, the sub systems must be examined to ensure that they are meeting the needs of the organisation, and the organisation examined to see that it is well adjusted to its environment. A managerial subsystem is charged with this task.

Brain Metaphor

This theory takes a neurocybernetic perspective, emphasising action learning rather than the somewhat passive adaptability that characterises the organismic view. It has led to attention being focused on decision making and on information processing. The best design of an organisation is seen as contingent upon the uncertainty and diversity surrounding the basic task undertaken by that organisation, since this determines the amount of information that would have to be processed. If task uncertainty is low, bureaucratic structures with their low information processing capacities will be adequate. But if task uncertainty is high, alternative structures will be required based on strategies aimed at either reducing the need for information processing or increasing the capacity for it.

Culture Metaphor

Those who see organisations as cultures regard managers who seek to promote the efficiency and effectiveness of their enterprises by concentrating their efforts on the logical design of appropriate structures, as seriously misplacing their energies. The belief is that social organisations can exist and perform well while employing a host of apparently illogical structures. A far more important role for managers to play is as engineers of their organisations' corporate cultures. According to the cultural perspective, the essential character of organisations is conditioned by the fact that their component parts are human beings, who can contribute meanings to their situation and can therefore see in organisations whatever they will. Organisations are regarded as processes in which different perceptions of reality are continuously negotiated and renegotiated. Their long term survival therefore depends upon the achievement of shared values and beliefs, or the management of an appropriate diversity of beliefs.

Coercive/ Prison Metaphor

According to this frame of reference, organisations are hierarchical systems made up of different class and status groups whose interests are unbridgeable given the present structure of organisations and society. Organisations only hold together at all because of the power of some group(s) to control the activities of others. Relationships between the different classes are essentially exploitative. It is always likely that conflict will break out given that the only consensus that exists is an enforced consensus. It is the job of managers to keep such conflict in check.

Using the ideas of Burrell and Morgan (1979), it could be said that those who see organisations as coercive systems concern themselves with issues of structural conflict, modes of domination; and contradiction and emancipation. This contrasts with those of a machine, organism, brain or cultural bent, all of whom emphasise the status quo, social order, consensus, social integration and cohesion.

Giving some guidelines on practice, Flood (1995a) suggests that familiar metaphors should initially be used to elicit organisational images already in play. New ones can then subsequently be introduced to create alternative images and understanding. The process therefore starts with a divergent phase, initiated by talking informally to people as individuals and in groups to try and find out which metaphors are already in play. Analysis of the images is then undertaken in a convergent phase to assess which of the images brings forward the most plausible explanations of the problems faced. Each metaphor only generates a partial understanding of organisational problems.

This section has given an overview of problem structuring; what it encompasses, its purpose and two of its methods within CST.

7.5 CRITICAL SYSTEMS HEURISTICS

The twelve boundary questions proposed by Ulrich (1983) were used in the practical study to be reported later in Section three. The methodology of CSH has been adequately covered under the discussion of boundary judgements (this chapter), and also within the early phase of CST's development (chapter two). Ulrich's rationality is that debate structured in such a way as to achieve consensus of viewpoints may fail to

address the interests of the socially underprivileged. CSH is therefore aimed at questioning the normative implications of systems designs, promoting consensus when participation is genuine, but allowing dissensus and the polemical use of argument when participation is not forthcoming.

According to Midgley (1997) there are two principles underlying CSH: the "emancipatory principle", which assumes that at times there arises a need to challenge those with power as they pursue their own interests with little regard for the concerns of others; and the "democratic principle", which assumes that, at other times, accommodations can be reached between people allowing them to transcend narrowly defined interests. Midgley explains that CSH embodies emancipatory principles in that the twelve questions it offers can help facilitate consciousness raising within an interest group, thereby "allowing for the identification of forms of coercion that might otherwise have gone unnoticed".

CSH has been said by Flood and Jackson (1991b) and others, to be impotent where debate is hindered by structural factors. For instance, where the involved are not committed to the views and interests of the affected. The other problem with CSH is that it only surfaces issues but does not provide for their dissolution, for this one has to rely on other methods.

7.6 INTERACTIVE PLANNING

The method of "idealised design", which is part of Ackoff's (1981) methodology of Interactive Planning (IP), was also used in the practical study. This is therefore reviewed below.

Ackoff (1981) claims that an issue of whatever complexity can be addressed through participative design, so long as all parties involved are open to dialogue and can look beyond their limited interests. Debate and accommodation are therefore vital for the success of Interactive Planning. The method aims at freeing the minds of participants in a planning debate, liberating them from unnecessary assumptions that restrict creativity.

There are five phases of interactive planning summarised as follows:

(i) Formulating the Mess: This is a projection of the future that the organisation would be faced with if it did nothing about its present situation and, if developments in its environment continue as now.

(ii) Ends Planning: This involves determining the ends to be pursued in terms of ideals, objectives, and goals. The process begins with "Idealised Design", which is a key element of the methodology. A design is produced that relevant stakeholders would like to replace the existing system with, if they had the freedom to do so. It is prepared through three steps:

- Selecting a mission and working out a vision of what the organisation could be like. This has to be a vision that generates commitment. Ackoff states that:

> ...a mission statement should make explicit those aspects of development to which the corporation intends to dedicate itself and, in very general terms, how it intends to pursue them. It ought to be a purpose to which virtually all of an organisations' stakeholders can dedicate themselves. (Ackoff, 1981).

- Specifying desired properties of the design which stakeholders agree should be incorporated into the system being designed. Once a mission is formulated it is useful to specify the properties which the system should ideally have. Ackoff points out that in order to assure coverage of all aspects of a corporation's structure, operations and relationships with its stakeholders, it is helpful to organise the preparation of specifications around a list of questions that should be addressed. In this research such a list incorporated some questions from CSH (see Appendix 12).

- Designing the system, setting out how all the specified properties of the idealised design can be realised. The translation of specifications into a design requires participants to determine how a specified property should be obtained, what should be done to endow the corporation or its activities with that property. The idealised plan is not a fixed 'utopian' design. Since values change and disturbances

occur, it is important that the designed system be flexible and capable of improving its own performance (Ackoff, 1983).

Idealised design promotes participation in that it focuses on what a system ought to be rather than with what is wrong with the current system. To enhance creativity among all the stakeholders involved, only two constraints are imposed on a design. First, it must be technologically feasible and not a work of science fiction. It must be possible with available technology or likely technological developments, but it should not, for example, assume telepathy. Second, it must be operationally viable. It should be capable of working and surviving if it were implemented. Start-up constraints of a financial, political or similar kind are not allowed to have a bearing on the creativity of the design, but running costs should be accounted for. The whole process of idealised design is said to facilitate the participation of all stakeholders in the planning process as well as allowing the incorporation of their aesthetic values. Apart from generating consensus amongst those who participate, it is said to release large amounts of suppressed creativity, directing it into individual and organisational development. It expands participants' concepts of feasibility, revealing that the biggest obstruction to the future we most desire is our own preconceptions. It facilitates implementation by allowing stakeholders a say in the plans.

(iii) Means Planning: During this stage policies and proposals are generated and examined with a view to deciding whether they are capable of helping to address the gap that separates the desired future ends (stage 2) and the future

the organisation is currently locked into based on the current situation (the reference scenario, stage 1). Again, creativity is of prime importance here. Alternative means of attaining the specified ends must be carefully evaluated and a selection made.

(iv) Resource Planning: In this planning stage, Ackoff recommends that four types of resources should be taken into account:

- Inputs, materials, supplies, energy and services
- Facilities and equipment; capital investments
- Personnel
- Money

Each type of resource has to be examined against the chosen means. For instance an assessment has to be made of how much of each resource is required, when it will be required and how it can be procured if not yet in place. Ackoff recommends having two designs, one constrained by all current factors, including resources, the other unconstrained. In this research only the unconstrained design was put together due to time limitations.

(v) Design of Implementation and Control: This is the last phase of Interactive Planning and it focuses on ensuring that all the decisions made hitherto are implemented. In this stage decisions about who is to do what, when, where and how are made. Plans are implemented and constantly monitored. The

results are fed back into the planning process so that learning is possible and improvements can be worked out.

Interactive Planning acknowledges the complexity of organisations as well as the pluralism inherent in them. For Ackoff, wide participation and involvement in planning and design are essential because, first and foremost, objectivity is regarded as following from the open interaction of multifarious individual subjectivities. It is "value full", not "value free". Secondly, the process of planning is regarded as more important than the actual plan produced. It is through their involvement in the planning process that members of the organisation come to understand the organisation and the roles they can play in it.

The idealised design has the capacity to evolve a vision of the future to work towards. Like CSH, idealised design is grounded on the participative principle. Ackoff (1981) maintains that any issue, however, large, can be addressed through participative designs if everybody is willing to open themselves to dialogue and is also prepared to transcend narrowly defined interests. Idealised planning/design, however, has been criticised by a number of researchers led by Jackson (1982). Among the criticisms are the apparent neglect of the existence of coercive relationships in organisations that can make it impossible to achieve genuine compromise on means and ends. Jackson and Flood (1991b) suggest that the method concentrates at an ideological level ignoring the structural features of social reality. It therefore works with subjective interests ignoring the more fundamental objective interests. Ackoff acknowledges that psuedo-dialogue (debate underlined by power and politics) will obstruct Interactive Planning. The

potential for debate and accommodation is essential for the successful application of Interactive Planning. Interactive Planning however does not address psuedo-dialogue.

7.7 SOFT SYSTEMS METHODOLOGY (SSM)

Although the methods from SSM were not directly used in my practical research, I found reflection on its principles important. Flood (1995) classifies SSM as a methodology for debating organisational change. SSM (Checkland, 1976, 1981, 1983; Checkland and Scholes, 1990) was developed for ill structured problem contexts where there is no clear view of what "constitutes the problem", or what action is essential to address the problem situation. It therefore rejects the means-ends approach, making the definition of the ends themselves (i.e., "what ought to be done?") the main task. SSM in action therefore prevents the making of rushed and poorly thought-out decisions based on preconceived ideas about an assumed problem. The method draws on subjectivity in a pragmatic way, by asking questions about the different ways people perceive problem situations; how these can be represented; and how learning can be generated from these representations; It is grounded in the belief that problem situations arise when people have contrasting views on the same situation.

Checkland's method consists of seven stages of activity (Checkland, 1981; Wilson, 1984; Checkland and Scholes, 1990). The first and second stages involve analysis of a problem situation and constructing a rich picture of it. The "Rich Picture" is a visual representation of the situation people currently find themselves in. In the third stage 'root definitions' of systems appropriate for improving the problem situation are

constructed. Each root definition represents a particular view of the problem situation, and springs from a world view or *"weltanschauung"* (W). According to Smyth and Checkland (1976) each root definition must embody six areas represented in the mnemonic "CATWOE". It helps the notional systems building process by providing an assessment criteria of root definitions through the questions indicated below:

C. Customers: the victims or beneficiaries of the system. Clients of the activity: the subsystem affected by the main activity(ies), the indirect object of the main activity verb(s).

A. Actors: Those who are to perform the activities. The agents who carry out, or cause to be carried out, the transformation process(es) or activities of the system.

T. Transformation: the conversion of input to output. The core of the Root Definition: it is assumed to include the direct object of the main activity verb(s).

W. Weltanschauung: the world view which makes the T meaningful in context.

O. 'Owner(s)': those who could stop T. Ownership of the system; control, concern or sponsorship; a wider system which may discourse about the system.

E. 'Environmental constraints': elements outside the system which it takes as given, Environmental impositions; perhaps interactions with wider systems other than that included in ownership. Those wider systems being taken as given.

The questioning sequence above was inspired by works of Churchman (1970). Ulrich (1983) also found inspiration in the same works of Churchman resulting in his own checklist of boundary questions the answers to which inevitably flow as normative premises into any concrete systems redesign (refer to CSH). In stage four, 'conceptual models' depicting the human activities implied in root definitions are constructed. These are sets of activities necessary to realise a given system. Of course they highlight the particular view embedded in such a system. In stage five the models constructed in stage four are compared with what was identified as obtaining in the actual problem context as depicted by the 'Rich Picture'. This comparison forms the basis of a debate about possible changes among the stakeholders concerned with the problem situation. SSM therefore makes possible a social process in which Ws are exposed for examination and accompanying implications discussed. Stage six of the methodology aims at the analyst and the various actors reaching agreement on changes which are both desirable and feasible. In stage seven, the analyst facilitates appropriate measures to secure implementation of the agreed changes.

There are four main principles underlying SSM as follows:

(i) Rather than adopting a means-end perspective, seeking to achieve present goals, SSM emphasises learning. This requires seeking and evaluating parts of the flux of interacting events and ideas before deciding on what action to take and implementing such action. Such action in turn becomes a part of the flux, with new perceptions, evaluations and actions emerging.

(ii) Cultural feasibility determines the notions of relevance and desirability of a system to be designed. The idea of culture guides the SSM user. It sensitises him or her to the fact that there are organisational and/or social constraints in the 'real world' that need to be fulfilled by any potential changes identified by an intervention. Taking action means implementing changes that are both desirable and feasible. Often such changes can be classified as attitudinal, structural or procedural.

(iii) The crucial role of participation. The interpretive grounding of SSM puts emphasis on the primacy of participation. Given the fact that there are always a variety of perceptions about a situation, each one valid according to its own worldview (W), it is necessary and desirable to encourage participation in order to produce recommendations that can be justified and implemented with assured success.

(iv) The process of SSM involves two modes of thought: abstract and ideal systems thinking; and specific, context-related, 'real world' thinking. Thus it entails a stream of logic based enquiry (about the world), and another stream of systems enquiry (about ideal actions). These streams must remain separate so that pure abstract thinking can be carried out with the aim of evolving ideal models for discussion. These are then employed as a point of reference to make sense of what is being done in the real world. SSM by virtue of its basis in an interpretive paradigm enables stakeholders to contribute and appreciate diverse conceptions of the problem context.

The principles of SSM were applied frequently in this research for the purpose of expressing views to secure a shared position. Thus SSM influenced the planning workshops as well as multi-agency meetings. Participants in the study were diverse in their perspectives, and the various forums helped negotiate a common goal thus making possible the exchange of information and understanding even on issues of potential conflict.

7.8 COGNITIVE MAPPING

Another method I drew upon was Cognitive Mapping (Kelly 1955). The way various authors have defined Cognitive Mapping reveals aspects that are compatible with the principles of critical systems thinking, particularly its acknowledgement of subjective rationality. It is a modelling technique which aspires to reflect ideas, beliefs, values, attitudes, and how they relate to each other in a form which is amenable to study and analysis (Eden, Jones and Sims, 1983). It has been described as an abstraction representing those cognitive or mental abilities that enable us to collect, organise, store, recall, and manipulate information about the spatial environment (Downs and Stea, 1977). It has also been described as a holistic method of analysing interviews (Koukouris, 1994).

Cognitive Mapping has its theoretical roots in cognitive and genetic psychology. Piaget (1973) points out that cognitive structures are not passive copies of the external world, but are intellectual constructions developed constantly through interaction. A cognitive map is not supposed to be a scientific model of an objective reality in the way some influence diagrams are. It does not necessarily reflect a correct position. Eden (1994)

relates Cognitive Mapping closely with decision making in that they both are a consequence of attaching meaning and significance to the events that occur around us. He notes that problem solving is about constructing the reality that determines action. A cognitive map therefore cannot be the same as the cognitions themselves: "We have neither the processing nor the storage capacity to allow perfect identity between representations and reality" (Downs and Stea, 1977).

The use to which Cognitive Mapping is put is quite broad. Billman and Courteny (1993) identify it as a problem formulation tool, whilst Finlay (1994) identifies it as one of two scenario development systems that impose a minimum of constraints on decision makers.

Axelrod (1976), adopting Cognitive Mapping as an approach to policy formulation, describes it as a graphical representation of a decision maker's beliefs about the causes and effects associated with strategic alternatives, goals and their utilities. Essentially a cognitive map is a network of ideas linked by arrows, and can be developed from both written and spoken statements.

7.8.1 Theoretical Background

Cognitive Mapping issues do not fall into any single traditional disciplinary field (Portugali and Haken, 1992; Stea, 1973), with the result that research is highly fragmented and without a generalised conceptual framework. Nevertheless, there is a common psychology literature that most of the disciplinary specialists draw upon. A number of cognitive theorists (Bandura, 1986; Lazarus and Lounier, 1978; Mischel and

Peake, 1982) hold a view of human functioning as interactional; that is, factors in the environment and in the person account for emotional and behavioural outcomes following from life events and experiences. These theorists believe that human responses are produced from cognitive interpretations of environmental demands rather than from the demands themselves or from stable personality traits of the individual. Cognition is selective in its operation, and Downs and Stea (1977) explain that this is necessary for coping with the sheer volume of possible information about an activity. They state that the criteria for selectivity are; (i) 'functional importance' and (ii) 'distinctiveness or imageability'. Downs and Stea observe that these criteria for selectivity are seen differently from two different theoretical positions that account for cognitive processes in general: Copy Theory and Constructivist Theory. Copy Theory assigns a dominant influence to factors existing in the activity or itself. Experience with the activity is ultimately reflected in direct "copies" of that activity stored in the brain. Constructivist Theory, in contrast, ascribes a dominant influence to factors existing within the individual. Human cognitive functioning is seen as a constructive process in which specific information about activity information is deliberately sought out (Downs and Stea, 1977).

Cognitive Mapping as a method for problem structuring is based upon the theories of Kelly (1955), whose work is based squarely in the Constructivist camp. Kelly's theory of personal constructs is said by Bannister (1970) to be the implementation of a philosophical assumption, that whatever nature may be, or however the quest for truth will turn out in the end, the events we face today are subject to as great a variety of constructions as our wits will enable us to produce (Bannister, 1970). Finlay (1994) points out that Kelly's theory is only concerned with the level of the individual: although

he does not deny the possibility of social construction, Kelly (1955) views this as unimportant compared with individual constructions of reality. Eden and his collaborators, however, have found it appropriate to combine the individual scenarios of each member of a management team into one hard map. This is aimed at facilitating modification of individual scenarios and hopefully achieving a consensus.

Kelly (1955) sees man as continually striving to make sense of his world in order to predict and control it. The resulting view is that man is an intelligent problem detector always evolving his subjective scenario by fitting the events that he interprets into it. It is the individual's set of personal constructs which makes up his scenario, and the scenario evolves through the modification and/or addition of constructs. Importantly, constructs are imposed upon events and not extracted from them:

> ...though our devices for interpreting circumstances are still meagre, and the human adventure continues to be fraught with dire uncertainties, it does not follow that facts ever dictate our conclusions, except by the rules we impose upon our acts... (Kelly, in Bannister, 1970).

Personal construct theory therefore does not reflect knowing that is independent of personal preferences and perceived practical implications.

According to Eden (1988), Cognitive Mapping in the style of Kelly builds on three key assertions of the theory. Firstly that individuals make sense of their world through contrast and similarity. That is, meaning in the context of action derives from relativism (i.e. personal assessment and judgement). Secondly, individuals seek to explain their world, why it is as it is, what made it so. And, thirdly, individuals seek to understand the significance of their world by organising concepts hierarchically so that some constructs are super ordinate to others. Within a problem solving context, Eden explains that the third assertion implies that individuals value some outcomes over others, see some

outcomes as contributing to others, and some beliefs about the situation they face as means to an end. This aspect of mapping is, however, not a direct derivative of Kelly's work, as Kelly does not account for the role of values and the manner of problem construction directly.

7.8.2 A Description of a Cognitive Map

Figure 7.5 gives an example of a cognitive map produced during this study.

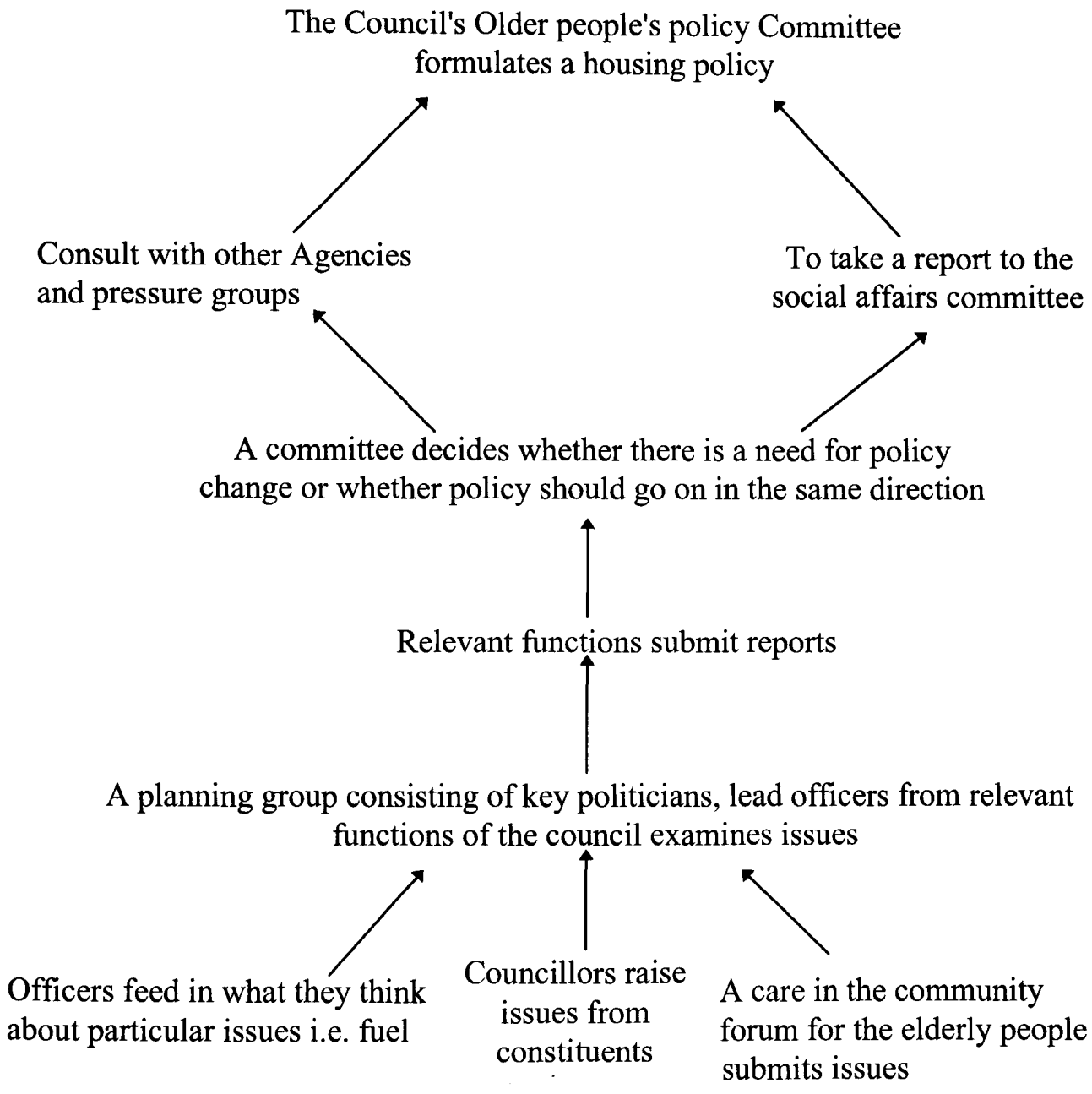

Figure 7.5 ***Map of Policy Formulation***

A cognitive map can be called a diagram because it represents thoughts through an assembly of lines, words and spaces on paper. It can also be described as a model: i.e. a

simplified representation of reality, in this case the reality of personal constructs (Finlay, 1994). Constructs in cognitive maps are "chunks" of what in practice turn out be about 10 - 12 words encompassing an implicit or explicit subject, active verb and object (Eden, 1994). Eden explains that, ideally, a construct includes a contrasting pole to declare the psychological (but not necessarily logical) opposite circumstance to the primary pole of the construct. In a cognitive map, a pair of contrasting phrases is called a construct or a concept. The idea is that our constructs develop as we discriminate between aspects of our world in order to understand and manipulate events for our purposes (Eden, Jones and Sims, 1983). Preferably, a bipolar choice between two alternative phrases sits at the centre of a cognitive map. Everything below this represents factors to consider in the choice. Everything above it represents meta-goals or values guiding the choice.

A cognitive map is therefore a network of pieces of text (constructs or concepts) with arrows linking the constructs (Barr, 1994). Sometimes it is not possible to link constructs in a causal manner, although two constructs can still be linked conceptually. These links are known as connotative links (Finlay, 1994). The direction of the arrows shows how one concept may have implications for another, or shows a means and ends relationship. The resulting cognitive map is similar to the influence diagrams used by system dynamics modellers (e.g., Forrester, 1961).

7.8.3 The Strengths of Cognitive Mapping

Kelly (1955) points out that the psychology of personal constructs lends itself quite conveniently to addressing the theoretical problem of gaining access to private worlds.

This is because the sharing of personal experience depends on the ability to construct the other person's experience. Cognitive Mapping therefore helps portray ideas, beliefs, values and attitudes and their relationship one to another in a form which is amenable to study and analysis (Eden, Jones and Sims, 1983). Brown (1992) points out that its typical content elaborates the political environment of the client, and the highly subjective judgements which could not be supported by "hard facts", but are nevertheless a crucial reflection of experience and wisdom. Cognitive maps therefore help individuals to be clearer about their own views and attitudes.

Brown further points out that more can be learned from reading a cognitive map than from reading a text. Drawing a map to represent someone else's thoughts gives ideas and insights that cannot be obtained from conventional notes, and comparing maps from different people concerned with the same problem or issue is said to be a potentially invaluable tool for discussion and negotiation. Barr (1994) observes from her use of cognitive maps to audit four community groups that, had a questionnaire been used instead, it is unlikely that the data collected would have been as rich and detailed as it was. She adds that neither would *verbatim* transcripts have provided the clarity of structure, goals, main issues and options. Furthermore she feels that the links between related points which had been made at different times in the interview may have been lost. Mapping is also said to provide a powerful way of thinking about, representing and asking questions of an account (Ackerman, Eden and Cropper, 1990). People's thoughts are often said to be muddled, and mapping is an effective way of capturing and structuring qualitative data. A cognitive map is also a model, and thus can be used to ask "What if" questions which would otherwise not have occurred, or would have been more

difficult to answer (Open University, 1991). Brown (1992) has also identified advantages of Cognitive Mapping summarised as follows:

Client Usefulness: The requirement to think hard about strategy is said to make the technique far more useful to respondents than other methods. Clients do not have to rely solely on knowledge of results for gains; insights during the process but on conceptual thinking as well.

A Low Tedium Factor: Experience from Brown's project is said to suggest that respondents quickly get involved in mapping and find it interesting and insightful.

Ethical Acceptability: Where mapping is being done on the spot, clients can see at all times what is being recorded, making the technique particularly attractive from an ethical point of view. When it comes to interpretation of results, the researcher is neither more nor less at liberty to come to conclusions that the client might not like with this technique than with others.

Richness of Information Collected: The great strength of all spatial techniques happens to be their non-linearity. During mapping, a respondent may 'start several hares' in rapid succession but can pursue only one of them first. Others may then be forgotten or overlooked. Capturing all the 'hares' in a spatial array that is before the respondent throughout the session provides a stimulus that allows him/her to decide to follow others or not.

(From Brown, 1992).

7.8.4 The Limitations of Cognitive Mapping

Cognitive Mapping, however, is not without weaknesses. To begin with it only plays a diagnostic rather than a problem solving role. That is, after building a representation of the perception of a problem situation, it does not assist with how to go about addressing the situation. Cognitive Mapping is also said to be clumsy to use in a "consultant-client" relationship, in a way which probably does not apply to "doctor-patient" consulting relationships. Some clients resist entering into such a structured 'interview' (Eden, 1988). Sometimes it takes a long time to elicit opposite poles, and as Eden (1983) found out, to keep repeating the question can become tedious after a while. A client may not be able to provide a psychological opposite in linguistic form. Eden further adds that there are constraints which derive from cultures of organisations about how problems can legitimately be described. The client may find it difficult to find the words which satisfactorily express his/her concerns. Cognitive Mapping is also said not to be well suited to large samples. Brown (1992) reports that with 118 maps to analyse in her study, she found that she had to use content analysis, i.e., it was easier to focus on the content of individual maps rather than on the cognitions being represented.

Brown (1992) also states that no actual estimates of reliability have been made for Cognitive Mapping. Other factors with a bearing on reliability include historicity, differences in focus of attention between interviews, and effects on human memory. Thorndyke's 'situational variables' will also cause variation (Thorndyke, 1949): for example, anxiety over impending redundancy, hangover, boardroom crisis, etc. It would appear that a first attempt at Cognitive Mapping is best regarded as a vivid snapshot. Indeed, cognitive maps have been criticised for failing to include feedback loops, non-

representation of the subjective certainty level of casual links, or for missing the time element (Huff, 1990). The memory of, say, a manager is not a filing system with a linear structure and a transparent interface. Memory access and processing (i.e., decisions, solutions or answers to an interviewer's questions), are association and stimulus dependent, and linked with the cognitive task and domain at hand (Evans, 1987, 1988; Lord, 1991). There is therefore no one all embracing representation of a cognitive construction. A response to a request to describe an activity today can be very different from a response given yesterday. Attention may be focused on very different categories of information, expressed and organised in different ways. Yet both answers reflect one's understanding and knowledge. Brown (1992) goes further to point out that modifications during repeated revisits only partially address the problem of selective attention. It is on the first occasion that a pathway is chosen and that choice constrains all subsequent choices.

> Even if the first map is jettisoned, the thoughts generated during its creation cannot be unthought (although some may be forgotten) and will affect all subsequent versions. (Brown, 1992).

There is also the issue of validity as exemplified by Laukkanen's (1994) question, "Can respondents say what they believe?" Underlying the established uses of Cognitive Mapping is the notion that it is a robust tool that helps capture from overt observation and analysis, covert aspects of individual and social thinking. But Argyris and Schon (1978) argue that people cannot easily differentiate their theories in use from their espoused ones, which are the ones that get communicated to the researcher. In management, knowledge is pursued, not for art's sake, but to be used functionally for survival and other less distant practical ends (Evans, 1987; and Scribner, 1986). Jensen-Butler (1981) also tries to account for this at the theoretical level. He explains that the

conceptual building block for all studies of mental maps is Popper's principle of methodological individualism:

> Accordingly, the belief in the empirical existence of social wholes or collectives...has to be placed by the demand that social phenomena, including collectives, should be analysed in terms of individuals and their actions and relations. (Popper, 1972b).

Popper and other adherents of methodological individualism (for example, Watkins, 1957) insist that all collective concepts such as class, group, or set be excluded from scientific analysis, unless they are reducible to the behaviour of individuals. Jensen-Butler (1981) states that cognitive mappers build explicitly, in their conceptualisation and in the methods used, upon this approach.

Jensen-Butler (1981) also argues that, if individual consciousness is determined by the individual's interactions with the external world, then an understanding of mental maps cannot be based upon the individual alone. Furthermore, mental maps cannot be understood on the basis of one, static cross-slice picture (which is what cognitive maps are), but should be developmental (Jensen-Butler, 1981).

A related problem is the fact that preferences are not directly observable, being, it is argued, only indirectly observable, via behaviour (Jensen-Butler, 1981). This raises the thorny problem of the relationship between maps clarifying preferences and behaviour. Behaviour is affected and constrained by a range of non-perceived variables, both internal and external to the subject: e.g., age, gender, class-based aspirations and goals, norms, power, authority, constraints in the market situation, etc. (Jensen-Butler, 1981). Boulding's (1956) recommendation is relevant here. He states that the level of analysis used to conceive and guide the research process must be at least as high as that of the

system being engaged. This requirement stems from the fact that a system at each higher level has key features that are not present at lower levels. For example, personality theory may help explain a person's behaviour at the individual level, but, emergent features of groups require the use of the additional concept of roles and norms to help analyse and explain individual behaviour within a work group (Chisholm and Elden, 1993).

The foregoing is a theoretical review of Cognitive Mapping. In the chapters that follow an account will be given of how Cognitive Mapping was applied in my practical research.

7.9 THE VIABLE SYSTEMS MODEL

Also used in practice was the Viable System Model (Beer, 1972 and 1979).

7.9.1 Cybernetics as the Basis of VSM

The VSM is grounded on cybernetic principles. Cybernetics is defined by Ashby as the "science of control and communication, in the animal and machine" (Ashby, 1958). Cybernetics therefore deals with general laws that govern control processes. In these processes, information is transmitted about any divergence of behaviour from a pre-set goal and corrective action is taken on the basis of this information to bring the behaviour back toward the goal.

Cybernetics is a strand of systems thinking in that it recognises that a "whole" system exhibits emergent properties that are not to be found in its parts. Cybernetics, as with the whole of the systems tradition, takes as its starting point the "Input - Transformation - Output" model. This reflects the idea that a system carries out some activity, the transformation, and is open, i.e., it imports "instructions" (in the form of energy, information, materials, etc.) and acts upon those instructions to produce an output. The theoretical basis of cybernetics is that this model allows management, i.e., regulation of the selected inputs - transformation - outputs, to be studied in its own right, the task of management in any particular case being determined by the nature of the system being controlled and the environment in which the system is embedded.

7.9.1.1 *Characteristics of Cybernetic Systems*

While the early studies of Wiener (1948) and others concentrated on problems of communication and control in "machines and living tissue", subsequent developments have taken cybernetics into the wider field of management. Beer (1959) considers that, to qualify for the application of the cybernetic approach, a system has to demonstrate extreme complexity, a degree of self-regulation and probabilistic behaviour. He views organisations as exhibiting these characteristics.

Beer (1959) designates as *"exceedingly complex"* a system which cannot be described in a precise and detailed fashion. To explain this point, the wiring loom of a car is, in Beer's terms, "complex but describable": its design and connectivity can be, and in fact is, recorded. An example of an exceedingly complex system would be an interaction between two people in a meeting. This apparently simple to observe and record

situation is not fully describable because the nuances, inflections of speech and bodily postures adopted all form a part of the interaction. The meeting would, following Clemson (1984), "have more relevant detail than the given observer can possibly cope with", although increasing the number of observers would, perhaps, counter this.

Self-regulation describes the ability of a system to "manage" itself towards its purposes or goals despite environmental disturbance: e.g., maintenance of body temperature. The system behaves in a quasi-autonomous manner.

Probabilism applies where the behaviour of elements of a system is at least partly random. With reference to the example of the car wiring loom, it is not only "complex but describable", it is also "deterministic". Its behaviour can be known in advance as any given input to the system, e.g. operating a switch, will generate a precisely predictable outcome, so long as the wiring loom is in working order. The outcome of the meeting between two people would be "probabilistic". This is because, while the agenda for discussion may be known in advance, and a "most likely" outcome predicted, the variables in the meeting (such as mood, posture and experience of the parties, separately and together) make the outcome uncertain.

The principles of management cybernetics are based on general abstractions of the characteristics and tools of cybernetic systems as follows:

7.9.1.2 *The Systems Principle*

Any system has emergent properties that are possessed by none of its parts in isolation. Each part has properties not possessed by the whole. The manager should seek to deal with the whole system of interest, and not the parts.

7.9.1.3 *The Black Box Principle*

No exceedingly complex system can be known completely, yet the manager may learn to control it through a systematic process of manipulating its inputs and classifying its outputs. It is not necessary to enter the black box in order to do this.

7.9.1.4 *The Principle of Self-regulation*

A complex system may be expected to exhibit a degree of self-regulation arising through feedback loops within itself and between it and its environment. The sum of the feedback loops may be either positive or negative and there is nothing in the structure or the "essence" of the system that determines this.

7.9.1.5 *The Law of Requisite Variety*

> "Only variety can destroy variety". This law, elucidated by Ross Ashby, states that the variety of the "controller" must be equal to that which is to be controlled in order to be an effective regulator.

Cybernetics also has a close link with Human Relations theory, or the "organic" view. Cybernetics accepts that humans are "exceedingly complex, self-regulating and probabilistic," That is, they exhibit the three characteristics of systems, which according to Beer (1979), make them suitable for cybernetic enquiry. Cybernetics also recognises that human beings interact with other systems, both human and social, in different ways and at different logical levels, playing a variety of roles and parts dependent upon systemic and environmental circumstances. It is proposed that cybernetics can help to explore and understand the interactions of people and organisations, viewing the organisation as "the meeting point of a number of interacting social, managerial, economic and political systems." (Robb, 1984)

7.9.1.6 *"Management" and "Organisational" Cybernetics*

A distinction has been made between management cybernetics and organisational cybernetics. Management cybernetics is considered by some (e.g. Clemson, 1984 and Jackson, 1991b), as not being a significant advance on the "machine" model. Early work in this field relied heavily on analogies for illustration, and for some cyberneticians the organisation came to be seen as a "machine" or "organism". Thus "management cybernetics" still saw the goals and purposes of the system as imposed from outside by management and regulated according to the feedback principle. The conceptual tools, such as "the black box technique" and "self-regulation", were used to gain knowledge of system behaviour. The concept of "variety" was largely ignored, as was the impact of the observer on the observed.

Organisational cybernetics was developed from this, principally by Beer (1979) and three of his followers, Clemson (1984) and Espejo and Harnden (1989). Organisational cybernetics rests upon two differences in approach between Beer and others. Firstly, Beer has built his Viable System Model from cybernetic first principles in "The Brain of the Firm" (1972) and "The Heart of Enterprise" (Beer, 1979), dispensing with the use of analogy. Secondly, Beer pays great attention to the role of the observer in defining the system, its purpose and its design, although this is understated in the current methodologies for its use.

Beer's approach is seen by Jackson (1991b) as enabling the cybernetic laws to be understood in their own right instead of only in the context of an analogy, and, as enabling the study of "relativistic organised complexity" because it studies the observing system as well. This approach is seen by Clemson (1984) as representing second order cybernetics as opposed to the first order cybernetics of the early approach.

The next section will introduce Beer's Viable System Model in detail, and will show how this draws from and develops the ideas and tools of cybernetics.

7.9.2 The Viable Systems Model (VSM)

The VSM is an observer dependent, general model of any organisation. It consists of a set of five sub-systems, each of equal importance to the viability of the organisation. These sub-systems are richly interconnected by a network of information loops in continuous operation. The whole system is designed to be capable of learning and

adaptation. The five sub-systems are termed Implementation, Coordination, Control, Planning and Policy.

The model attempts to deal with the underlying nature and identity of a system, and concerns itself with the mechanisms of adaptation, communication and control in that system. Whilst Coordination and Control mechanisms ensure cohesion of the whole, the model encourages granting maximum autonomy commensurate with systemic cohesion at the level of Implementation. This uses the self-regulating tendencies of complex systems and enables problems to be resolved as closely as possible to where they arise. This is seen as generating two outcomes: firstly, greater motivation at lower levels, and secondly, freeing higher management to concentrate on the functions of most relevance to them. The model perceives the organisation as open to its environment through its Planning function, both influencing it and being influenced by it. The Policy function is responsible for the whole system, creating and representing its identity and arbitrating between the potentially conflicting demands within the system for stability and change.

The Viable System Model is useful for systems exhibiting purposeful behaviour. The purpose is considered to be observer dependent, thus the purpose of the organisation, even its very existence, is seen as a function of the perception of the observer rather than being an objective statement about the system. "The nature and the purpose of a System are recognised by an observer within his perception of what the system does" (Beer, 1979). The observer's perception is informed by how he sees the system, and this is in turn, prejudiced by his past experience, personal desires and expectations. This means

that, even if the system is studied by different people from precisely the same place, different aspects of the system will be highlighted.

The VSM is an artificial intellectual construct: it provides, not a set of facts about a particular organisation, but a way of thinking about the organisation itself. Through this it offers ways of making any particular perceived organisation more effective.

7.9.2.1 *The Organisation in its Environment*

The starting point for the VSM is that any organisation exists in an environment with which it interacts. That is, it is both influenced by, and seeks to influence, its environment. This is shown diagramatically in Figure 7.6. The cloud shape represents the environment, the circle the operations, and the square, the management function. Its operations are contained within the environment, and those operations contain a management function.

"Environment" is the term used to describe all of the external factors interacting with the organisation. The aspects of the environment that are of relevance depend upon the particular organisation being studied and the purposes to be served. The operations are the things which the organisation does, i.e. its purposes, whilst Management is what enables the operations.

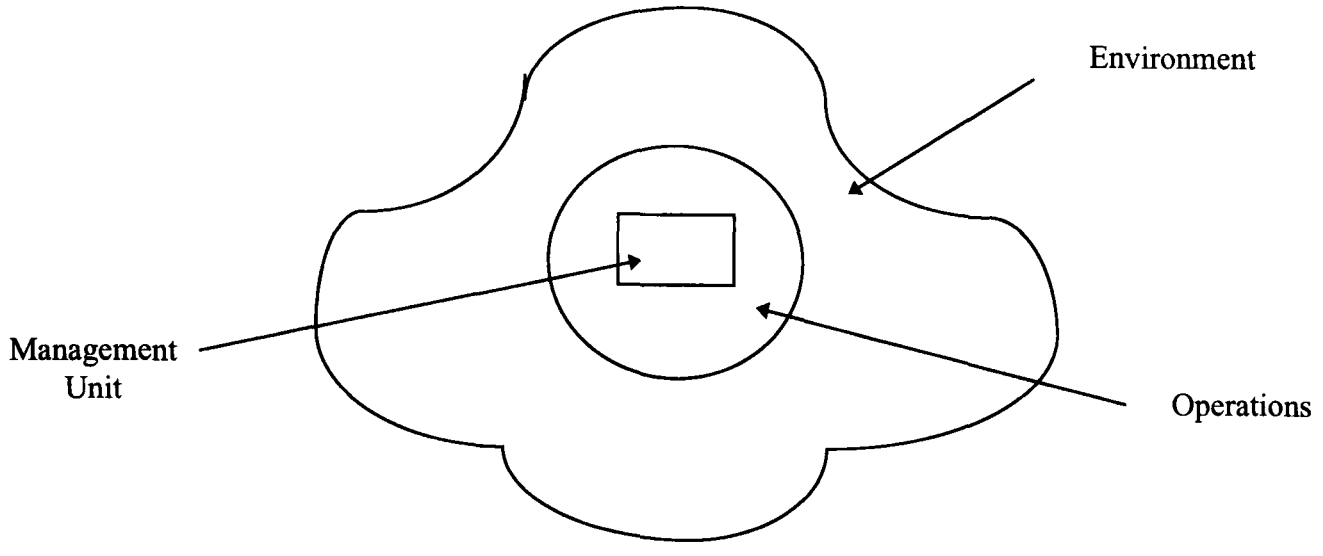

Figure 7.6 ***The Organisation in its Environment (Adapted from Beer, 1979)***

Interaction is through communication channels which link the environment to the operations and the operations to the management. While diagramatically these links are shown as discrete communication channels, the process is seen by Beer (1979) as more like diffusion, the discretely drawn boundaries being "porous membranes" rather than walls. Beer proposes that the channels are "variety exchangers" and that the variety of the environment is greater than that of the operations which in turn exceeds that of the management unit. The channels represent the diffusion process of these differing varieties. The Law of Requisite Variety, "only variety can destroy variety", demands that variety will tend to equate throughout the system and this leads Beer to enunciate his "First Principle of Organisation":

> Managerial, operational and environmental varieties, diffusing through an institutional system, tend to equate; they should be designed to do so with minimal damage to people and to cost. (Beer, 1979).

This means that, rather than allowing variety amplifiers and attenuators to act randomly on the communication channels, they need to be designed so that only relevant and necessary information is carried across the boundaries. Beer sees the limiting case of

unconstrained growth in attenuators as "that attenuating filter called Sheer Ignorance" (Beer, 1979), in which case management is likely to be a farce. He proposes that, rather than allowing this to happen, filters and amplifiers need to be built into each of the channels to enhance the performance level of each element to enable it to cope with the variety generating capability of the system in which it is contained. Figure 7.7 shows the communication channels with the amplifiers and attenuators represented by standard electrical symbols.

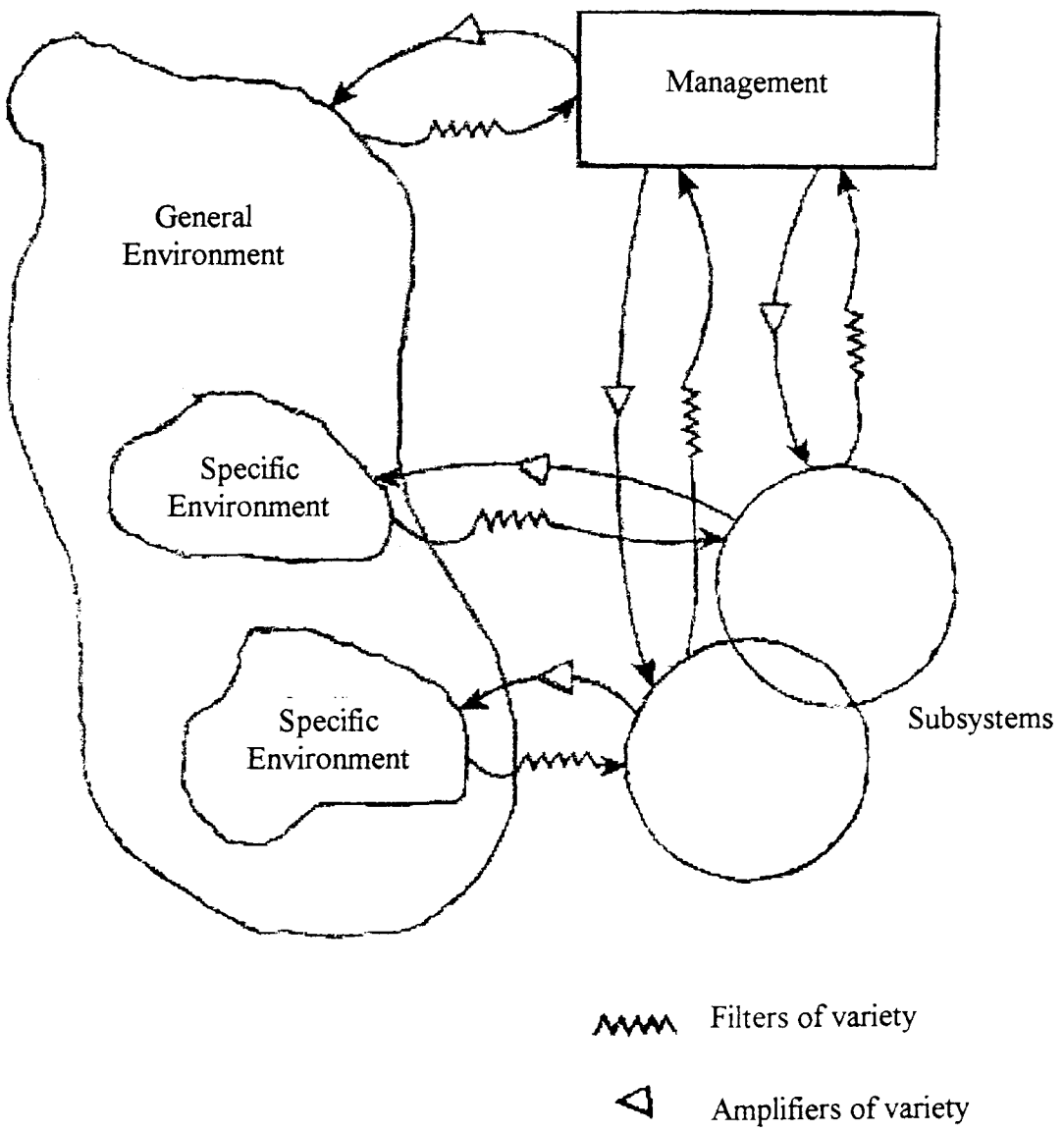

Figure 7.7 ***The Environment, Operations and Management Unit Separated to Reveal the Communication Channels. (Adapted from Beer, 1979).***

Communication between the environment, the operations and management unit requires information to cross the boundaries between them. The "language" of each sub-system is considered to be unique to it and it is therefore necessary for the message to be translated on crossing the boundary from the language of the sender to that of the receiving sub-system. The mechanism that does this is called a transducer. It should be apparent that the transducer must be able to distinguish at least as many states as the communication channel can convey. A transducer that cannot do this will act as a variety attenuator, any message becoming denatured or distorted and the transducer failing in its purpose. Similarly, it must be remembered that since some information will always be lost in translation it is essential to minimise the number of translations.

This section has established the viable system view that an organisation, consisting in essence of operations and an enabling contained management unit, exists in dynamic interaction with an environment. To be effectively organised, adequate communication channels using variety amplifiers and attenuators must convey information between the three sub-systems. This process relies on competent transducers at the boundaries to translate information into a language which can be understood by the receiving sub-system. The basic view can now be developed to elaborate the full model, as shown in Figure 7.8 overleaf.

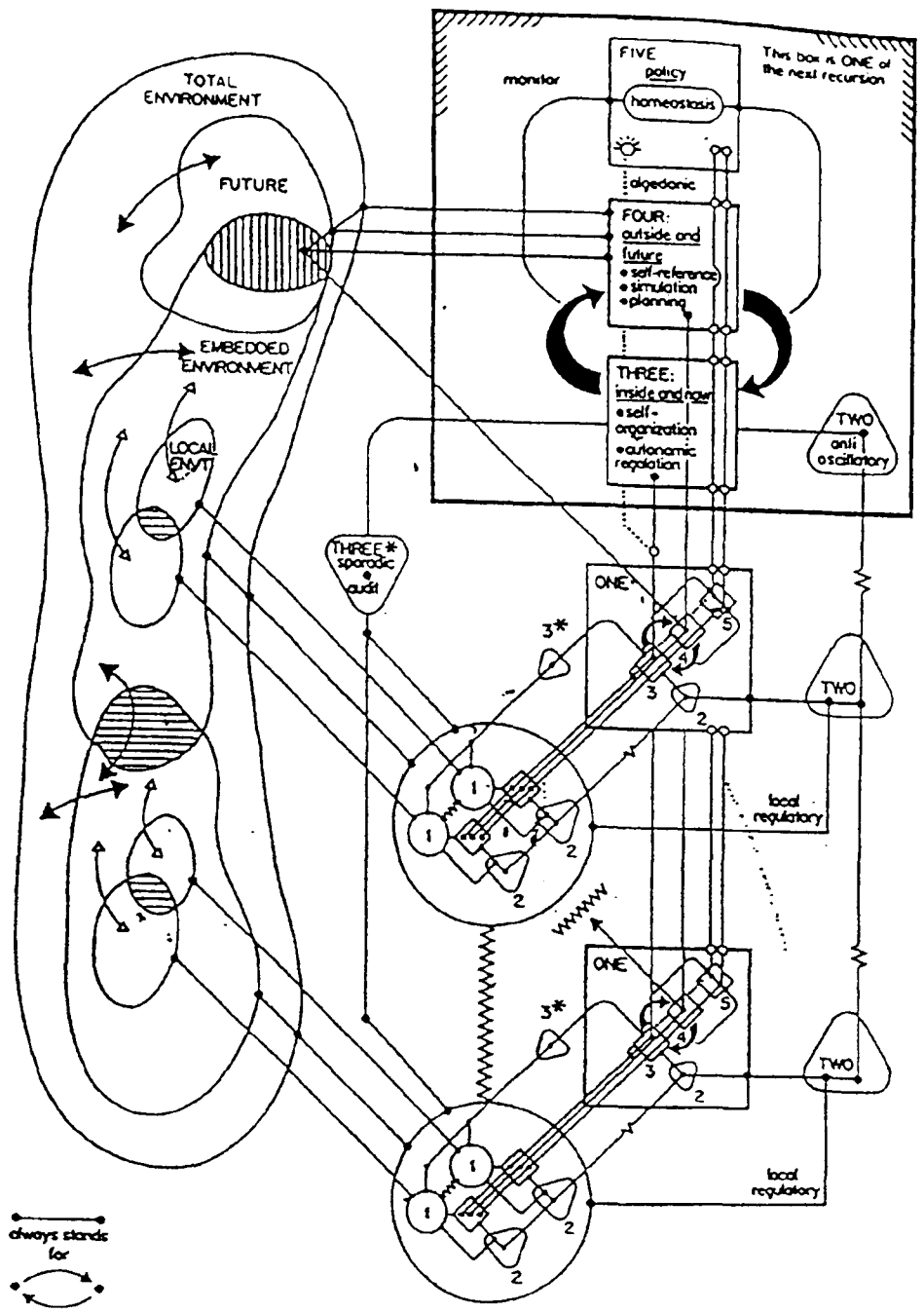

Figure 7.8 ***The Viable Systems Model, (Beer, 1979)***

7.9.2.2 *System One*

"The purpose of a system is what it does."

This "key aphorism" (Beer, 1985) describes "Implementation", the purposeful actions of the system. System One consists of the set of operational sub-systems of the organisation. Each of these sub-systems is composed of an operations unit and a management unit in interaction with a local, or operation specific, environment. That is, each system one element at any particular level of resolution may be represented as in Figure 7.8.

For an organisation these elements will be the "productive" parts, e.g. the branches of a Bank, the factories of a manufacturing company, the sales territories of a direct sales operation. At a higher organisational level they may be subsidiaries or divisions. At the lowest practical level of organisation they are people.

The model recognises that these elements will necessarily interact with each other, exchanging information about relevant issues.

Each system one element has its own Regulatory Centre which amplifies managerial variety to the operations and attenuates operational variety to management. This is achieved by elaborating the basic framework of the resource bargain between management and operations and ensuring that operational potential is harnessed to the achievement of agreed objectives. System one then is a set of operational elements and management units, each with its own regulatory centre and which taken together fulfil the purpose of the organisation.

7.9.2.3 *System Two*

Conflicts and oscillations arise between the system one elements because the management of any one element must inevitably act in at least partial ignorance of the activities of the other elements, and may therefore take actions which interfere with them. All elements may be interfering with each other in this way, and each will be continuously attempting to adjust to each of the others. This is "oscillation", or "hunting". A mechanism is necessary to inhibit this.

System two is the overall sub-system which links all the regulatory activity of the individual elements to each other and to the senior management. This service to system one, ensures that the conflicts and oscillations occurring between system one elements are dampened to inhibit oscillation which could lead to ineffectiveness and fragmentation.

System two and its organisational embodiment does not have higher status than system one. It performs a different function and has a wider view of all of the activities of system one, which gives it power through knowledge. However, if it is to act in a system two (coordination) capacity preserving system one autonomy, and not as a part of the senior management on the command channels, its activities must be limited to those which are anti-oscillatory. Beer gives as examples, the "attitude" to health and safety, the personal ethos, house style, salary and company car policies.

Commonly, the need for system two activity is recognised, but is made explicit through the command channels of the organisation rather than through anti-oscillatory behaviour.

In summary, system two is any anti-oscillatory activity within the system being studied. Accountability and command authority do not reside in system two. It is a system operating outside the resource and accountability loops to minimise conflicts between system one elements as a service solely to them.

7.9.2.4 *System Three*

System three is that aspect of the senior management which manages all the internal aspects of the system so far elaborated. Unlike the individual system one element management's, system three deals with the whole of system one, negotiating resource bargains and accountabilities, and being responsible for the anti-oscillatory activity of system two and the sporadic interventions of system three. It is described by Beer (1985) as being responsible for the internal and immediate functions of the enterprise: its 'here and now', day-to-day management.

Beer also refers to system three as an "Operations Directorate", composed of those parts of the organisation which enable and control the purposeful behaviour of system one. It is important to recall at this point that while system three must intervene in the autonomy of system one, this should be at a minimum level consistent with cohesiveness within the purposes of the viable system, (Beer, 1979).

The particular organisational aspects which create system three cannot necessarily be found as features of an organisation chart. It will be remembered that system three negotiates a resource bargain with system one, passes down legal and corporate requirements and monitors behaviour (accountability). It is the processes and features which enable these things to be done which create system three. These may include, for example, a sales management function, a production or manufacturing management function, management accounting, and a personnel function together with their necessary support services and procedures, most of which should operate substantially through systems two and three (evaluation of operations), rather than through the

command channels, in order to maximise the "sense of autonomy" at the operational level. At this stage it is worthwhile remembering that not one of the five sub-systems within the model is more important than any other, they are each necessary and the absence or ineffectiveness of one threatens the viability of the whole system being studied.

System three is logically necessary to manage the "inside and now" of the organisation. However, it needs to be recognised by the actors in this system that, without system one, there is no role for system three since the organisation no longer exists. The focus of design for system three and its subsequent activities should be on how it can enable system one to function most effectively whilst minimising its own cost to the organisation.

7.9.2.5 *System Four*

The system so far described is "autonomic", it will continue indefinitely doing what it has been designed and structured to do. System four is the sub-system that enables the learning and adaptation which are considered essential to viability.

Referred to by Beer as a "Development Directorate", system four is comprised of those functions which deal with the future, or, "outside and then", of the organisation such as, Research and Development, Market Research, Strategic Planning, Personnel Development and Manpower Planning. For the VSM these units continuously and systematically scan the total environment of the organisation to identify relevant patterns of change. Then, using a model of the organisation, they consider whether and how it

should adapt to cope with those changes. The "internal" model of the organisation is informed by system three, a model of the organisation's environment focuses on aspects where the different issues identified by the research units intersect. All of this activity may be undertaken on a part-time basis in a small organisation, or by properly constituted committees and advisory groups in others. This satisfies the Conant-Ashby Theorem, quoted by Clemson (1984), that "Every good regulator must contain a model of that which is regulated." It enables the use of feed forward or strategic control, predicting disturbances before they affect the organisation and encouraging timely adaptation, avoiding problems rather than confronting them.

7.9.2.6 *System Five*

Systems three and four are envisaged as engaging in a continuous conversation to negotiate the need for investment in both stability and adaptation of the viable system, three and four are "accountable to each other" (Beer, 1979) for the disposal of their respective varieties. In the terms of the model, one cannot be permitted to dominate the other, although this often happens in practice, e.g. when system four is weak or poorly articulated. A system is necessary to maintain balance between the demands of these two systems and this is system five.

The essence of viability is that system one must continually produce itself, remembering that "the purpose of a system is what it does and what the viable system does is done by system one" (Beer, 1985). "To go on being itself" does not mean that the component parts of system one cannot be changed, but that system one as a whole is guaranteed survival. System three must then appropriate to itself those resources, of all types (both

internal and external), which are necessary to ensure this survival, and "What is left is, grudgingly, available to System Four." (Beer, 1979).

System five, the final sub-system of the Viable System Model "monitors" the ongoing conversation between systems three and four and, when necessary, arbitrates between their conflicting demands for resources. This arbitration is not seen as being made evident by the imposition of sets of rules but, preferably, by the establishment of a "Corporate Ethos - an atmosphere" (Beer, 1985). System five is seen as a "variety sponge of gigantic capacity" (Beer, 1985), dealing with all the residual matters which could not be addressed by other parts of the system, or "mopping up variety that the homeostasis of One-Three and Three-Four will not have accounted for." (Beer, 1985)

Although system five is "the Boss", it is not in cybernetic terms more important than the other sub-systems. It does not "produce the system", it "is only thinking about it" (Beer, 1985). System five is the ultimate authority in the system and as such has two functions:

- it supplies logical closure to the viable system.
- it monitors the Three-Four homeostat.

In most organisations system five is comprised of "the Board". In a commercial firm however, the board is appointed by shareholders, on whose behalf the chairperson and directors claim to speak. In principle ultimate authority rests, not in the hands of the board, but of the shareholders. The same can be said of a government and its electorate in a democratic state. System five therefore is expected to represent the essential qualities of system one to the wider system of which the system studied is a part. This is

very pertinent in the context of this study, which is concerned with coordination between various stakeholders.

7.9.2.7 *Algedonic Mechanism*

System five should, if all is properly designed within the viable system, be able to "fall asleep", it should be receiving a constant drone of satisfaction from below. However, an algedonic (pain/pleasure) mechanism is present to enable system one to directly alert system five of danger or threat to the system without having to pass through systems three and four.

7.9.2.8 *Environment*

The total environment of the viable system is greater than the sum of the individual environments of the system one operational elements. This is because system four, Planning, is concerned, not simply with those things which the system already does, but also with all the things which it does not do but which are relevant to the "Ethos" established by system five.

7.9.2.9 *System Identification*

The Viable System Model assumes a unitary view, that is that the goals or purposes of an organisation are either agreed between the participants in the system or are readily susceptible to such agreement. It is firstly necessary to identify the purpose to be

pursued. This may be "given" by the owners of the organisation to be studied, or may be imputed by the observer of the system.

The next step is to identify the appropriate system for achieving that purpose. This may exist as a physical or legal entity, e.g. a firm or a hospital, or may be a conceptual system, e.g. "Housing System" or "Development Agency", both of which are accepted as existing but have no "physical" presence. Beer (1985) proposes that:

> in practice, the best plan is to consider a trio of viable systems at any one time: the organisation we wish to study, that within which it is contained, and the set of organisations contained by it - one level of recursion down.

This helps to ensure that the study focuses solely on issues which are relevant to the system under study by providing full awareness of the adjacent levels.

The system identified at the centre of the triple recursion is known as the "System-in-focus". Once this is established it is necessary to specify the viable parts of that system, i.e., the operational elements. These, taken together, comprise and produce the system one of the system-in-focus.

As the Viable System Model is observer dependent, another factor emerges with the recursive system theorem. In addition to being perceived as contained in a chain of viable systems that one observer has defined, the observed system may also be at the centre of any other chain of systems that other observers define.

7.9.2.10 *System Diagnosis*

The trio of embedded systems having been identified, emphasis moves to an examination of the system-in-focus through the cybernetic principles upon which the VSM has been constructed. The diagnosis is expected to reveal the faults in the cybernetics of the organisation so that, upon completion of the examination, courses of action to rectify problems will have already been identified. The process of diagnosis is, then, the beginning of the cure and commences with an examination of system one.

In this research, the VSM was used as a template to facilitate the design of a multi-agency organisation that could deliver services which would work towards the generated plan. According to Beer, cybernetic laws are observed to the extent that a model of a viable system founded on the laws of viability can be applied in the design of viable systems as well as in the diagnosis of the faults in non viable systems. A proper application of the VSM is said to be in the claim that it allows the greatest autonomy to the operating systems.

The problem with VSM is that it assumes a unitary view, that is the goals or purposes of an organisation are either agreed between the participants in the system or are readily susceptible to such agreement.

7.10 CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have introduced the theoretical framework of the study, two key concepts and key methods applied in this research. As will have been evident by now

these methods fall into different paradigmatic camps. In the chapters that follow, the application of these methods and concepts will be narrated within the theory-practice framework.

CHAPTER EIGHT

BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCH PROJECT

8.1 INTRODUCTION

Having introduced key methods and concepts in the last chapter, in this chapter I will undertake to give an outline of the research project, its significance and how it was conceptualised.

In Britain, like in most other developed countries, there has been a growing concern about quality throughout public life. Walsh (1990) states that this must be seen in the context of other developments. First, the development of greater variation in public services. He maintains that, as organisations mature, they tend to move from an emphasis upon quantity to a concern for variation and design. Second, there is a growing emphasis on choice, and therefore on responding to user preferences and demand. Quality assurance is in reality being driven by a strange mix of rising public expectations, political rhetoric and the imperatives of 'good financial housekeeping'.

Variation and choice raise the question of what quality is for different users. Knowing what the customer needs has been a problematic and elusive issue. Traditionally it has been left to the professionals to decide, as they tell resource controllers what provision should be made for whom and to what degree. Not surprisingly, professionals of different disciplines will invest their decision making with their particular perspectives,

interests and expertise. Consequently, service planning tends to be largely based on quantifying the levels of existing resources and fitting them to 'needs' described in terms of those different professional perspectives. In other words, "standard" needs are provided for instead of a community's "felt" or "expressed" needs.

As Gregory and Walsh (1993) observe, not only is quality being applied in a whole range of contexts, it is also given a whole array of meanings. Making particular reference to quality management outlined in BS 5750, Walsh (1990) raises the following points:

1. It is essentially manufacturing focused so a good deal of work will need to be done if the approach is to be adopted for use in the public services.

2. It focuses on the total operation of the organisation. This may mean that the search for quality loses focus as managers try to change the whole pattern of working.

3. There is a danger of quality management becoming a very bureaucratic process focusing on records and control.

(Walsh, 1990).

Walsh (1990) concedes that BS 5750 does bring out the way that each aspect of service design, organisation and delivery contributes to the final output for the user, and this is also supported by Gregory and Walsh (1993). Nevertheless, Gregory and Walsh (1993) propose an alternative approach to quality to be practised in the National Health Service

(NHS). They propose a methodology which focuses on the user as an equal and legitimate judge of quality. The methodology also reflects different perspectives: a variety of professional and carer views. This approach is said to be dependent on the promotion of dialogue, and also fulfils the conditions for "communicative competence" and "ideal speech" (Habermas, 1984a,b) (refer back to chapter three for more details of these concepts). The methodology requires the identification of methods for designing meetings in which dialogue is embraced and a broad range of views are sought. Similarly, Armstrong and Little (1993) describe a method called "triangulation" developed by the Foyle Community Unit of Management in Northern Ireland. This adopts a comparative framework that aims to assess health and social care needs from a multiple-reality, multiple-agency perspective: i.e., need is looked at from various angles. By engaging the community in the process of needs assessment, this approach is said to look at community processes rather than simply counting resources and service demands. The current research makes a similar assumption about the value of multiple perspective inquiry.

8.2 THE RESEARCH PROJECT

This research is based on a study that initially set out to look at the use of information from needs assessments to inform policy making and planning of housing services for older persons (later we will see how the research agenda was broadened). In the United Kingdom, Social Services Departments (local government departments with diverse responsibilities, such as child protection, provision of housing adaptations for older people with disabilities, etc.) have a legal requirement to assess the needs (including the housing needs) of potential clients. Services are then provided based on those

assessments. While other agencies (e.g. statutory and non statutory health and housing organisations) are not obliged by law to assess their potential clients, most do for the sake of justifying allocation of services.

On April 1, 1993, the National Health Service and Community Care Act (1990) came into force. One of its main features is that, in community care planning, services should be provided based on assessed need. Needs assessment is therefore prescribed by law. The legislation also stipulates close cooperation between the department of social services and other statutory agencies (including those in the voluntary and private sectors).

In the 1989 White paper, 'Caring for People: Community Care in the Next Decade and Beyond', housing was recognised as the foundation of community care, and often the key to independent living (Means and Smith, 1974). This research, in part, looks at the application of the 1990 National Health Service and Community Care Act with respect to housing for older people. Midgley, Munlo and Brown (1997) observe that, while other agencies are not obliged by law to assess their potential clients, most do, and two reasons account for this. First, assessment ensures fair practice: potential clients can be sure that the same criteria are used for everybody. Second, it allows for a reasonably controlled use of resources: where resources are scarce, the criteria for service provision can be set in such a manner as to ensure that only the most 'needy' applicants receive a service, thus minimising the possibility of overspending.

Given the wide spread use of assessments in the 1990s, it would appear that agencies have a great deal of information about applicants for services that, if aggregated, could

prove useful in the coordination of multi-agency housing policies. It is this impression that informed the Joseph Rowntree Foundation's decision to commission the research reported here. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation is a charity that funds research for social benefit. It invited the submission of research proposals to discover how information from assessments of individual older people applying for housing services could most effectively be aggregated and used in the development of housing policy. Rowntree defined "housing services" as being more than just the provision of "bricks and mortar" They included adaptations to properties and other services provided to allow older people to stay in their own homes.

The project was advertised in a mailing to British Universities and Gerald Midgley (at the Centre for Systems Studies, University of Hull), who is also my supervisor, put in a proposal. He was awarded the project in mid 1994.

8.3 ACTIVITIES BEFORE MY INVOLVEMENT

Before I was involved in the project, my supervisor had already submitted a project proposal to the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (see appendix 1). Thus, some key features of the research were already determined as follows:

Purpose: The project was to research the ways in which information from assessments is used in practice to inform policy. This was to involve building a picture of the flow of such information through organisations, and was to examine the role information plays in the decision making processes of different

stakeholders (councillors, officers, CHC representatives, etc.). Specifically, the aims of the research project were spelt out as follows:

- To build a picture of how information from assessments of older people is actually used in developing housing policy.

- To work with stakeholders in the policy making process in order to develop practical action plans for improving the use of information.

- To test out an innovation in planning methodology that facilitates the participation of service users, their families and their representatives.

Project Phases: Two phases of the research process were identified as follows:

1st Phase: An evaluation to look at the use made of information from assessments of older persons.

2nd Phase: A series of facilitated planning workshops to be conducted with relevant stakeholders, including service users and their advocates. The aim would be to develop practical action plans for improving the use of information from assessments of older people in determining housing policy. Issues relating to the effectiveness of consultation mechanisms and the ethos of the local authority were also going to be examined.

Project Boundaries: It was decided that the project would be based in two different geographical locations in order to offset the possibility that results might be influenced by peculiar circumstances that only obtain in one area. Specifically, one local authority in the north of England and another in the south were to be covered.

Following a call put out in August 1994 for councils to take part in the study, one council in the south of England was selected out of the twenty that had responded. It was chosen over the others because it had a two-tier structure and it also provided extensive written commitments to involvement by key stakeholders, while the other councils only sent perfunctory letters. A preliminary visit to the council had already been undertaken by my supervisor during which confirmation of participation was obtained, time schedules fixed, and potential stakeholders identified. During this visit the remit of the project was discussed with officials of the Housing Department, background reports were collected, and a coordinator for the project (a local Housing Research Officer) was appointed.

Research Boundary: Different broad categories of stakeholders were considered: i.e. statutory agencies, voluntary agencies and current users of services.

Organisation: A steering committee was set up consisting of housing managers, specialists in the development of services for older people, and community operational researchers. This was to oversee the project and sanction major design changes.

Methods: It was decided that Cognitive Mapping (for example in Eden, Jones and Sims, 1983) would be used in the evaluations to uncover perceptions of key stakeholders in the policy making process. As we saw in the previous chapter Cognitive Mapping allows a researcher and the person being interviewed to map his or her beliefs about causal relationships between elements in a decision making process. It was hoped that Cognitive Mapping would make available a picture of the shaping of information at each point in the organisation. This could demonstrate how the output from one individual became the input of the next. It was further hoped that numerical values could be put on the strength of a person's belief that there is a causal relationship between two or more elements. (Significant limitations were experienced in practice with Cognitive Mapping, as will be discussed later).

It was also decided that Soft Systems Methodology (Checkland, 1981; Checkland and Scholes, 1990) (described in the previous chapter) would be adapted for use in the planning workshops aimed at improving the use of information from assessments of older people for policy making. It was determined that participants in the workshops would carry out the following activities:

1. Identify relevant systems to be designed: Using themes from the earlier evaluation to evolve a list of relevant systems likely to bring about improvement if developed.

2. Elaborate the relevant systems: Each relevant system would be refined by specifying its expected customers, its purpose, the agents responsible for pursuing the purpose, its underlying assumptions, those who can prevent it from working and the environmental constrains it has to contend with (Checkland's, 1981, CATWOE analysis).

3. Produce models of activity systems: Each relevant system would be elaborated further and a 'map' produced of the activities that would need to be undertaken within it.

4. Allocate tasks: Finally participants would have to produce an agenda for practical action on the basis of a consensus as to who should undertake the activities, how and when.

This description does not, of course, conform to the 7 stages of SSM proposed by Checkland (1981). In fact, two adaptations of Soft Systems Methodology were stipulated. The first adaptation was said to be perfunctory. It involved the use of outputs from the evaluations as inputs to planning. It was therefore envisaged that it would be possible to do away with the first stage of SSM: i.e. the production of a 'rich picture' (a visual representation of the situation people currently find themselves in).

The second adaptation was perceived as fundamental, and it involved the conducting of separate planning workshops with each of the identified groups of stakeholders. The outputs of the workshops were then to be collated and presented back to the stakeholder groups so that they could comment on each other's ideas. Later, a further workshop

would be conducted with each separate group, to enable each group to incorporate feedback from the other groups into its final action plan. The output from the workshops were finally to be handed over to a group of stakeholder representatives who would produce an overall plan for involvement. The justification for this adaptation was the need to create a conducive environment for expressing dissenting views in confidence.

A major weakness of the methods was already envisaged. It had to do with the involvement of people with physical frailty as well as those with mental frailty, since Soft Systems Methodology puts emphasis on debate. It was suggested that physical frailty could be addressed by conducting the workshops in residential homes so that participants would not have to travel long distances. The problem of dementia was expected to be addressed through the use of advocates where available.

The outputs of the intervention were hoped to be the building of a picture of the use of information from assessments, the design of action plans for improvement, and the facilitation of user participation.

8.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter has given a background to the research project and aspects of the research proposal. The following chapters will give accounts of activities during each of the phases, as well as the outcomes of the phases. As the thesis unfolds, it will become evident that the research process did not exactly follow the original proposal.

CHAPTER NINE

THE RESEARCH PROJECT: FIRST PHASE

9.1 INTRODUCTION

The first phase includes the period beginning with my direct involvement in the project. In this chapter I will give a narrative account of the first phase, with activities in chronological order.

9.2 ACTIVITIES DURING MY INVOLVEMENT

In the previous chapter, I stated that this thesis is based on research work funded by the Joseph Rowntree Foundation. The project money from the Foundation funded a Research Assistant Studentship, which I successfully applied for.

When I became involved I had the opportunity to examine the whole project, as well as review it with my supervisor. After speculating on the complexity of the issues, we decided that I would not, after all, tie myself to specific methods in advance, but rather I would be using my theoretical insights to respond to situations as the research project progressed. This was in line with CST decision making, based on the understanding that exploring different boundary judgements makes possible the examination of alternative forms of knowledge as well as different social identities. My dependence on stakeholders in identifying problems and solutions required interaction with, and feedback from them in mapping out the research path. I therefore settled for a

continuing effort at reflection based on an analysis of action. I did not start off with a pre-established model. Chisholm and Elden (1993) present a scale for arranging specific cases from comparatively closed to open research (Figure 9.1). This research tends towards the open end of the continuum, in that design and management stemmed from both pre-design concepts and self-design decisions made during each phase, but with the latter dominating. See Figure 9.1.

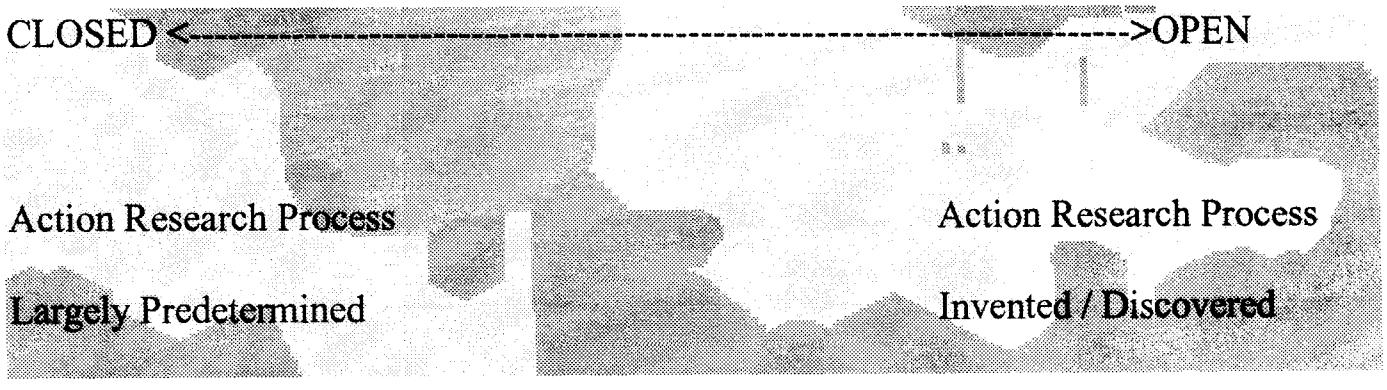

Figure 9.1 ***Closed Action Research - Open Action Research Continuum***

Source: Chisholm and Elden (1993)

After reflecting upon the project brief, our next task was to contact and adopt a second council. We did so using the criteria that it should be in the north of England, have a unitary local government structure, and should also provide a written commitment to participation.

9.3 ACTION NARRATIVE

9.3.1 Preliminary Preparation

I noted that one of the proposed key methods in the research project was Cognitive Mapping (discussed in detail in chapter seven). This is a technique which helps uncover the perceptions of a respondent with respect to a particular decision that has been, or has to be, taken. It offers a graphical representation of a decision-maker's belief about the causes and effects of, as well as options associated with, strategic alternatives, goals and their utilities. I therefore spent some time familiarising myself with the technique. I travelled to the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow where I held discussions with professionals who were conversant with using the method. I conducted a literature survey on the methodology, and practised the technique on staff and students in the Department of Management Systems and Sciences at the University of Hull.

This trial run revealed that Cognitive Mapping on its own would not suffice for evolving a full picture of the problem situation. This was further confirmed during the first round of interviews. The reason is that the cognitive maps I produced only reflected causes, effects, and options, but not the reasons why particular options were preferred over others. Yet reasons are important in validating the choices people make. This limitation reflects the theoretical background of Cognitive Mapping in the work of Kelly (1955), in that his work is action oriented and not reason oriented. Therefore, although I did use Cognitive Mapping in the first phase of the research, its value proved to be strictly limited. More details of this reflection on Cognitive Mapping are provided in chapter thirteen.

9.3.2 Preliminary Visits

A visit was made to the council in the north of England, at which participation was confirmed, time schedules were determined, and potential agencies and officials to be covered by the study were proposed. The remit of the project was discussed with officials of the council, and a coordinator for the study (a Housing Research Officer) was appointed.

Thus, the study covered two councils. The names of these councils have been changed to "Northlands" and "Southtown" to preserve confidentiality. In Northlands, (see Appendix 2) the unitary nature of the council allows an integrated organisational structure divided into functional units (e.g. Community Care, Housing, Assessment, etc.). Northlands does not have a traditional social services department, so the activities of a social services department are spread out amongst the various functional units of the council. The requirements of the National Health Service and Community Care Act have been met by the development of a common assessment process (actually extending beyond the activities of the council to include a health assessment), which is applied regardless of which functional unit an older person first contacts. Thus, people undergo the same assessment if they have applied for housing as they would have undergone if they had applied for a home help or an adaptation to their property. The result of this amalgamation of social services with other services, and the practice of joint assessment, is that all parts of the council and the Health Service are subject to the National Health Service and Community Care Act's requirement that services should be provided based on the assessment of need.

In Southtown, (see Appendix 3) with its two-tier local government structure, a traditional social services department still exists. This means that the other statutory agencies, which remain functionally independent, are not obliged to conform to the requirements of the National Health Service and Community Care Act relating to assessment. They nevertheless still do assess in a similar manner. This is because there are plans to create a unified structure in the near future, so the agencies need to bring their practices into line with one another in preparation for greater cooperation. Joint assessment between the statutory agencies does not yet exist, but the council's housing assessment does provide access to the services of a number of housing associations as well as the council's own properties through a joint register of applicants for housing.

9.3.3 Boundary Setting

The research project had stipulated in advance that older people would be interviewed as prime clients of the housing services. This was because it was felt that the exclusion of service users could well have resulted in a design proposal that failed to meet their needs. Local government officials therefore were informed right from the start that the research would promote the views of clients alongside other views.

Apart from this, I could not immediately define in more detail who should be included in the problem identification phase. All I knew from preliminary discussions with council officials, and from reading documents on housing and older peoples' services, was that a diverse variety of agencies were involved in housing for older people: local and regional government, the National Health Service, housing associations, voluntary organisations, private companies, etc.- far too many to identify right from the start. To

establish who else might need to be involved, and who specifically in those general agency categories should be interviewed, we set up what Midgley and Milne (1995) call a "rolling program" of interviews. This is when each interviewee is asked who else should be involved, either because they might have something useful to contribute; because the interviewee's activities impact upon them; or because they have a different view from the interviewee. The interview program ends when no new agencies are being suggested by interviewees. To aid the rolling program, I also incorporated questions relating to the boundaries of the study: e.g. who is affected by your activities? Whose expertise or help do you call upon? Who provides relevant services or sources of information? etc. These were modifications of some of Ulrich's (1983) questions from the methodology of Critical Systems Heuristics (those relating to the boundaries of involvement in decision making and the identification of witnesses). I chose only questions that had direct and practical relevance to boundary setting, and those whose wording could be simplified without significantly changing their substance. Cognitive Mapping was used to map current practice with respect to information flow.

For a comprehensive exploration of issues, the two methods above were incorporated into semi-structured interviews (see Figure 9.2) also aimed at exploring broad areas like perceived critical issues; awareness and appreciation of other stakeholders; presence or absence of collaboration; procedural issues; activities to do with the collection, collation, use and dissemination of information about needs; awareness of existing services; critical incidents, etc.

After each round of interviews, maps (but only those with a reasonable structure) and transcripts of interviews were produced and sent to respondents for their comments. Amendments were made as appropriate.

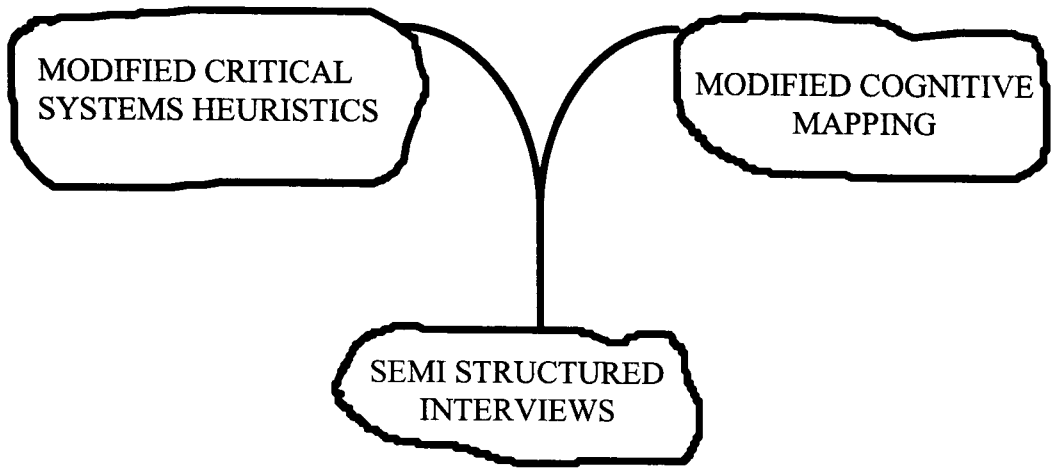

Figure 9.2 ***Structure of Method for Problem Identification***

I decided on individual interviews rather than group workshops first, because of the difficulty of identifying all relevant stakeholders in advance and secondly, because of the need for confidentiality so that problems with agencies could be discussed.

9.3.4 Information Collection

The first field visits to both councils were organised by the coordinators, while subsequent ones were jointly arranged by the researcher and the coordinators in collaboration. Sixteen agencies were involved in Southtown, and eleven agencies in Northlands as follows:

Southtown:

- Social Services Department
- Health Commission
- Housing Department
- Health Care NHS Trust
- Environmental Health Department
- A Public Housing Association
- A Voluntary Services Agency
- A Housing Trust
- An Umbrella Organisation for Voluntary Agencies
- A National Voluntary Housing Association
- A Local Private Housing Association
- A Regional Private Housing Association
- A National Commercial Housing Firm
- A Voluntary Carers Association
- A Relatives Association
- A Pre-Retirement Forum

Northlands:

- The Housing Management Function of the Council
- The Corporate Policy Function of the Council
- The Care in the Community Function of the Council

- A Health Authority
- A National Health Services Trust
- A Regional Housing Association
- A National Voluntary Housing Association
- A Pre-Retirement Forum
- A Voluntary Organisation for Carers
- A Voluntary Services Organisation
- An Organisation of Housing Professionals

Housing in all forms of tenure was covered: owner occupation, local authority, private landlord, sheltered and residential care. 131 interviews were conducted in total: these included users, potential users (those approaching retirement), carers, councillors, senior managers, middle managers, wardens and assessment officers in the various agencies.

Interviewees were always given assurances of anonymity, although issues from previous interviews were introduced in discussions with subsequent interviewees if permission to do so was given. In virtually all cases (other than in interviews with service users) both tape recording and note taking were used to record information, unless intuition suggested that it would be counter-productive to use a tape recorder. For the users of services, however, only note taking was used. The interviews lasted from 30 to 60 minutes. Of necessity, the selection of interviewees was subject to some limitations as follows:

- Random sampling of service users was generally not possible due to problems of access to files and lists of names. These were controlled by rules of

confidentiality. I therefore had to make contacts with users by gaining permission from wardens to visit their residents.

- Older people with mental incapacities were not interviewed.

- In just a couple of instances respondents were unwilling to divulge information for fear of reprisals, despite my assurances of confidentiality.

- It proved difficult to access potential users. Housing waiting lists, which I had hoped to use for this purpose, were classified as confidential. Potential users were therefore identified mainly through voluntary agencies such as pre-retirement forums.

9.3.5 Emerging Issues

After the first cycle of interviews (approximately 20) in each locality, a number of issues came to the surface as follows:

1. A number of crucial stakeholders were revealed, some of whom were not even known to our coordinators. These included some voluntary agencies and private firms.

2. It was often not possible to get respondents to give responses in a format that was amenable to analysis using Cognitive Mapping. Reasons included respondents not being articulate about their informal decision-making mechanisms; the need for a heavy reliance on memory; and sometimes embarrassing periods of silence as interviewees struggled with the task. By probing for opposite concepts to clarify meaning using the

phrase "rather than" (as is demanded by Cognitive Mapping to clarify decision making alternatives), I found myself (judging by facial expressions, silence, or tone of voice) causing strain. I discovered that very few respondents were able to cope with such structured questioning.

3. It was observed that, contrary to expectations in the proposal, Cognitive Mapping could not provide a picture of the shaping of information at each point in the system. There were a number of reasons for this. First, even when dealing with similar problems, individuals did not necessarily consider similar factors to arrive at decisions. Even more pertinent, decisions at various levels were rarely based on formal sources of information, but mostly "gut feeling". Again, at most levels, individuals said that they did not exercise freedom in making decisions because procedures were rigidly prescribed. Indeed, it was my observation that where it appeared that official procedure or policy was not adhered to (meaning that real decision making had taken place), most respondents preferred stating the case in general terms rather than revealing a specific incident. Thus, Cognitive Mapping became unusable.

These limitations of Cognitive Mapping resulted in it being used only in boundary setting. Thus, boundaries for the study were identified through the semi-structured interviews in two ways. First, by the "rolling program" method (Midgley and Milne, 1995), augmented by Ulrich's (1983) boundary questions (as reported earlier). Second, by asking for examples of specific decisions regarding assessment, information provision or planning that people made, and then mapping the subjectively perceived variables that were considered in the decision making process using Cognitive Mapping.

Stakeholders involved in, and/or affected by, an interviewee's activities were identified through analyses of these maps. Below are two examples of such maps.

In most cases, those whom officials stated were important stakeholders were not necessarily those whom they identified as being important for the success of specific decisions. More often than not, users were recognised only as important stakeholders in a general sense, but were not seen as vital for the success or failure of specific decisions.

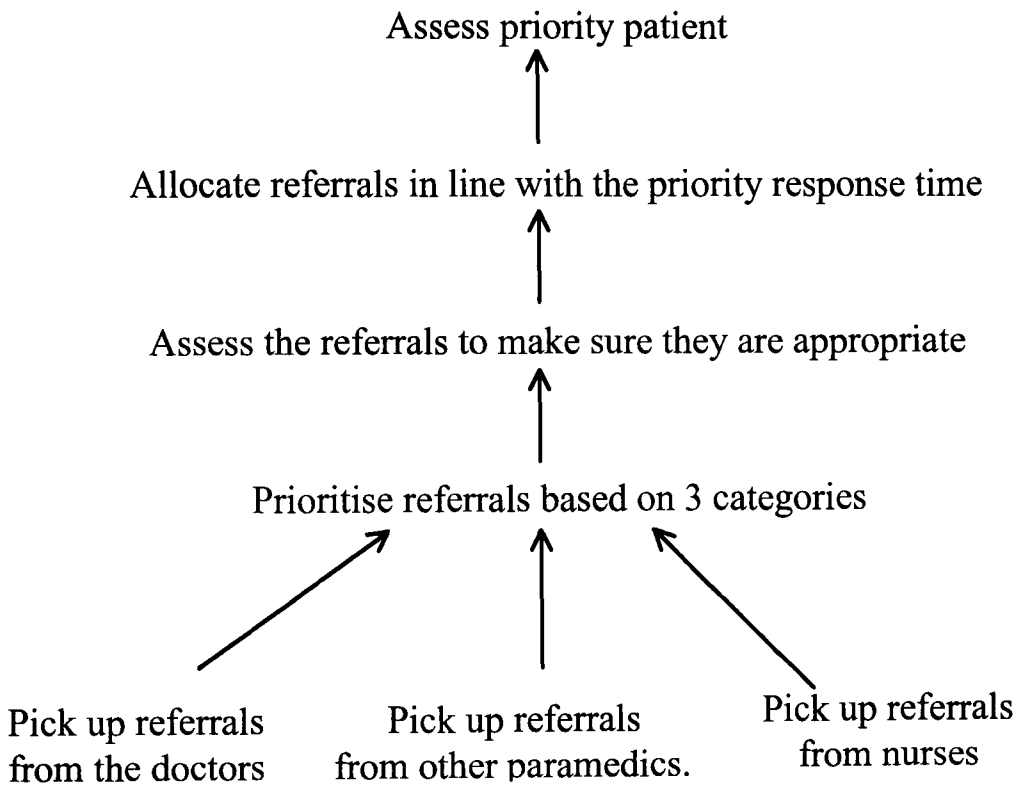

Figure 9.3 ***A Map of a Decision of Which Patient to Assess***

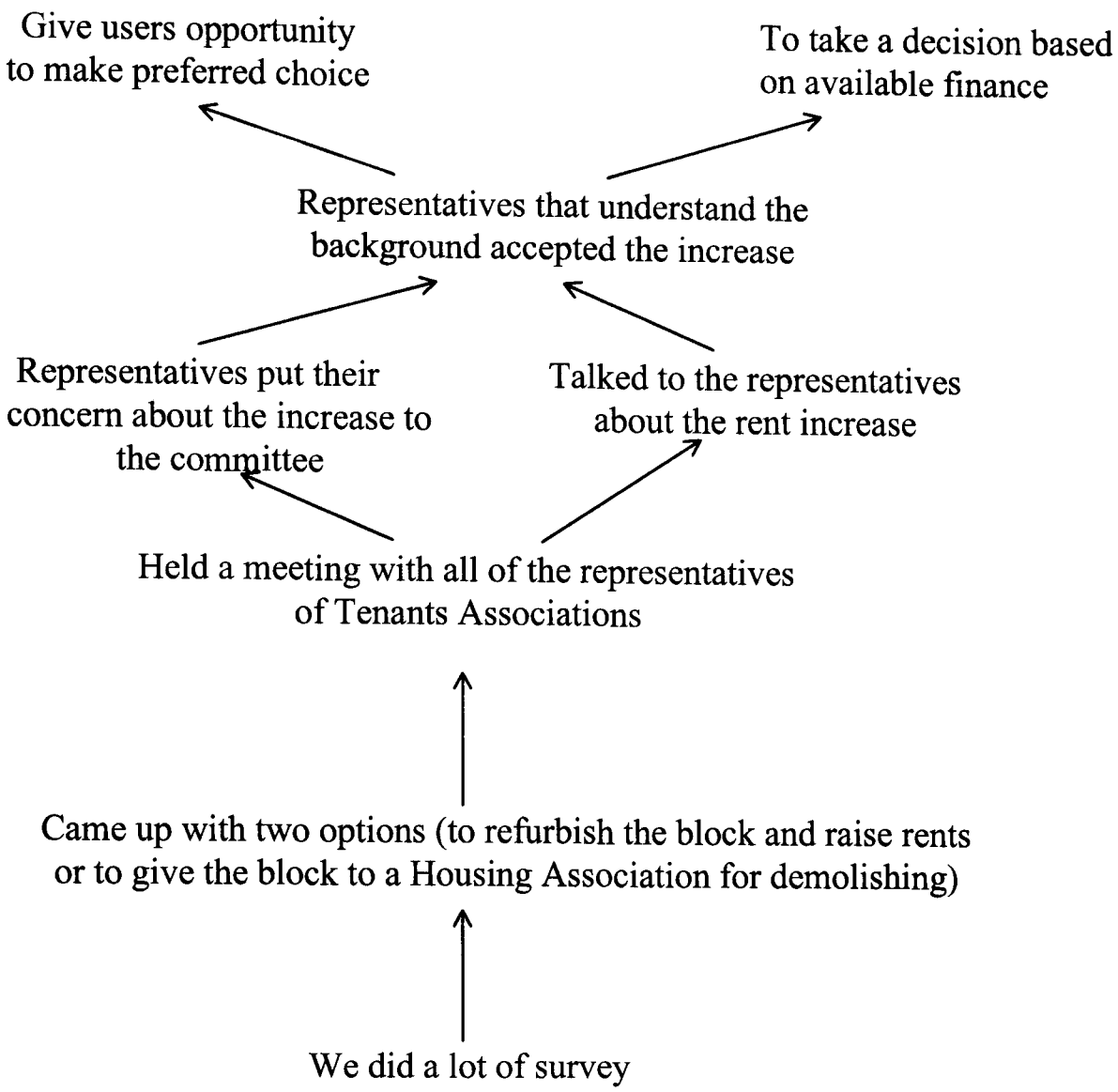

Figure 9.4 ***A Map of a Decision by the Housing Committee to Raise Rent***

4. It became very clear that the problems people were identifying in the areas of assessment and planning were so important that to narrow the focus in the second (design) phase of the research to issues of information provision would mean ignoring the real concerns of many stakeholders, including those of older people themselves. Many of these concerned a perceived mismatch between what older people requested in assessments and what was actually provided in the way of housing services. We tackled this dilemma by convening a meeting of the Advisory Group at the Rowntree offices, at which the ethical consequences of adopting the various boundaries were explored. At this meeting it was decided that the study should not be limited to issues of the use of

needs assessment within the existing system, but it should endeavour to look at broader issues: e.g. multi-agency planning and how the existing legal boundaries impact on the identification of older people's housing needs. Quality of information is influenced by how it is collected, so I expanded the boundaries to include all perceived problems that were being surfaced surrounding assessment, information provision and policy making vis a vis planning. The result was therefore revised and enhanced questionnaires (see Appendices 4-11). The significance of this change is that first, information provision was now only one aspect of the research agenda. Second, the emphasis was no longer on evaluation (which aims at a balanced picture) but rather on problem diagnosis.

9.4 ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

The problem surfacing phase produced a lot of recorded interview tapes and interview manuscripts. Analysis of content was not carried out until virtually all interviews had been completed, the tapes were all transcribed, and the transcripts typed out. This was felt to be necessary for a holistic analysis. I then went through all interview material in detail. I looked for problems identified by interviewees. I also looked for evidence in the transcripts supporting why the interviewee thought it was a problem. An assertion was not enough on its own. I produced a list of problem issues.

Once duplication had been accounted for, I ended up with a list of about 150 problems for each locality. Many of these were related and could be further clustered under single headings representing key issues. I eventually ended up with 23 headings for Northlands and 26 headings for Southtown. These helped facilitate analytical distance from materials before further cross checking categories with data. The key issues were then

written on post-it notes which were stuck on a white board for each local authority. I was then in a position to look at how the key issues related together. Taking each issue in turn, I asked if and how each of the others impacted upon it. Patterns of relationships between problems started evolving, and a network of conceptual relationships was formed. I produced problem maps something along the lines of logic diagrams (McNeil, 1985): i.e. visual representations of analytic thinking to show the evolution of the logical relationships between categories.

Over the course of a day I developed two "maps", one for each locality. I found that issues for both areas separated into three interrelated sub-sets: problems with the assessment process; problems of information provision to planners; and problems with planning and management itself. The maps are presented in figures 10.1 and 10.2 respectively, in the next chapter, which contains outcomes of this phase.

I then proposed to the Housing and Social Services Departments who had sponsored the research that these maps should be used as the basis for presentations of the findings, in workshops, to decide what should be done in the design phase to produce recommendations for improvement. Eden and Harris (1975) argue that one of the most valuable contributions that operational researchers can provide is a framework within which decision makers can learn more about the behaviour of the organisation of which they are part, and the wider systems within which they must operate. The problem maps facilitated this. These presentation workshops will be discussed in more detail in chapter eleven.

9.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter has discussed my approach to the first phase of the study, including the setting of boundaries, collection of information, and its analysis. The next chapter presents and discusses the results of the first phase.

CHAPTER TEN

OUTCOMES OF THE FIRST PHASE

10.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I will present findings of the problem definition phase discussed in the previous chapter. These are presented by geographical area in the two problem maps (Figures 10.1 and 10.2). The purpose of this chapter is to provide more details of the key issues, as seen from the points of view of different stakeholders. A summary of the issues will be provided, before going into more detail in the areas of Assessment, Information Provision, and Planning and Management.

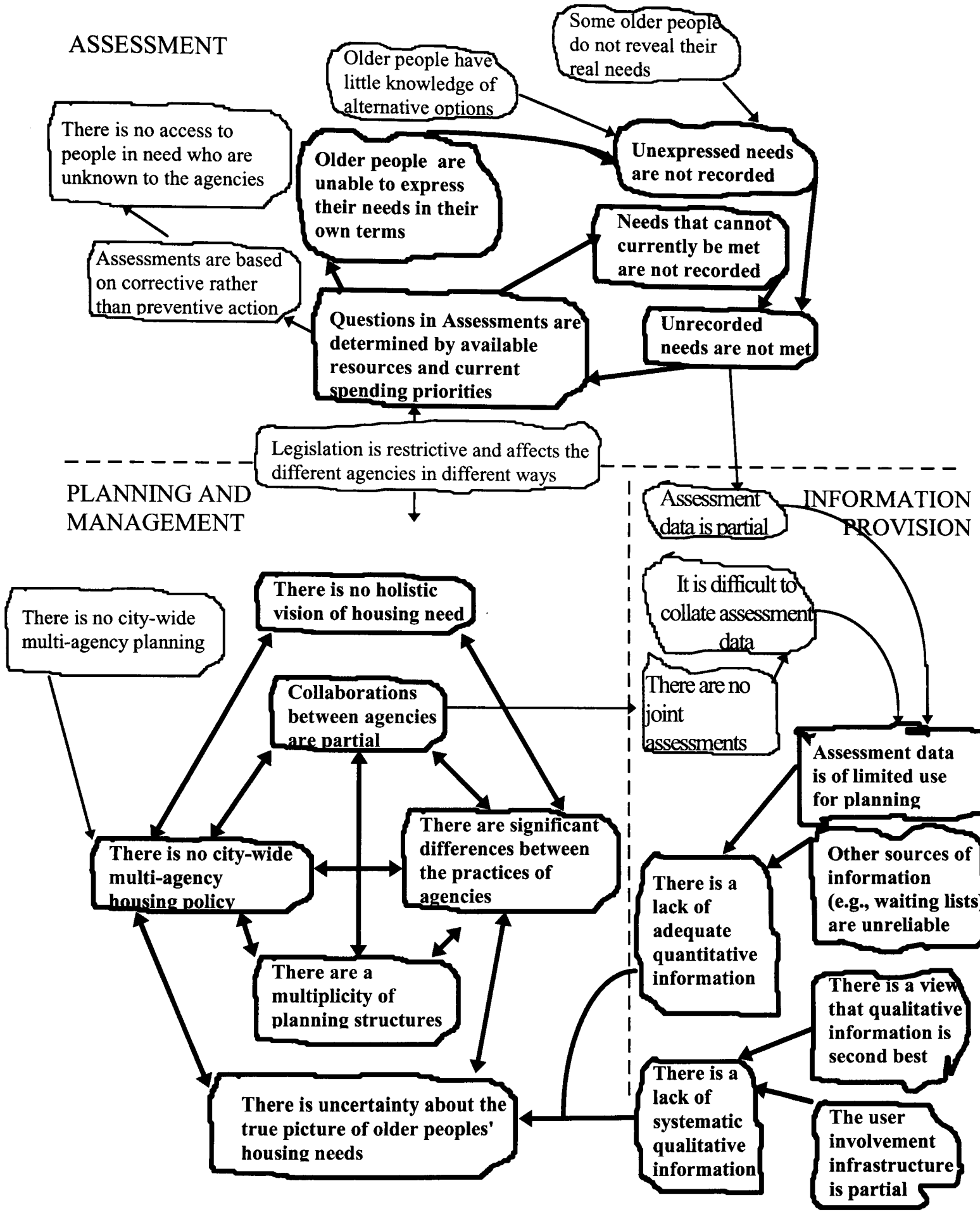

Figure 10.1 ***Problem Map for Southtown***

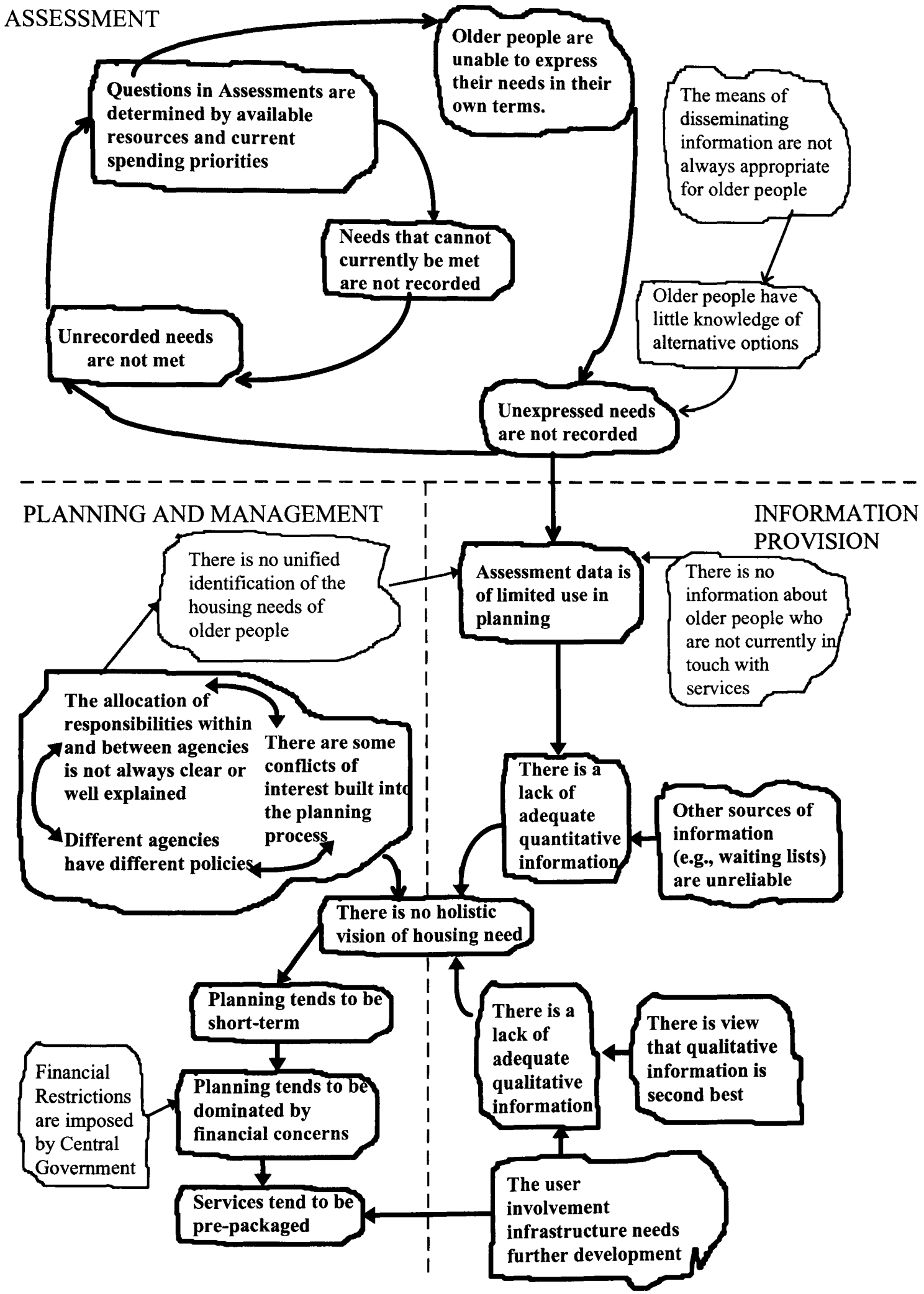

Figure 10.2 ***Problem Map for Northlands***

10.1.1 Assessment

It was found that older people are restricted in how they can express their needs when being assessed. A primary cause of this is the nature of the assessment process: the questions that are asked are largely determined by resource availability and current spending priorities. Older people are not encouraged to articulate needs and wishes that cannot currently be provided for, and may not receive an assessment at all if it is known in advance (through an informal pre-assessment screening) that they do not qualify for a service. If an assessment is conducted, and the older person expresses a need or wish that cannot be provided for, then this is rarely recorded. The reason for this is that legislation requires Social Services Departments to meet all recorded needs, and to record needs that cannot currently be met would place them in an impossible position. This equally affects any other agency which participates in joint assessment with Social Services Departments. The net result is that the adequacy of the system is not properly open to scrutiny. Although older people, assessors and their managers are well aware that some needs go unmet, these needs are made invisible to planners at both the local and national levels. It therefore looks from the outside as if the system is working well, but insiders tell a different story.

10.1.2 Information Provision

Moving on to information provision, it appears that the sources of quantitative information about housing need that are currently available to policy makers are not particularly reliable. Unfortunately, at the present time, use of collated assessment data does not offer any significant hope of improvement. The primary reason for this is the

difficulty of recording needs that cannot currently be met (detailed above). To use the information that is now being recorded would paint an artificially rosy picture. However, there are other problems too. These include the fact that assessments are not conducted proactively: they do not reveal the needs of older people in the community who are out of contact with agencies. There are also problems of within and between agency coordination that make joint assessment difficult to operate. It therefore appears that there is no holistic picture of housing need available to planners.

10.1.3 Planning and Management

In Southtown (characterised by a two-tier local government system), problems of planning and management appear to centre around a confusing multiplicity of planning structures and patchy multi-agency coordination. Holistic policy making and planning across the agencies with regard to housing for older people simply does not take place. These problems are made more difficult to address than they might otherwise be because there is no holistic picture of housing need, and no reliable means to validate plans (whether using data from assessments or other information). It appears that this lack of holism, and some of the lack of coordination, stems from legislation which requires different things of different agencies.

In Northlands (characterised by the existence of a newly created unitary local authority), a significant amount of policy making and planning across the agencies does take place. However, the problems of information provision (summarised above) still result in the absence of a holistic picture of the housing needs of older people. This is exacerbated by some remaining difficulties of within and between agency coordination. The lack of a

holistic picture of housing need means that most planning is short-term and is dominated by financial concerns (another cause of which is Central Government restrictions on local government income generation and enforced 'efficiency savings' in the Health Service). The result is that most services are offered in pre-packaged form. They do not generally allow for the kind of flexibility and choice that users say they need.

10.1.4 The Importance of Taking an Overview

Essentially, the problems identified above interact with one another to form a total problem that is greater than the sum of its parts. For example, during assessments, failure to record needs that cannot be met makes the data that could potentially be aggregated of little use in planning, and the lack of reliable data makes the generation of multi-agency plans more difficult than it might otherwise be. Also, difficulties of multi-agency coordination make joint assessment problematic, in turn making data from assessments even more troublesome to use in planning because the information from the various agencies takes different forms. If each of the three main problem areas (assessment, information provision and planning) is addressed in isolation, then the sum of the three solutions will not necessarily fit together to deal with the whole. The importance of taking an overview, rather than just focusing on details, therefore cannot be over-stressed.

10.2 PROBLEMS OF ASSESSMENT

This section provides more concrete details of perceived problems of assessment (see Figures 10.3 and 10.4).

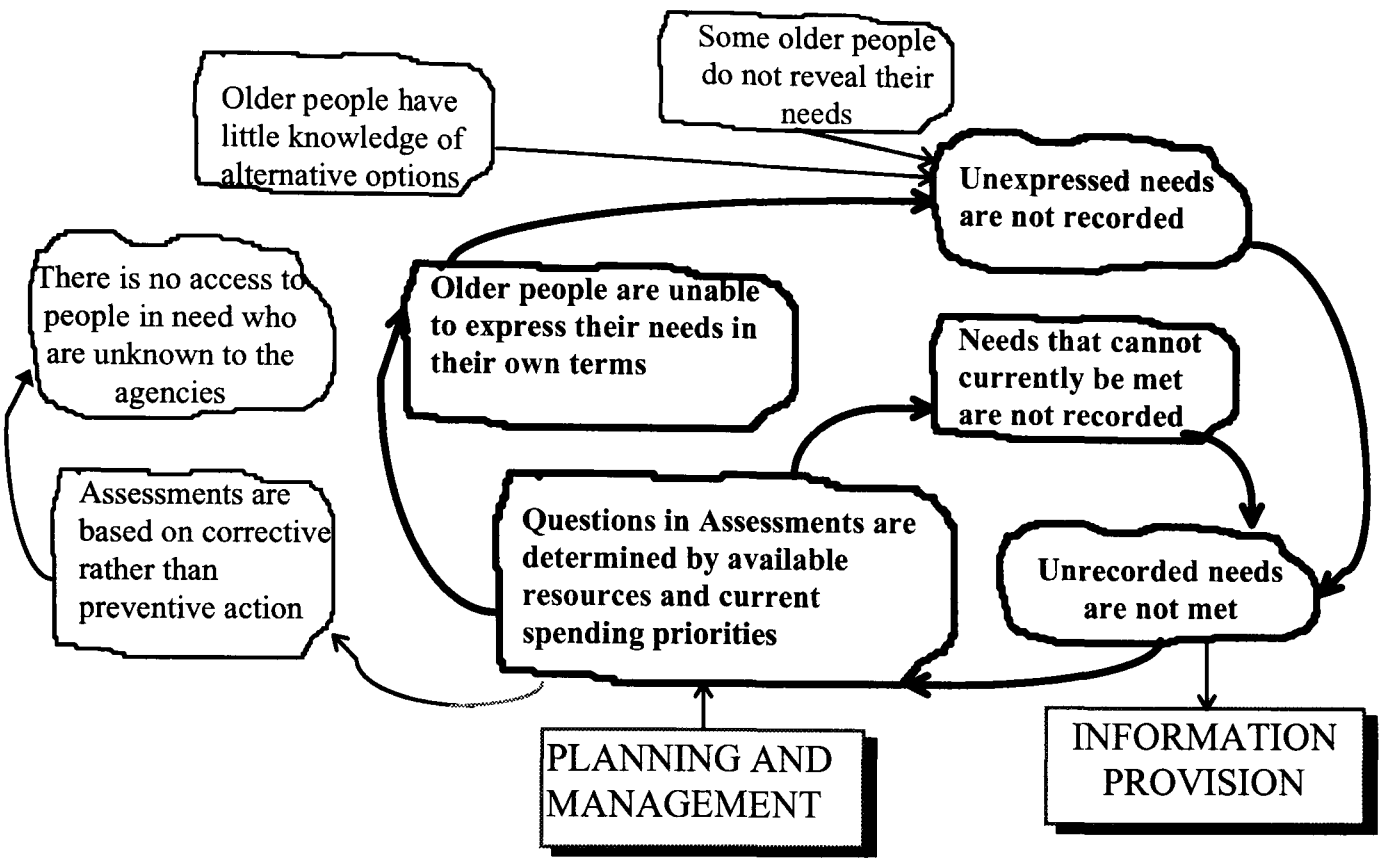

Figure 10.3*Problems of Assessment in Southtown*

Ideally, the practice of assessment should ensure that everybody who is in need actually has that need met. Stipulating the need in writing should ensure that both parties (client and service provider) are aware of what the client has a right to expect, and what should therefore be provided. However, the experiences of people in both regions suggest that the practical operation of assessment has serious side-effects with real consequences for service provision to older people.

As we shall see over the coming pages, the major problem is that needs come to be defined through interpretations of agencies' available resources and current spending priorities. Any other 'needs' are not identified or recorded. The needs of older people, defined in their own terms (or any other terms that fall outside the assessment criteria), therefore become invisible. If the only needs that are recorded are those that agencies have a statutory obligation to meet, or that can be met through the use of existing resources, then this makes reviews of current priorities and/or resourcing highly problematic. It *looks* like all older peoples' needs are being met, but it is impossible to ascertain whether this is indeed the case (except through occasional research projects such as the current one). Evidence drawn from interviews with stakeholders in Northlands and Southtown will be provided over the coming pages to support these arguments.

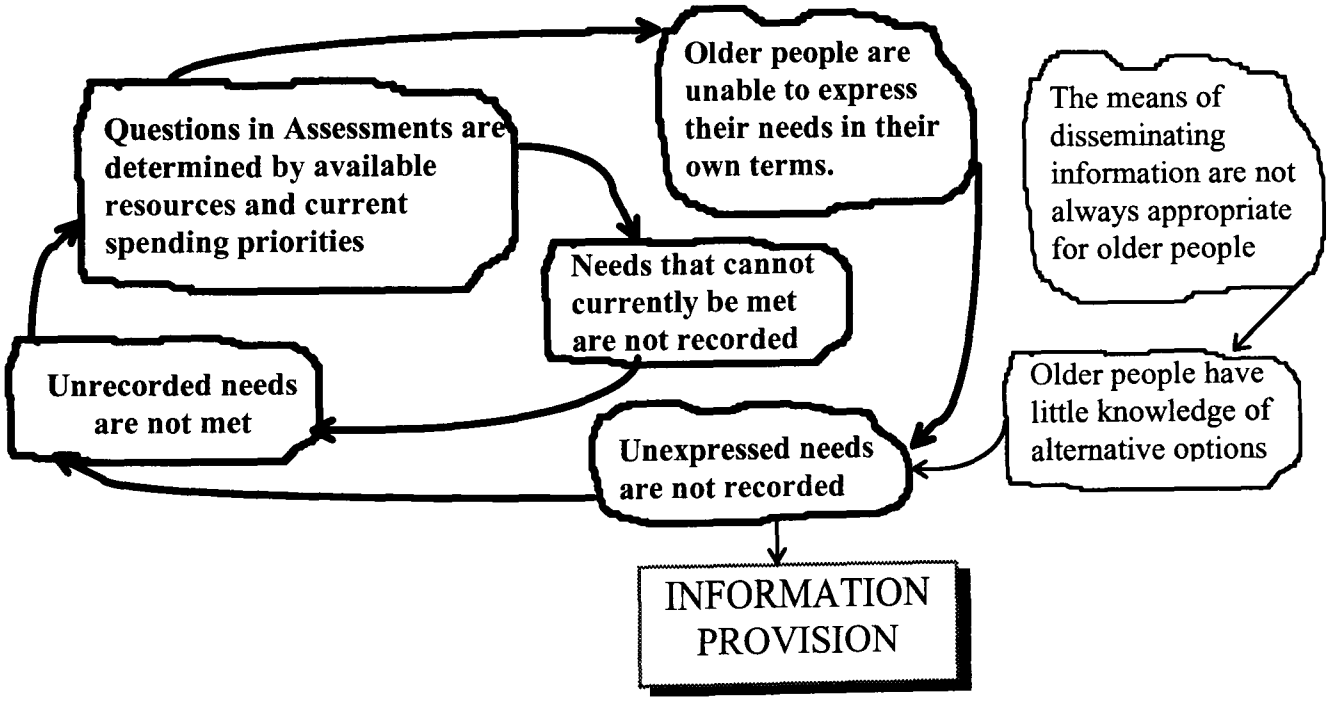

Figure 10.4 ***Problems of Assessment in Northlands***

10.2.1 Prioritisation in the Assessment System

All the agencies in the statutory sector have obligations placed upon them to provide certain services to people with certain defined needs. These needs are one significant focus of the questions asked during assessments. However, people in both areas described how the availability of resources determined what other questions should be asked, and what answers should be accepted as expressions of need. One Northlands Council Assessment Officer said that,

> "We used to go into four priorities of need. The Council now only goes into two.... This is because the Care in the Community Act says that, if the Council assesses there to be a need within its priorities, then we must provide a service".

Similarly, an Area Housing Manager for Social Services in Southtown said quite categorically that,

> "Eligibility criteria for assessment is based on availability of physical facilities and political decisions".

Some managers see this in a positive light. For example, a senior manager in a Health Trust claimed that,

> "Because we have this agreement about using the [Health] Scale, and we have stuck rigidly to it, in fact this part of Southtown is one of the few that has not run out of money for Care Management and for Nursing Home Care".

There is definitely a positive aspect to assessment systems. They ensure fairness, in that everybody who is assessed is subject to the same criteria for the allocation of services. However, as we shall see later in this chapter, when people wish to plan both the allocation of resources and the provision of services, basing assessment questions on resource availability creates significant problems.

10.2.2 The Expression of Need

Making assessment questions reflect current spending priorities limits possible expressions of need. Thus, an assessor might be able to ask "can you get to the bathroom?", and the answer "not easily" might indicate a need for adaptations to the property. However, if the person being assessed then said "but I would rather have someone help with the garden than have a downstairs bathroom", this preference would most likely be outside the spending priorities of the agency, and would therefore not be recorded. This was actually an example provided by an Assessment Officer. As a middle manager in Northlands Council said,

> "We allow them to know what we are prepared to provide. We do not go beyond what we are providing".

The other aspect of assessments, as they are currently administered, is that they limit the options that can be offered to older people. If cost is a key factor, then usually only the cheapest options will be presented. The question "were you given any options?" was put to older people and their carers, and the following illustrative responses were obtained.

> "They offered me two other places. I chose [this residential home] because I had friends here".

> "They offered me an option, a flat in another area, but it was filthy".

> "I was offered no choice. I wanted a Warden-controlled flat on the ground floor with access for an electric chair, as I am disabled, but I was taken to this residential home and I was not told why my request could not be met".

> "It is take it or leave it, or wait indefinitely".

Some older people feel quite happy with the options offered, but others clearly do not. Limiting options at the point of assessment might not create problems at all if flexibility can be generated later on. Older people and Wardens in residential homes were therefore

asked what options people had once in receipt of a housing service. An illustrative response came from a Warden in Northlands:

> "When paying,.... some elderly people wanted to give up some services. The problem is that there is a flat charge regardless of the residential services one enjoys".

This was confirmed by another Warden who said,

> "People are willing to give up what are known as important services for their own preferences".

Although there is clearly a desire for flexibility amongst older people, so that their personal preferences can be catered for (without necessarily incurring the use of extra resources), the housing services do not usually provide it. Asked why personal preferences are not generally catered for as part of service delivery, a Hospital Assessment Officer said that,

> "One of the practical problems is getting people to have a mind shift in their actual thinking so that they assess people in terms of their needs rather than what resources are available. That's a big mind shift to get people to take on board".

These comments suggest that the limitation of options at the point of assessment *is* an important issue—options are not so easily generated once a person has accepted a service and is therefore subject to the restrictions this imposes.

10.2.3 Older Peoples' Knowledge and Expectations

The problem of limiting options at the point of assessment might be less crucial if older people are clearly aware of the diversity of agencies involved in housing and related activities, and how to access them. If people have such knowledge, then they might be more able to shop around. A 'failed' assessment would be less of a problem if the older person knew that there were other avenues to be explored. However, this research

suggests that there is a dearth of knowledge amongst older people about the agencies and services they can access. Indeed, unless they are already receiving a service from a housing association, most people only know of the Council. Asked what other agencies could assist them with housing, the following representative responses were obtained from older people:

> "The other agency I knew was [a housing association], but I did not know that I could go to them, whether social benefit would apply, whether their rent would be affordable, and what rules and regulations governed them".

> "I heard of other housing agencies, but I thought that I would never need them".

> "I do not know any other agency".

Two Wardens were asked whether they advised residents about other agencies. They said,

> "Yes, mostly on services like luncheon clubs and social clubs, but not necessarily on accommodation".

> "No, not on housing. Only on services and probably rent rebates".

To their credit, the agencies in Northlands have an information strategy that is designed to raise awareness of services available in the locality. There is a Resource Directory for consultation in libraries and Customer Services Centres. A senior manager in the Council observed that,

> "Availability of information about existing community care services has been improved by the compiling of a Resource Directory of 4,500 entries on 'data view': a computer-based information storage and retrieval system, making this available in Customer Service Centres and the GP Information Centre as a shared Health and Council resource".

There are also leaflets describing each major service area, and a regular community care newsletter. However, despite this initiative, it appears that the information is not reaching many older people. Most of the service users and potential users we talked with

in Northlands said that they did not know about the Customer Service Centres, and only used libraries on an occasional basis. None had received the community care newsletter. One potential user claimed that,

> "People do not know where to get information. It is a lot easier to have information if you can phone and have a name to contact".

Asked how they had found out about the housing services they were using, most older people and carers in both areas indicated that it was through personal contacts. The following quotations are illustrative:

> "My son put my name down at the Council".
>
> "I had close friends here who always encouraged me to come".
>
> "I heard from someone at church that Dad could be given an alarm, but no one had mentioned this to me. Again, if I had known about the Home Care Service I could have requested for it a year ago and perhaps I could have avoided my illness".
>
> "I spent ten months attending to my husband [who died recently] and I did not know that I was entitled to attendance allowance. I did not even know that nurses could have come to help. I have only recently learnt these at the Day Centre".

Indeed, only one of the thirty two older people interviewed as part of this research said that they used leaflets to find out about services. These problems of information provision clearly worsen the problem of meeting needs that are expressed in terms that fall outside the assessment criteria. If information were readily accessible, older people might find alternative routes to the services they require when an assessment does not give them what they feel they need.

10.2.4 Inadequate Answers to Assessment Questions

So far, a picture has been painted of an assessment process that defines needs according to the resources available, and which correspondingly limits the options offered to older

people. It has also been indicated that older people are not in a position to generate options for themselves, mostly because of a lack of knowledge about alternative possibilities. However, it also seems that there is a reluctance amongst some older people to express their needs in case they are seen as a burden. A carer said,

> "A lot of older people are very slow to complain and tell us what they want. They feel as if they are trouble. A lot of older people, for instance, don't like to apply for housing benefit and any other benefits which they might be entitled to because, in their generation,.... there was a stigma attached to it".

This attitude was confirmed by comments from two older people:

> "My son, daughter, son-in-law and grand-daughter take care of me, but I would never ask them for help".

> "My father paid for everything he got. I will also pay for anything that I need during my retirement".

Some people seem to worry that, if they disclose a health problem, they will not get the kind of housing they need. One such case was described by a Warden in sheltered accommodation:

> "One resident I found had epilepsy, but she and her family did not disclose that. I only noticed this by going into her flat one day and seeing a bottle of drugs that I knew were for epilepsy".

The majority of the older people interviewed in both areas did not know what aspects of their circumstances were considered in assessments, and how points were awarded to applicants. This lack of knowledge compounds the problem of people withholding information: the person with epilepsy, for example, would not have been refused housing because of her disability, despite her fears. Because of their lack of knowledge about the assessment process, people do not always realise what information is in their own best interests to disclose.

So, expressions of need are limited by the kinds of questions asked (determined by available resources and current spending priorities), but in a minority of instances this can be compounded by older peoples' lack of knowledge about the assessment process and their own attitudes to service provision.

10.2.5 Recording Practices

Clearly, there are some needs that never get expressed, either because of the nature of the assessment process, which asks only limited questions, or because of older peoples' own knowledge and attitudes. So what happens when older people *do* express needs that fall outside the current spending priorities of the agencies?

In the case of Northlands, the response is not to make a record of them. The reason for this, in the words of a Council Assessment Officer, is that,

> "If we recorded needs we could not meet, we would be pushing ourselves to a judicial review. We don't record it".

Similarly, a Planning Officer stated that,

> "If we assess somebody and write down what she needs, it becomes a legal duty for us to provide. Because of that, people will put down what they can offer, but not what they cannot offer".

The situation in Southtown, where the agencies work less closely together, is a little more complex. Different agencies appear to respond to expressions of needs that they cannot meet in different ways.

Assessors for the Health Trust are free to make notes on individual cases, but it is left to their own discretion whether they act on them. One Occupational Therapist who

conducted assessments said that, if she came up against what she felt was an obvious injustice, she would try to do something about it by putting the person in touch with other agencies. However, she said that there is only time to do this in the most pressing cases. She then pointed to a filing cabinet and said,

> "There are hundreds of stories about people in there".

The Social Services Department has a different attitude to recording needs that fall outside the scope of assessment criteria. A senior manager in Social Services stated:

> "We do not record the needs we do not meet because we are not legally allowed to not meet needs. There is a huge air of contention about that, but we will often meet them in a way that is minimal; i.e., based on cost and availability, though not necessarily reflecting Care in the Community".

A middle manager for Social Services, commenting on what happens when identified needs cannot be met, said

> "They just go. They are just left like that".

Clearly, the Community Care legislation creates a serious problem for Social Services personnel. And it appears that the Southtown Council takes a similar line when needs that cannot be met are discovered:

> "For those people whose needs are much higher than we can provide, normally the application is cancelled. We send them a letter which tells them that we are not going to proceed any further with that application, but if there is a change in the circumstances then we will" (Southtown Council Rehousing Officer).

One direct consequence of failing to record, and therefore not meeting, needs that fall outside the assessment criteria is that offers of rehousing made in response to needs that *are* officially identified can be turned down:

> "Our main problem is that we go along with the Warden to tell someone they have got an offer of accommodation. Then that is it as far as we are concerned, but this older person has got to arrange the removal, pack up her stuff, unpack it at the other end and there is a gap there. A lot of these people have not got anybody, and that is why they

> do not take up the offers. [A local voluntary organisation] used to assist, but now they have not got enough volunteers, and at the end of the day their volunteers are in the same age group" (Southtown Council Rehousing Officer).

Clearly, needs that go unrecorded (or needs that are recorded and then just filed) cannot be met, even if there is another agency that might be in a position to help.

One final point should be made in relation to this issue. When the first phase of the research was complete, and a feedback session was held with managers of the statutory agencies in the two regions, both groups said that they were overcoming the problem of failing to record needs that cannot be met. Their means of doing so was to informally "pre-screen" applicants for services: if, in an informal discussion with an older person, it becomes clear that they do not qualify for a service, or insist on something that cannot be provided for (refusing other help), then that person will not receive a formal assessment.

10.2.6 Implications for Planning

One serious and direct implication of these findings about problems of assessment is that unrecorded needs cannot be addressed. However, there is another important implication: any unrecorded needs that cannot currently be met then 'disappear' from the system, and no information about them can be communicated to planners.

What could be gained from information from assessments, if it were being collated, is a picture of shortfalls in the provision of services that are already a spending priority. While this would help short-term decision-making (facilitating adjustments to current

strategies), it would not aid wider planning. In this context, the term "wider planning" means local decisions on what spending priorities should be, and Central Government decision-making on the allocation of resources to regions and localities. To facilitate wider planning, *information about needs that cannot currently be met is required.*

At the local level, such information would allow planners to evaluate whether there are needs that are not currently being met that should be addressed in preference to some that are currently given priority. For Central Government, information about unmet needs would facilitate discussion on resourcing priorities. Politically, it might be quite acceptable for currently unmet needs to remain unmet while there are other spending priorities. Alternatively, politicians might feel that the unmet needs are so pressing that resources must be diverted to meet them. However, without information about what these needs are, discussion of the options is impossible.

10.2.7 Overview

If we take an overview of all these problems, we find that the various restrictions on older people expressing their needs, combined with the fact that needs that cannot currently be met are rarely recorded, result in a lack of serious scrutiny of the adequacy of the system. Although older people, assessors and their managers are well aware that needs go unmet, these needs are made invisible to planners. It therefore looks from the outside as if the system is working well, but insiders tell a different story.

The linchpin in this system is clearly the fact that the form assessment takes is determined by the availability of resources and current spending priorities. All of the

other problems flow from this. If it were possible to assess differently, so needs that cannot be met using current resources (and given current spending priorities) could be recorded, informed planning might be undertaken. Of course, one significant barrier to recording needs that cannot currently be met, at least for Social Services Departments, is current legislation. This is also important for other agencies because the practice of joint assessment means that the problem faced by Social Services must be taken into account by everybody: it would create an impossible situation for a Social Services Department if it were to ignore needs that cannot currently be met, and then found that (for example) health assessors picked them up anyway. If the legislation is going to remain an obstacle for the foreseeable future, then other sources of information about needs will have to be found. Possibilities (and some problems surrounding these) will be explored in the next section.

10.3 PROBLEMS OF INFORMATION PROVISION

This section looks in more detail at information provision, and identifies problems that might need to be addressed if planners are to be supplied with reliable information. Diagrams of key issues of concern for each geographical area are given in Figures 10.5 and 10.6.

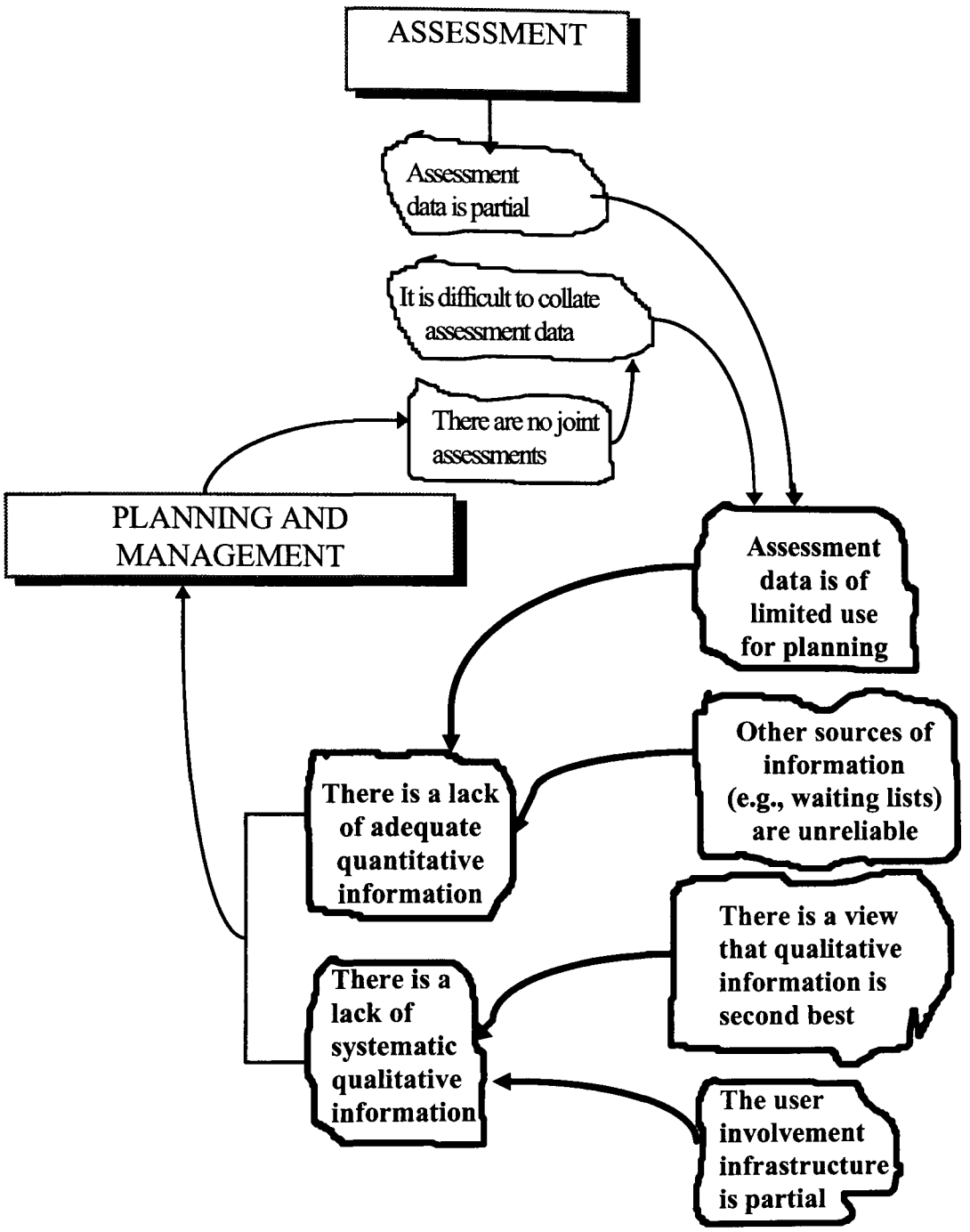

Figure 10.5 ***Problems of Information Provision in Southtown***

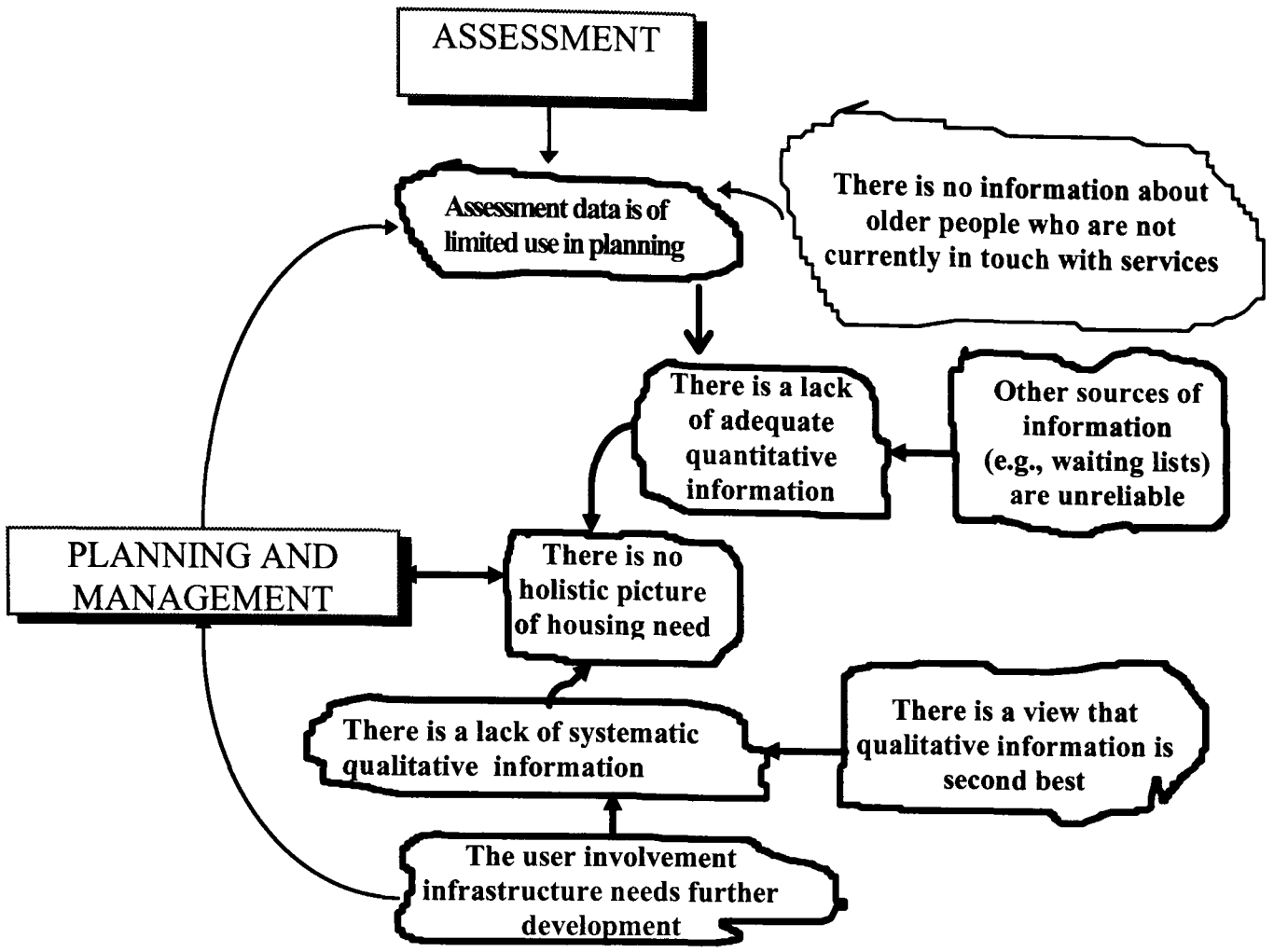

Figure 10.6 ***Problems of Information Provision in Northlands***

Over the coming pages the issue of providing appropriate information will be explored, starting with the unreliability of sources of quantitative information. The possibility of using collated assessment data to inform planning and management will then be examined, and significant problems that surround the use of such information will be identified. Finally, the idea that planners could supplement their unreliable and incomplete quantitative data with qualitative information will be looked at. This could be gathered from older people themselves. However, obstacles to the collection of information from older people currently exist, and these will also be explored.

10.3.1 The Unreliability of Quantitative Information

People in both the statutory and voluntary agencies are acutely aware of the difficulties they face in developing a reliable picture of the housing needs of older people. Senior managers in both geographical areas were asked to identify the sources of information they have available for planning in the area of housing. They mostly indicated sources of quantitative information (the census, council house waiting lists, the Health Atlas, etc.). However, when the same managers were asked what are the most *reliable* sources of information for understanding the housing needs of older people, completely different answers were provided—mostly reflecting the value of information from professional organisations and personal sources (e.g., briefings from the Joseph Rowntree Foundation, guidelines from the Housing Corporation, personal contacts with housing managers, home visitors, tenants and people who conduct assessments). The same question about the most reliable kinds of information was also asked of middle managers. They also listed personal sources (e.g., "people who are less emotive and less professionally involved", Housing Department medical advisors, carers and the Police). Similarly, it appears that Councillors use personal sources of information to inform policy decisions. One Councillor said,

> "We are local politicians. Therefore, if a constituent comes to you with a particular complaint you take it more seriously, and do what you can to try and resolve that. There are always policy issues, however, that arise from public concern and complaints; i.e., 'why haven't I been rehoused when I have an urgent medical condition?'".

These words are echoed by an analysis of selected policy decisions made by Councillors: by and large, decisions are influenced by piecemeal issues brought up by other politicians, issues surfacing from consultative forums, and national issues such as those addressed in the Carnagie Report. Special reports from officers, and issues

surfacing during Councillors' surgeries, also appeared to have a significant influence on policy.

It would appear that the sources of quantitative information currently available in the two geographical areas are generally perceived as unreliable, and that personal sources of information are actually more influential in decision making.

10.3.2 Further Problems with Information from Assessments

If existing sources of quantitative information are seen as unreliable, then the prospect of using collated information from assessments to support planning and management looks like an inviting prospect. However, in the last chapter it was pointed out that bias is introduced into information from assessments by the fact that needs that cannot currently be met are not recorded. It is also important to be clear about five further problems associated with using assessment data in this way.

First, assessments are usually conducted in response to crisis situations or expressions of immediate need. They are not conducted proactively to forecast future needs expressed by people not currently in contact with the various agencies, so there is no long-term perspective. A Councillor said that this makes the information from assessments of little value to planners: essentially, assessments ask questions that are too limited (focusing on immediate needs only), and do not access a wide enough population (only those in crisis who have made contact with an agency). It also has to be said that even some people who come into the category of "in crisis" do not get assessed, as indicated by a hospital Assessment Officer in Northlands:

> "Only individuals that are admitted to the older persons' ward get multi-disciplinary, holistic assessment. Those who go into surgical or orthopaedic wards do not have these assessments".

Second, doubts were expressed by a number of stakeholders in Northlands about the accuracy of the information collected during assessments:

> "How you ask something often determines what sort of answer you get, and I think that sometimes the information that we get isn't necessarily the best information we can have" (senior manager, Northlands Council).

> "When older people are applying for rehousing, they will quote and recite health reasons. We are rather concerned that the way older persons ask for information from their GPs is unstructured and variable. It is unclear what GPs are being asked for. There is no systematic process and clear criteria about when medical health reasons will affect someone's choice to be rehoused" (senior manager, Health Purchaser).

> "Sometimes they are not accurate. They can assess an older person as incontinent when it is only due to forgetfulness of directions" (Warden).

Third, there is no clear vision of the form that information from assessments should be presented in if it is to inform planning effectively. This is illustrated by the following quotation from a senior manager in Northlands Council:

> "With older people you get two sources of individual information: social and housing assessments, and health assessments of people over 75 years old, which look at medical aspects. From these assessments what one gets is a morass of information that does not tell anything. So one still has to fall back on individual perceptions".

This looks like a problem that could be addressed through the development of clear guidelines for collating the information. However, the first sentence in the above quotation ("...you get two sources of individual information") also reveals the fourth problem with information from assessments. Joint assessment is problematic. Indeed, in Southtown, with its two-tier local government structure, joint assessment is not

practised at all. Each agency has its own assessment protocol. A senior manager in Social Services said,

> "I do not think we are good enough at making sure that our assessments fit clearly with the Housing assessments, and that either of our agencies have clear enough triggers that make sure that our Care Management assessment spots housing need where we can involve colleagues from Housing, or that the Housing assessment spots social need so that they can involve colleagues from Social Services".

While it would be possible for each individual agency to collate its own information into a form that would be useful for planning, this would inevitably be partial—omitting details of older people in contact with other agencies. For the information to be of any real use, the agencies would have to pool their assessment resources, or at least ensure that they all use the same assessment form in the same way.

In Northlands, with its unitary Council, joint assessment practices have been agreed. However, there is still a perception that the information is of two types: social and housing on the one hand, and health on the other. The reason for this appears to be that joint assessment looks good on paper, but is problematic in practice. One significant difference between a health and social/housing assessment is that the former defines an older person as someone over 75, while the latter uses the age of 60 as the cut off point. This means that anybody referred for an assessment who is between the ages of 60 and 75 would not even qualify for a health assessment. The result, generally speaking, is that health professionals leave the social/housing aspect of the assessment blank, while social/housing workers do the same for the health assessment.

Unfortunately, the same problem also appears to exist *within* Northlands Council. In the Assessment Function of the Council there is the Social Work Team (consisting of

professionally qualified Social Workers) and the Housing Needs Team (consisting of former Housing Officers). More often that not assessments are conducted by these individual teams, and afterwards, when it becomes apparent that there is a need to involve someone from the other team, that team is notified. An officer from the second team will then conduct a second assessment. If there is a health aspect to the case as well, then the older person may be subject to *three* separate assessments. Clearly, these difficulties with joint assessment would need to be addressed before the agencies would be in a position to collate information from assessments into a form that could be useful for planning.

The fifth and final problem, highlighted in Northlands, is also one of inter- and intra-agency coordination. The different agencies (and Functions within the unitary Council) currently use different geographical boundaries to define their areas of responsibility:

> "We have not got coterminous boundaries, so to get information into a usable form, we have to put huge levels of effort into getting the information to make sense. Housing Letting's boundaries are not coterminous with ward boundaries, ward boundaries are not necessarily coterminous with areas of responsibility within the Care in the Community Function. So when we receive information annually, we have to disaggregate it on a numeration district level, and then build it up to whatever boundary we select" (senior manager, Northlands Council).

These five problems, combined with the seemingly intractable problem of an inability to record needs that cannot be met using available resources and given current spending priorities, makes information from assessments of limited value to planners.

10.3.3 Quantitative versus Qualitative Information

In the absence of adequate quantitative data, the agencies might need to look for different kinds of additional information. Indeed, the details presented earlier of what

senior and middle managers see as the most reliable sources of information indicate that they are already doing this, albeit on an ad hoc basis. One possibility is to supplement quantitative information by systematically accessing qualitative information from older people themselves. It is quite possible to design an information strategy that takes the form of a quality initiative, defining quality in terms of the 'stories' that people tell about the housing services they are in need of, or are receiving (Midgley, Kadiri and Vahl, 1996). Stories can be collected directly from older people in the community, categorised, and then sent to the appropriate agency (or department or function within that agency) that can make use of them. Some stories (about unmet needs, waiting times, etc.) will be useful to planners, some (about building designs, staff attitudes, etc.) will be helpful for managers, and others (about individual requirements, etc.) will be relevant to front line workers. However, if a systematic quality initiative were to be undertaken, three further problems would have to be addressed:

10.3.3.1 *Bypassing the Scientific Method*

The first problem is that there appears to be a strong emphasis by some staff in the statutory agencies on the value of one-off scientific studies yielding quantitative information. A middle manager in one council suggested that this might be a result of political influence: scientific studies have to be sanctioned by Councillors, so they attach much interest to their outcomes. If stories from older people are seen as 'merely' anecdotal, and therefore unscientific and ungeneralisable, then there will be a resistance to taking them seriously. However, there is a way around this problem. One can look for stories that continually recur, indicating a more wide-spread need that should be planned for. It can be argued that qualitative information *is* useful, but some officers in the

agencies might need to be convinced of this before a systematic scheme could become operational.

10.3.3.2 *Confidentiality*

A second problem that would need to be addressed comes about because of what is seen as an issue of confidentiality:

> "Because of confidentiality, I don't keep records of any specific issues that come up in our meetings with relatives. I do write a meeting report, but all it really says is how many people attended and what the agenda was" (worker with a carers' association).
>
> "I let my Housing Manager know what I have identified, and she advises me what to do. Then I record on case records, which are locked away in the filing cabinet in the office as they are very private and confidential—only to be seen by a Warden and a Housing Manager" (Warden).

It appears that Wardens often become aware of unaddressed needs of residents, but in the majority of cases do not communicate these beyond the home:

> "We record them and keep them in confidential files.... Once a month the Housing Manager comes to see what our tenants' needs are. It keeps his records right".
>
> "We record on care notes and put on file. They are not communicated to anyone".
>
> "I do not record them, I just cope with them. The only time you do not cope is when they go senile".
>
> "We do not record additional needs".

Clearly, front line staff such as Wardens are in regular contact with older people and would be a good source of stories. For them to provide the information, however, would require a significant change in procedures. Also, if information is to be passed between agencies, it might also require workers to gain permission from older people and their carers before this is done.

10.3.3.3 *Consultation with Older People*

The third obstacle to building an information strategy around qualitative information from older people themselves is the current lack of a comprehensive 'infrastructure' of user involvement. To provide information that is of value to planners, two kinds of user involvement are necessary: the usual kind, involving current service users, and another kind—drawing upon the views of *potential* users (via residents' associations, community centres, retirement groups, etc.). As a senior manager in Northlands Council said,

> "We need to begin to look at trends as well as finding the means by which to engage potential users of services for the future. I think we are quite good at consulting with people who use our services, but that's quite a limited group. They use our services, so they are probably appropriate to them. But there are more people out there who don't use our services because they are not appropriate. How do you reach those people? How do you find out what their needs and aspirations are? I think that is the difficulty".

Forums for user involvement, which are up and running in both areas, are excellent focal points for gathering information, but it appears that they are mainly used to consult on decisions that have to be made, or simply to disseminate information. One example communicated to the researchers was Northlands Council's use of a meeting of a user involvement forum for older people to tell them about the need for a council housing rent increase. According to the person relating the story, there was no consultation or even another option presented. Similarly, in Southtown, an officer of the Council explicitly stated that

> "We use these groups specifically if a requirement is there, like when we wanted to introduce a pets policy. The tenants cannot have any decision-making power, and that is under the law".

When it comes to user involvement in the management of residential homes, there appears to be a mixed picture. The following representative comments from service users were obtained:

> "We do not have a committee, but we have residents' meetings where we discuss how to improve life".
>
> "If we wanted to we could contribute ideas on the running of the residence, but we do not want to".
>
> "As residents, we do not have an organised meeting apart from the odd chance to meet in the lounge".
>
> "It is better not to raise any enquiries or suggestions as they will call you an agitator, and it's too cold out there. The best way, perhaps, is to go through a Councillor".

Wardens also painted a mixed picture of user involvement. Some demonstrated a clear commitment to it, while others seemed sceptical about its usefulness, or even hostile towards it:

> "We have a residents' committee. The Warden or another member of staff sits at the meeting. The committee members feed back to the other residents what has been going on".
>
> "There was a committee for residents of which I was a member. Residents kept on fighting and being jealous of each other, so I proposed to them that I run the services on their behalf and they agreed. Everything runs properly now".
>
> "They moan, but that is all. It would be awkward to give residents the facility to contribute their views to the running of a residential home as they would want different things. They simply access what we give them".
>
> "If I did involve them on issues to do with the running of this place, they would take over my job in two minutes".

It appears that there are useful user forums in at least some residential homes which could be accessed for stories about services and peoples' need for them. However, this is by no means universally the case, and we actually encountered several residents in both

areas who refused to be interviewed for fear of reprisals from staff. A senior official of a carers' association also said that

> "....very often relatives are afraid of raising issues with the homes because they think it will be taken out on their relative".

Further work to build user involvement infrastructures would probably be necessary before a quality initiative, such as the one mentioned here, could be launched.

10.3.4 Overview

It appears that quantitative sources of information currently available to planners are not particularly reliable. Unfortunately, at the present time, use of assessment data does not offer any significant hope of improvement. This is partly because of the inability to record needs that cannot currently be met (as explained in the previous chapter), but also because (in the regions involved in this research) assessments are not conducted proactively; there are questions about their accuracy; there is no clear vision of the form that information from assessments should be presented in; the practices of joint assessment are problematic; and there are problems of data comparability because of differences in the geographical boundaries used by the different agencies.

There are three possible ways forward here. The first is to go down the route of further one-off research projects, perhaps in the form of house to house surveys. However, these are expensive. Nevertheless, it may prove to be a worthwhile investment if agencies want to commission them jointly to look at wider issues than housing for older people alone.

A second way forward is to reform joint assessment procedures and collate the information for planners. This would have to be done in the knowledge that the resulting information would only identify the needs of people currently in touch with the principle agencies. However, such a strategy would only really be useful as a stand-alone exercise if the problem of recording needs that cannot currently be met (explained in section 10.2) could be dealt with first. If this could not be addressed, then collating assessment data would only have limited value. It would allow planners to adjust the distribution of resources given current spending priorities, but it would not help them question what the spending priorities should be in the first place.

The third possible way forward is to develop an information strategy based on a combination of quantitative and qualitative information. The latter could take the form of a quality initiative, with quality being defined in terms of the stories people tell about their lives and their contacts with services. The material that would be generated would be equally useful to planners and front line workers. The advantage of this would be that planners would hear about the needs of older people in their own terms. Nevertheless, if agencies wish to set up this kind of quality initiative (with or without a complementary quantitative approach), then there are several problems that should be addressed. In particular, distrust of 'non-scientific' approaches and (in some cases) an ad hoc attitude to user involvement would have to be overcome, and the working practices of front line employees might need to be modified to encourage the recording and transmission of relevant information.

The implications of these problems of information provision for planning and management are clear: there is currently no way to develop a reliable, holistic picture of

the housing needs of older people. In the next section, problems of planning and management will be looked at more closely.

10.4 PROBLEMS OF PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT

The difficulties of planning and management are problems in their own right, but also frustrate or disrupt joint assessment, thus hindering the collection of data from the agencies into a form that would be useful for planning. Southtown and Northlands will be discussed separately in this chapter, as the problems arising in these locations were significantly different.

10.4.1 Southtown

The problems of planning and management identified by stakeholders in Southtown are shown in Figure 10.7.

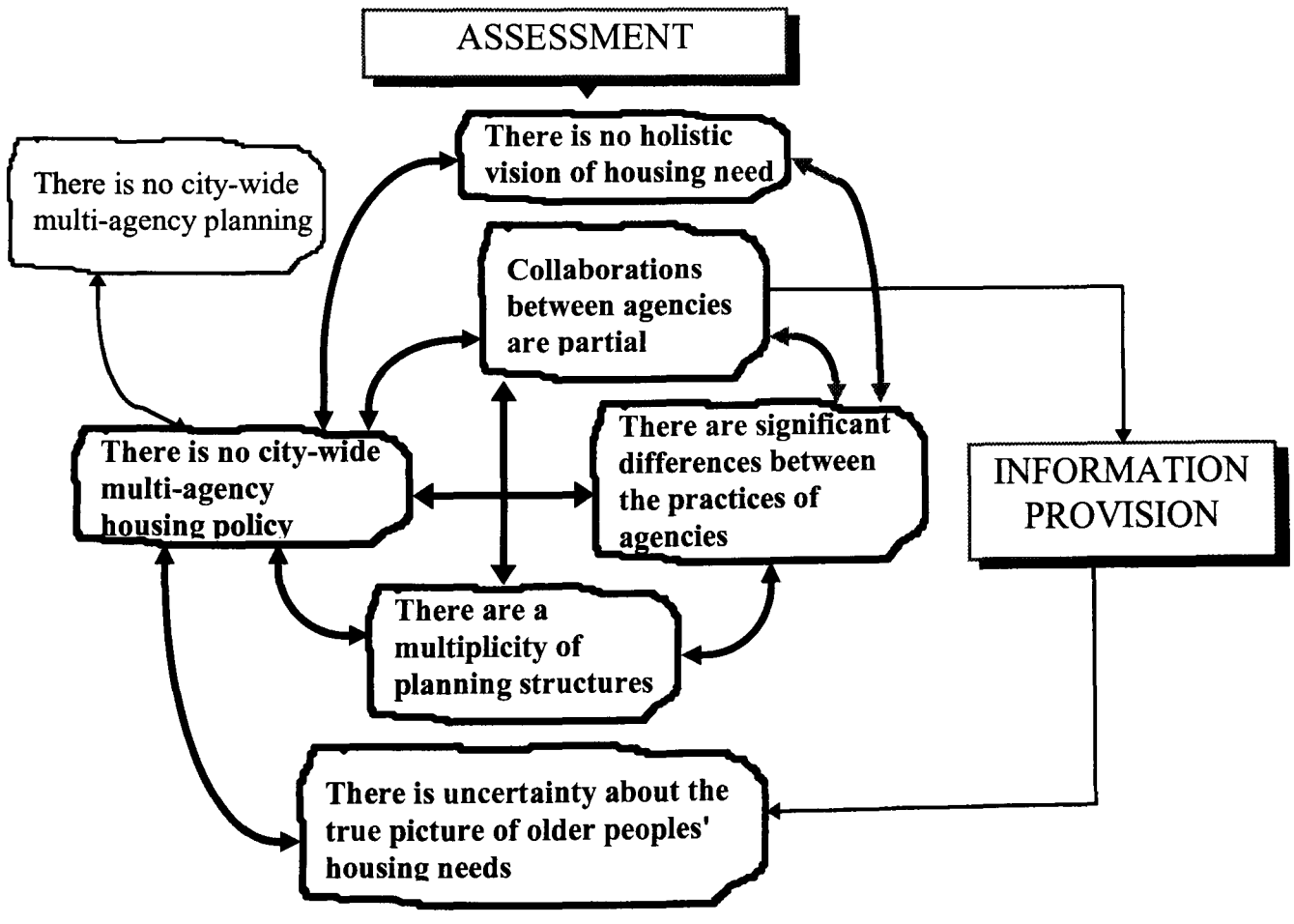

Figure 10.7 ***Problems of Planning and Management in Southtown***

In Figure 10.7, four intimately related problems cluster together: there are a confusing multiplicity of planning structures; collaborations between agencies are partial; there is no city-wide, multi-agency housing policy; and there are significant differences between the practices of agencies that make cooperation difficult. These problems are further complicated by the lack of a holistic picture of housing need, and the inadequacy of information provision to create this. Some of these difficulties appear to stem from requirements laid out in current legislation, so this will be the initial focus.

10.4.1.1 *Problems with Current Legislation*

For the statutory sector, the Community Care legislation splits the function of service purchasing from service provision. Thus, purchasing agencies are responsible for planning, and on the basis of their plans they buy the required services from other agencies. Some agencies are further down the road of institutionalising this split than others. For example, the Health Service is already fully split, while the Social Services Department is still undergoing change. The fact that Social Services is still in transition, and yet it has statutory responsibility for acting as the lead agency in planning, is seen as problematic by some. In the words of a Southtown Council Housing Officer,

> "I think there is a danger if you have an organisation that fronts up a process of identifying services that it is a provider of, using money other than its own".

More worryingly, senior managers in the Housing Department believe that the changes will limit the motivation to plan long-term. This is because, if purchasers can agree to buy a housing service from Southtown Council one year, then cancel the agreement a couple of years later, the agency will be too insecure to make any long-term

commitments. Justification for this fear can be found in the words of an officer from Social Services,

> "If the Housing Department cannot give us what we want, then we will go somewhere else for it. The waiting time for sheltered housing, for instance, is quite long, and there have been various initiatives to try and reduce that, but it hasn't worked".

This is largely a problem for the future, but there already appears to be another problem right now. Because there are overlaps between the domains of Health, Social Services and Housing, the overlapping areas inevitably become contentious. This is evidenced in the following quotation:

> "The role of Health is shifting. The Health Trust is on the one hand being very clear about what is its core business in relation to health care, but on the other hand it is also considering the responsibility of bidding to provide services which could actually have a social care component" (senior manager, Social Services).

Service providers like the Health Trust are therefore seen as predatory by some. Purchasers, on the other hand, want to steer clear of taking responsibility for areas of overlap. The fact that all the purchasing agencies are subject to resource limitations means that they have an incentive to ensure that overlapping areas are the responsibility of another agency. As a senior manager in Social Services put it,

> "It's about being able to bring your budgets in on line and purchase sensibly, or not have to purchase at all if someone will pick up the bill for you, or the problem will go away".

Any purchasing agency which attempts to plan holistically, and thereby takes full responsibility for the areas of overlap, will inevitably overspend. Over the coming pages the problems of multi-agency coordination will be described in more detail, along with the problems of holistic planning they give rise to.

10.4.1.2 *Multi-Agency Collaboration*

Multi-agency collaboration at the level of planning can best be described as patchy. Joint funded initiatives appear to be largely unproblematic, and there are certainly good relationships amongst individual professionals, but this local collaboration does not extend to the design of joint strategy. As an Area Housing Manager from Southtown Council said,

> "What is manifest is collaboration on a more day to day basis between individual professionals from different agencies, rather than collaboration between agencies".

Various problems of participation in planning were discussed by the different stakeholders. For example, several people noted that the Health Purchaser is under-represented at the locality levels within the district planning structure, so their views are not routinely fed into district Community Care plans:

> "I think that has been one of the failings of locality planning here. Health, for a variety of internal reasons, has decided that it is not something they want to put a lot of time into. Therefore they have not been represented adequately at the planning process, and it may be because of that, a lot of the difficulties that are being highlighted do lie with Health" (member of a Locality Planning Group).

A senior manager of a Health Care Trust indicated why her organisation no longer participated as actively in multi-agency planning as they used to:

> "We used to send a representative to one of the forums in the city for elderly people, but we found that we were not actually contributing enough or getting enough for the amount of time we were investing. So we said 'yes, please continue to send notes and we will reappraise it'. It is one of the things that was kind of icing on the ginger bread as opposed to something essential".

Relationships between purchasers and providers are also of concern:

> "I can see in future that purchasers might be very uncomfortable to be with their providers in the planning forums, as this might tie them to that particular provider, and also they might end up giving too much information to one provider" (senior manager, Health Trust).

Another issue was raised by managers in both the Housing Department and Social Services:

> "One of the biggest criticisms I think the Housing Department has of Social Services, quite rightly, is that we have seen joint commissioning just between Health and Social Services, and not seen Housing as our equal partner. And that is the problem, because then you have got an imbalance, and you get Health and Social Services who think they have got it cracked" (senior manager, Social Services).

This problem was also seen by some as related to legislation, in that Social Services has been given the responsibility of being the lead agency:

> "When [community care] is fully implemented, Health and Council Housing are going to shrink, and that will only leave Social Services as the main lead agency" (middle manager, Housing Department).

So far, this discussion of the difficulties of multi-agency planning has focused on Health, Social Services and Housing. However, there are actually numerous voluntary and private organisations in Southtown with a stake in planning a housing strategy for older people. When it comes to involving these, there are still greater problems. One senior manager of a voluntary organisation felt that, in his view, planning did not actually take place at the official planning forums (which involve organisations from outside the statutory sector): he believed that senior managers in the statutory sector plan between meetings and then use the meetings to present their ideas and have them ratified. Nevertheless, he also acknowledged that effective participation in planning is often difficult for voluntary organisations because their resources are so stretched.

10.4.1.3 *The Multiplicity of Planning Structures*

This picture of patchy collaboration at the level of planning is further complicated by the confusing multiplicity of planning structures that exist in Southtown. As a researcher

coming in from outside, it was quite difficult to identify, and determine the relationships between, all the different groups, boards and committees with a role in the planning process. The proliferation of planning bodies might not be a problem if everybody participating in them understood their place, but this is clearly not so. As an officer of a voluntary organisation concerned with housing for older people told us,

> "We have Locality Planning Groups, which are client consultation networks, then the Joint Commissioning Boards, which are lead planning forums between Health and Social Services. The providers, users and carers are not sure which planning mechanism is the main one, particularly when priorities fixed by Locality Planning Groups have in some cases been totally ignored in preference to something which was never identified by Locality Planning Groups".

A senior manager of a Health Trust also talked about her frustration with planning at County level. She pointed out that the form this planning took was designed to bring users and carers on board, but increasingly decisions were being fed back for middle managers to take. In her view, the planning structures were simply not capable of dealing with the complexity of the issues facing people.

10.4.1.4 *Housing Policy and Activities*

Given this picture of a confusing multiplicity of planning structures and patchy multi-agency collaboration, it is unsurprising that there is no city-wide housing policy that all the agencies are committed to. A senior manager from Social Services claimed that this is partly a result of legislation:

> "The legislation does not stay the same for all agencies. We are working to different pieces of legislation. It is not sort of holistic social, housing and health care".

Furthermore, the two-tier system of local government appears to make developing and implementing a common multi-agency policy difficult. There are two sets of politicians, at County and City levels, with Social Services responsible to the former and the Housing Department to the latter. There also appears to be some differences in thinking between local and district offices of the Social Services Department. As a senior manager in a Housing Association told us,

> "The problem we have at the moment is that Southtown (Social Services) is consistently having to go to (County) for planning issues".

On the other hand, a senior manager in the Housing Department observed that

> "With Social Services we have an overarching strategy that comes out of (County Headquarters), but in terms of a local agreement about a process, they are not terribly interested".

Given the lack of a general plan for older peoples' housing that all the agencies are committed to, it is unsurprising that the practices of these agencies vary too. Health and Social Services can provide aids, adaptations and personnel to keep people in their own homes—but only if this is the least expensive option. In contrast, while the principle of care in the community suggests that maintaining people in their own homes is important, provision of council housing starts with buildings, not people: it looks for the most suitable people for housing units when they become vacant. Also, the various agencies use the same language to define different things. For instance, Social Services defines an older person as someone aged 60 or over, while the Health Purchaser defines an older person as over 75. Similarly, for the Housing Department, a "locality" is a group of wards, but for the Health Purchaser localities are based on GP practice areas, and Social Services have a different definition of localities again.

10.4.1.5 *Understanding Housing Need*

A further obstacle to collaborating on the production of a joint strategy that all the agencies can commit themselves to is the lack of a holistic picture of housing need. As noted in the previous chapter, there are no sources of quantitative information about housing need that are fully reliable. Unfortunately, this problem and the problem of patchy multi-agency collaboration are mutually reinforcing. As long as the agencies do not have a joint assessment practice (and are unable to record needs that cannot currently be met), the available data remains partial. However, as long as only partial data is available, no agreed factual basis exists for the construction of an overarching, multi-agency plan.

10.4.2 Overview for Southtown

For Southtown, a picture has been painted of patchy multi-agency collaboration, a confusing multiplicity of planning structures, the absence of a city-wide, multi-agency housing plan, and significant differences between the practices of the various agencies involved in housing for older people. All these problems are interrelated. In addition, the provision of information is unreliable, so there is no holistic understanding of housing need upon which multi-agency plans could be based. The problems of multi-agency collaboration and inadequate information provision are mutually reinforcing, making it important that the two areas are addressed together.

10.4.3 Northlands

The problems of planning and management for Northlands are shown in Figure 10.8.

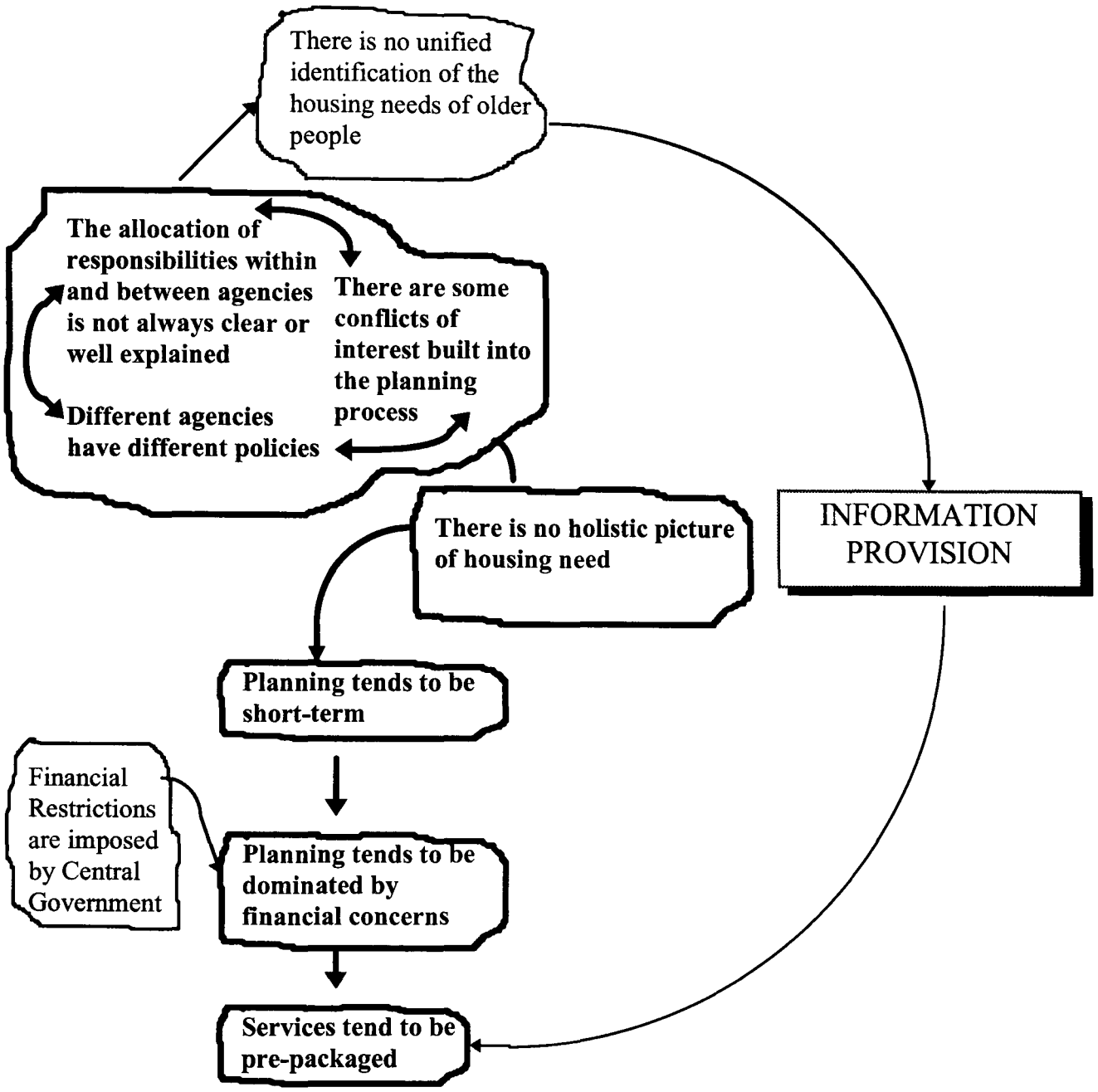

Figure 10.8 ***Problems of Planning and Management in Northlands***

In Figure 10.8 there is a cluster of three intimately related problems: the allocation of responsibilities within and between agencies is not always clear or well explained; there are policy differences between the agencies; and some of the service providing agencies

are said to have a conflict of interest which limits the potential for their participation in collective planning. These issues make the business of developing a holistic picture of housing need more problematic than they might otherwise be, as it is the problems of inter-agency coordination that make collating information so difficult (as explained in section 10.4). The effect of the lack of a holistic picture of housing need (together with financial constraints imposed by Central Government) is that planning is mostly restricted to short-term decision making dominated by financial considerations. As a result, services tend to be pre-packaged. A more detailed consideration of these issues will begin with a look at the three interrelated problems of coordination within and between agencies.

10.4.3.1 *Problems of Coordination*

The first problem of coordination is a general feeling that there is a lack of clarity about exactly what responsibilities the Health Service and Council (and the Functions within the Council) have with respect to housing for older people. Where clarity does exist, people are unsure what the rationale is for the allocation of responsibilities. A senior manager in the Health Purchaser said,

> "I think housing is one of those areas where you can see peoples' housing conditions impact on their health, and improvement in their housing conditions will improve their health. I think what is less clear is what the role of the Health (Purchaser) is in dealing with that issue".

A number of managers working in Northlands Council suggested that it is difficult to understand the rationale behind the allocation of certain responsibilities to certain Functions. An example is sheltered housing. The running and administration of sheltered housing is the responsibility of the Care in the Community Function, while its

allocation is the responsibility of the Housing Function. A middle manager claimed that the effect of the separation of these two areas of responsibility is that older people whose needs change while they are in council care have to go back onto a (Housing Function) waiting list before being provided with another service. Several managers said that it would help matters if both the Assessment and the Care in the Community Functions could have an improved input into the decisions made by the Housing Function.

Coordination between agencies is also hampered by policy differences, several of which were highlighted during interviews. For example, Northlands Council aims to house all older people, while the housing associations are more selective. Housing associations are now putting more emphasis on owner occupation and providing for people with special needs. The Council also has a policy of creating integrated living spaces so that older people and others with special needs are not 'ghettoised', but the Housing Corporation has chosen not to fund this kind of development. These policy differences were accounted for in two different ways:

> "Due to the corporate planning structure, all major decisions in the Council are taken by Council members. The Health [Purchaser] is run by non-elected members appointed mostly by Central Government, while the Housing Corporation is appointed by the Government and reflects a different perspective. So, yes, we have quite different policies. Almost diametrically opposed sometimes" (middle manager, Northlands Council).

> "We look at the same problem from different angles. We have a statutory responsibility, for example, and some of the agencies are only pressure groups who are looking after a certain small part of our potential customers. For example, the elderly agencies who only push for better accommodation" (senior manager, Northlands Council).

The third problem that hampers inter-agency coordination is perceived conflicts of interest stemming from the purchaser-provider split. When a service provider

participates in planning, it may come up against a conflict of interest: it is in a position to steer plans in a direction that is favourable to itself, and away from directions that would be favourable to its competitors. A manager who participates in a local planning forum was interviewed, and he made it clear that conflicts of interest have already been identified, and they make collective decision making on certain issues very difficult.

The major consequence of these problems of within and between agency coordination is that they make it difficult to build a holistic, quantitative picture of housing need. As explained in section three, the collation of information across the agencies is hampered by a lack of agreement on common definitions and geographical boundaries. The problems of coordination outlined above do not, in principle, *prevent* an agreement on definitions and boundaries being reached, but they create an atmosphere in which trust and cooperation are not always sought and expected.

10.4.3.2 *Short-Term Planning*

The lack of a holistic picture of the housing needs of older people certainly affects planning. Planning tends to be short-term and dominated by financial considerations. Indeed, almost all the managers we spoke to said that finance is the major ruling force in decision making. Representative comments include the following:

> "It is not possible to plan ahead. At the moment we are only scratching the surface to keep the service going, but not planning for the future" (Councillor, Northlands Council).
>
> "The problem is,.... how do we start shifting the spending we are doing now into getting where we want to be in five years time?" (senior manager, Northlands Council).
>
> "What we do not do, in a sense, is sit down and say, right, we are going to do an assessment of the elderly; we are going to say, what are

> the old peoples' needs and how do we meet them. For the bulk of the services, by and large, what happens is, in contract negotiations we have with the Health Trust each year, we will identify those areas we want to specifically change, and the rest we will argue about exactly how much we buy and what it costs us. Ours is a 300 million Pound business. We do not sit down each year and systematically say what we are going to purchase with our 300 million Pounds. By and large, we buy what we bought last year" (senior manager, Health Purchaser).

Of course, the primacy given to finance has other causes besides the absence of a clear vision of housing need: it also stems from the Government's policy of restricting the income of local authorities, and seeking 'efficiency savings' in the Health Service. However, the lack of a holistic picture of housing need exacerbates the financial problem: without such a picture it is very difficult to develop longer-term plans for the use of the resources that *are* available. In addition, the invisibility of the needs of older people limits the possibility of reviewing spending priorities at national level. This is because there is no reliable, hard evidence for people to debate (refer back to sections 10.3 and 10.4 for further details).

10.4.3.3 *Pre-Packaged Services*

The result of the dominance of financial concerns is that services tend to be pre-packaged. That is, a service is offered, and older people have to decide whether they take it or leave it. To make service provision more flexible, so that older people have more options concerning what they receive, would inevitably take some forward planning and the allocation of resources to ensure that service managers have the time and space to engage in this planning. Interviews with service users make it clear that lack of flexibility is one of the main problems they perceive with service delivery. These three comments are typical of the kind of complaints people made:

> "It is unfair that we are given no choice in certain improvements, such as central heating, but as a result of such enforced upgrading we have to pay higher rents".
>
> "The decorating allowance scheme is of limited use without the physical help to decorate".
>
> "The Home Care service does not provide a spring cleaning service and does not move heavy furniture".

The idea of basing an information strategy on a quality initiative focusing on the stories of older people (as discussed in 10.4) would bring these kinds of issue to the fore.

10.4.4 Overview for Northlands

For Northlands, a picture has been painted of coordination difficulties within and between agencies. In addition, the provision of information is unreliable and as a result there is no holistic understanding of housing need to inform planning. The effect of this, together with financial constraints imposed by Central Government, is that planning is mostly restricted to short-term decision making dominated by financial considerations. As a result, services tend to be pre-packaged.

10.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter has presented the outcomes of the first phase of the research project. Problems with assessment, information provision and planning and management were identified and these have been found to interact forming a holistic whole.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE SECOND PHASE

11.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter follows on from the previous chapter giving a narrative account of the second phase of the research, the planning phase.

The report produced on the basis of the findings in phase one was circulated and discussed by members of the steering committee. It was endorsed and a decision made for the research to proceed into its second phase where ways of addressing the issues surfaced would be worked out. The decision was that I should go ahead and conduct the planning workshops with each local authority. In case the workshops did not come off, for whatever reason, a contingency plan was put forward. This involved organising a planning workshop with a group of professionals drawn from a cross section of housing services for older people. This, however, would only lead to an "ideal" solution (in Ackoff's, 1981, sense), not linked to any one authority.

Subsequent to this meeting of the steering committee, the report was refined and sent to the two lead agencies in Southtown and the coordinating office in Northlands. At this point in time the research project experienced a period of inactivity and minor setbacks. In Southtown the first problem was that a senior officer in the Housing Department who was responsible for monitoring the progress of the research and identifying people to coordinate it within the council (as well as liasing with other statutory agencies) fell ill.

Secondly, the increased pressures of annual budgets and meetings on the formation of a unitary local authority meant that the project was all of a sudden given a low priority. Third, despite the fact that we had made it clear that the report was problem focused and gave reasons for adopting this approach, the Social Services representatives were not comfortable with this stance and wanted assurances that the report would not be reproduced in that form. We gave these assurances, and also said that, in the verbal presentation of the report, mention would be made of the positive aspects of service planning and delivery that were observed during the research.

In Northlands, the coordinator of the research went on maternity leave shortly before the production of the report. When a copy of the report was sent to the officer who was standing in for her, he neither acknowledged receipt nor reproduced it for circulation to departments within the council. Eventually he acknowledged receipt of the report after repeated attempts to make contact, but he did not set up a meeting to discuss the findings and plan the way forward. Six weeks later, two senior officers from the council enquired from me about the status of the project. I told them a copy of the report had been sent. They went to the officer concerned and demanded to read the report, after which they reported to me that they found it very informative and were anxious for a workshop to map out the way forward with respect to the issues uncovered by the study. Convening such a workshop however, was outside their official areas of responsibility.

11.2 THE ONSET OF THE SECOND PHASE

11.2.1 Northlands

Three months later, Northlands contacted us again. The original coordinator had finally returned from leave. She could not find a copy of the report we had sent, so she asked for a fresh one. Later, a request was made for a formal presentation. At this point we indicated that we could not guarantee to undertake the second phase in Northlands as they had left it so late, and the research was now running behind time. The aim of the presentation would therefore be to assess if there was something small and definable that could be undertaken by us on a voluntary basis after this research project had been completed in Southtown.

The methods employed up to and including the presentation workshops are summarised in Figure 11.1.

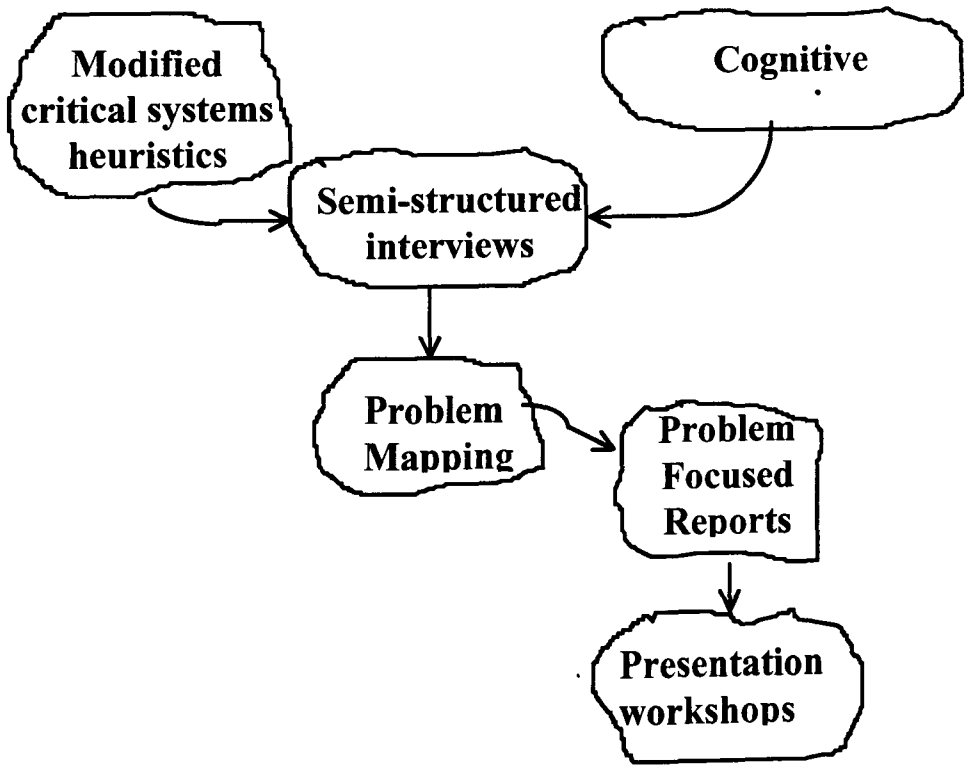

Figure 11.1 ***Research Methods used in the First Phase.***

11.2.1.1 *The Presentation Workshop*

The workshop was attended by heads of the various council departments or their representatives; senior staff of the Corporate Policy Department; and the coordinator of the research within the Council.

11.2.1.2 *Activities of the Workshop*

1. *Presentation of Report*

The participants who had already read the report were given a brief summary of it by my supervisor. The remit; boundaries of the study; the approach taken; and the results, were presented using transparencies on an overhead projector. After the presentation, discussions ensued in which the council officials stated that they had been aware of some of the issues raised for some time, only that they did not know how to go about addressing them.

2. *Brainstorming*

Having achieved a common understanding of the problem issues and their structure I decided to generate priority problem areas by means of brainstorming. This is a method of idea generation in which participants to a forum are encouraged to contribute ideas freely on the basis of their perception of the problem context. It is used to tease out issues or problems in a spontaneous manner. Flood (1995a) has given the following as principles of brainstorming:

i. Every idea potentially is a good idea.

ii. Every person potentially is a good idea generator.

iii. Every participant must contribute ideas.

iv. The best ideas are achieved by encouraging group talking and facilitating speech and debate.

(Flood, 1995a)

Brainstorming further enhances creativity and opens up the boundaries wider. Brainstorming was used to generate ideas for subject areas for future intervention. After some protracted debate, through a process of convergence the large number of suggestions were condensed into the following priority areas:

1. Joint registration of housing applications with other agencies.

2. Accessing those who are not assessed; getting a picture of their views.

3. Flexibility/Quality of housing services provision.

4. Monitoring/Feedback.

Eventually participants to the workshop decided to focus on the issue of joint registration of housing applications with other agencies. They observed that this had an impact on various other aspects of provision of housing for older persons.

3. ***Discussing Intervention Methods***

After discussion and further elaboration of the problem of joint registration, I and my supervisor openly consulted and suggested that soft systems methodology (SSM) could be used to structure planning workshops. Other methods might also be used as and when necessary. Some of the officials present had already heard about the methodology, but never had the opportunity to apply it. They therefore felt comfortable with our suggestion. At the time of writing, we have not yet followed up this initiative with Northlands. For the purpose of this thesis, then, my involvement with Northlands ends at this point.

11.2.2 Southtown

Two months behind schedule, Southtown council wrote to say that they were setting up a workshop for us to present the findings of the first phase and discuss how best to address the issues. However, the lead agencies, Housing and Social Services, stated that they wanted to be the only agencies to participate in the workshop. This was because they felt that the report covered some sensitive issues with respect to service provision and inter-agency relationships. This raised an ethical dilemma, for it meant that there was a likelihood of other agencies, and indeed older people themselves, having their concerns marginalised. To me this was a real problem because, through the interviews

conducted in the first phase, I had already detected resistance on the part of some professionals to hearing users' views.

In consultation with my supervisor, we decided to design a strategy which would hopefully ensure that the concerns of other stakeholders were not marginalised. We incorporated a third member into the project, and allocated different roles to each one of us. My supervisor was to present the report (which, because of its problem focus, contained information that we anticipated would be seen as controversial). He was also to facilitate the discussion on ways forward. The new member of the research team was to concentrate on group dynamics, paying particular attention to emotional aspects in order to help manage conflicts. I myself was to act as an advocate for the other stakeholders who were not going to be represented at the workshop. This was also to be complemented by a deliberate appeal to participants to place themselves in the shoes of other stakeholders and take their concerns on board. Despite the narrow boundaries of involvement in the workshops, we felt that we could ensure that wider concerns were not marginalised.

11.2.2.1 *Presentation Workshop*

The workshop was attended by functional heads of the council's Department of Housing and also the Social Services Department. Officers with specific functions within policy formulation, Heads of Areas/Sections, and those charged with responsibility for working out the unitary council structure were also present.

11.2.2.2 *Activities of the Workshop*

1. ***Presentation and Discussion of the Report***

All the participants had read the report before coming to the workshop. In the workshop each participant was given a summary of the findings in the form of the problem maps. Using an overhead projector, my supervisor briefly introduced the study, its origin, its remit, its boundaries and how the information was collected. He then went ahead to present the report, section by section. After the presentation, a discussion followed in which the participants raised a number of comments, the major ones being as follows:

- Representatives of the lead agencies were pleased that the preamble to the presentation of the report covered some success stories.

- The representatives yearned for some statistics in the report, some quantitative analysis. They would have, by tradition, found these more convincing.

- A few of the participants, especially those opposed to the proposed unitary structure of the council, were suspicious about the direction of the research and the use to which the findings would be put.

- A consensus was secured that planning for the second phase should go ahead.

2. ***Planning the Second Phase***

Looking forward to the second phase, we asked the workshop participants to identify the key themes that it should address. Of course, these had already been highlighted to an extent in the outputs of the first phase, but we wanted to give participants an opportunity to suggest possible new ideas and/or translate the outputs of the first phase into their own words (to facilitate ownership). Six key themes were identified:

- Identification of long-term trends in population needs.

- Establishing a mechanism for identifying and dealing with unmet needs. Getting the whole picture.

- Problems of multi agency collaboration.

- Problems with formal and informal information provision. The need to get the "right information" out to people.

- How "Joe Public" can best access services, in the face of the fragmentation of activities, lack of involvement with Health, and the trend towards further privatisation of housing.

- Working out priorities of older people versus others.

3. ***Discussing Methods***

Reflecting back on the problem maps, it was decided that since the problems faced in the housing system for older people were highly interactive, it would not be useful to design a solution to one problem without considering the effects of all the others. The second phase should therefore take an overview of how the situation could be improved. At this moment we negotiated a key principle upon which all future intervention activity would be founded: any recommendations for improvement that were to be generated should be based on a vision of the ideal service produced by stakeholders, including older people and their carers.

After further facilitated discussion of the problems facing housing services for older people, and possible ways of addressing them in the second phase of the project, our research team of three asked for ten minutes in which to evolve a concrete proposal for intervention methods that could be used. This was granted. An atmosphere of mutual trust had by now developed, and to sustain it we held discussions in front of the other participants. Our sudden lapse into system jargon produced laughter all round! We then provided an impromptu thirty minutes presentation of our proposed approaches and methods in plain English. This was followed by open discussions, re-interpreting the proposal with respect to the selected issues. This approach was aimed at preventing, as far as possible, the marginalisation of participants in the process of selecting and designing methods for addressing the issues. This particular point will be picked up again in chapter thirteen.

11.2.2.3 *Outcomes of the Workshop*

In principle, it was agreed that three methods: Critical Systems Heuristics (CSH) (Ulrich, 1983), Interactive Planning (IP) (Ackoff, 1981) and the Viable System Model (VSM) (Beer, 1979), would form the backbone of the approach for evolving solutions to the priority problem areas.

Solutions would be sought through five one-day workshops with different stakeholder groups as follows:

- Users and Carers
- Managers in Housing, Social services, Environmental Health, the Health Commission, the Health Trust and selected housing associations.
- Front line professionals, including Wardens, Occupational Therapists, Care Managers and Assessment Officers.
- Voluntary Organisations
- Private Companies

Each workshop would generate a list of "desired properties" of the ideal service system, plus two design outlines of the ideal service. The first outline design would allow stakeholders to disregard current legislation in order to produce a vision of a genuinely ideal service. The second workshop would be generated taking the constraints of current legislation into account.

Once outputs from the workshops had been produced, they would be brought together for consideration by a multi-agency group made up of representatives of all five of the

earlier groups. A one-day workshop would then be held in which key differences between the outputs of the earlier groups would be identified. Discussion of these, possibly using Strategic Assumption Surfacing and Testing (Mason and Mitroff, 1981), was expected to lead to an agreed shared vision of the ideal older people's housing service.

Any unresolved disagreements would be carried forward into a final stage for consideration by a multi-agency group of managers which was to undertake the design of improvements in organisational structure and communications, using the VSM.

11.3 THE PLANNING WORKSHOPS

The planning workshops were only held in Southtown. Due to the programme running behind schedule and problems of logistics, it was later agreed between the researchers, the Housing Department and the Social Services Department that the number of separate stakeholder workshops be reduced from five to three. The three groups were to be: (i) service users; (ii) carers and campaigners; (iii) managers and front-line professionals.

To stimulate discussion in the three stakeholder groups about the ideal service system, I prepared a list of questions in advance. These were based on Ulrich's (1983) methodology of Critical Systems Heuristics, and were specifically designed to explore the boundaries of proposals for improvement. However, the language in which Ulrich's original questions are formulated does not make them easily comprehensible. The set of questions was therefore modified to improve their accessibility (following Cohen and Midgley, 1994). I also added some questions of my own (see Appendix 12). The

purpose of this exercise was to work with each stakeholder group to generate a list of "desired properties" (Ackoff, 1981) of the ideal housing system.

To facilitate the creative exploration of ideas in the workshops, participants were asked to imagine that all housing occupied by older people, and all the agencies responsible for it, had disappeared from the face of the Earth, and that it was the group's job to design a replacement system. To prevent participants from becoming utopian, the following three rules (developed by Ackoff, 1981) were provided as guidelines:

- Ideas contributed had to be technologically feasible. Participants could not propose something that it would be impossible to implement given current technology. For example, magic pills that made everyone 21 years old forever were not allowed!

- Generated ideas had to be viable. Participants were allowed to disregard start up costs but, if implemented, their thinking had to be realistically sustainable by the agencies identified as having responsibility for making the system work.

- Ideas contributed had to be adaptable. That is, participants were required to think about how control could be exercised over the system to ensure that it does what it is supposed to do, and has the capacity to change to meet new circumstances.

The process of generating ideas through "idealised design" has the effect of suspending belief in the usual taken for granted boundaries of what is considered to be possible. In this particular context, the challenge to the boundaries of possibility was enhanced by the integration of questions from Critical Systems Heuristics, as these have the capacity of raising boundary issues that might not otherwise have been considered. Idealised design conducted in this manner is, however, not unbounded (Midgley and Munlo, 1996): boundaries are explicitly set in terms of feasibility, viability and adaptability - exactly what is feasible, viable and adaptable being a matter for debate. While boundaries about what is possible will inevitably remain, they will be set more widely, and be justified more rigorously, than they might have been during a conventional conversation about design.

The outputs from the workshops were three lists of desired properties (included in appendix). There were only a handful of disagreements between the different stakeholder groups on the characteristics of an ideal housing system for older people. It had been planned that, in case of major differences, a multi-stakeholder workshop would be convened using a method like Strategic Assumption Surfacing and Testing (SAST) (Mason and Mitroff, 1981). This subjects alternative strategies to oppositional debate before a synthesis of ideas is sought, in order to sort out substantial differences of opinion between stakeholders. With minimal differences between the stakeholder groups, I felt justified in moving straight on to synthesise one single vision without further multi-stakeholder deliberations.

Therefore, with my supervisor, I produced a first draft of the synthesis. Desired properties were listed on a flip chart using coloured pens, with different colours

indicating which stakeholder group(s) had made particular points. The areas of disagreement were also highlighted. The synthesis was then presented in a workshop to a group of managers from the statutory agencies (Social Services, Housing and the Health Commission). This included Heads of Functions, as well as officers at middle management and policy levels. It must be pointed out here that the users had explicitly stated that, having identified the attributes of an ideal housing system, they did not want to be involved in its actual design. The following steps were followed in the workshop:

- With the managers, we went through the outputs of the various workshops.

- They then discussed and expressed an informed opinion on, the few disagreements between stakeholders that were outstanding. In dealing with each in turn, the three researchers, (I, my supervisor and a colleague) advocated for the position(s) of stakeholders who were not represented. The managers took all points of view very seriously, often debating them at length, and the resolutions they arrived at certainly reflected the concerns of users and carers as well as their own.

11.3.1 Designing Organisational Delivery

Having finalised the list of desired properties, the managers moved on to design a desirable and feasible form of organisation that would be capable of delivering the kind of housing system described in the previous workshops, and which would also address the problems highlighted in the first phase of the research.

First we presented the Viable System Model (Beer, 1979, 1981, 1985) which we suggested could be used as a template for the design (see chapter eight for details). This model was suggested by us because it contrasts with the usual hierarchical and multi-agency structures used in organisations. It was already clear from the earlier workshops that the organisation to be designed was going to have to be multi-agency and cooperative in character, and thus a hierarchical structure would have been inappropriate: developing a hierarchy would have meant placing a minority of agencies in a privileged position with regard to policy making. An alternative was also required to the usual practices of multi-agency working where senior managers come together to set policy, but nothing else is done to support joint working: in the first phase of the research this practice had already been identified as highly problematic.

It is worthy of note that, when the managers saw the VSM (represented in the manner of Figure 7.8), they identified an element of hierarchy that they were unhappy about: system 5 is at the top, and the others are below it. To counter this, they turned the diagram round 90 degrees so the environment was on top and all the systems were at the same level below it (see figure 12.1).

After they had accepted the model, the managers were asked to use it as a template to generate a first draft of an organisational means of delivering housing services to older people according to the specifications set by stakeholders.

The managers then rigorously reviewed the list of desired properties of the ideal housing system that was generated following the first set of workshops, checking if they had been provided for in the model. The proposal for organisational development was

required to deliver all the desired properties, either directly (by instituting them in its design) or indirectly (by providing an organisational means by which they could be discussed and realised in the future).

11.3.2 Deviations From the Research Proposal

The research process in practice did not strictly follow the original plan. Apart from reducing the number of single stakeholder workshops, and dispensing with the idea of a multi-agency group to debate disagreements (which were only minor), it was also the case that the stakeholder workshops produced only one design. Previously, two had been envisaged: one unconstrained, and one constrained by current legislation. Only the unconstrained design was produced due to time constraints. This inadvertently addressed the participants difficulties in thinking idealistically.

11.4 CONCLUSION

This chapter has given an account of activities in the second phase of the research project. It has covered the following activities: presentation of findings through workshops; mapping out areas for further action; identification of possible methods for evolving solutions; holding a series of stakeholder planning workshops; amalgamation of design attributes evolved by different workshop groups; the design of a desirable and feasible organisation by managers from lead statutory agencies. The next chapter presents outputs of the second phase in detail.

CHAPTER TWELVE

OUTCOMES OF THE SECOND PHASE

12.1 INTRODUCTION

A major activity reported in the last chapter was planning workshops aimed at evolving an ideal design for older peoples' housing service. This chapter gives details about the properties of an ideal housing system for older people, the design process and the final design itself.

12.2 THE DESIRED PROPERTIES OF AN IDEAL HOUSING SYSTEM

A summary of the outputs from the three stakeholder groups are presented below. Detailed outputs together with managers' comments concerning areas of disagreement are presented in Appendix 13. Note that in the appendix the participants' ideas have been expanded upon to make them more meaningful to readers who were not actually in the workshops.

- independent living and decent housing should be seen as basic rights;

- choice for older people should be maximised;

- it is vital to maintain the variety of services and organisations that currently exist. However, if there is going to be a variety of services and organisations, then there is a need to coordinate, work together and share information;

- assessment is necessary because, even in an ideal system (which is still implementable), not all wishes could be fulfilled. People should have a single assessment that leads them to all services from all organisayions. Assessment should be based around participation between everyone involved, with the older person as the lead decision maker. It should result in the generation of options, not a single outcome which a person has to take or leave. A standard form should be used, but assessment should be conducted flexibly, not always 'by the book';

- a key-worker system should be adopted to ensure continuity for individuals, and to allow face-to-face information to be provided. The user should be able to say at their assessment if they want a key worker and, if they do, whether they want it to be the person conducting the asessment or somebody from another agency;

- housing should normally be provided to a mixed age group, with the special needs of older people being met as part of this. However, older people should have the choice of going into specialist, segregated accommodation if they prefer;

- new houses should be built with lifetime needs in mind. A young person should be able to move into a house that can already accommodate their changing needs as they get older. This will ensure a more effective use of resources in the future and will mean that more people will be able to remain at home when they become frail.

A comprehensive list of the properties of an ideal housing system for older people (in the eyes of stakeholders) is presented in Appendix 13. It is worth noting that, when the researchers presented the outputs from the three workshops to the group of managers responsible for creating an organisational design capable of delivering them, they commented that the whole list makes an excellent agenda for service improvement. One person, responsible for managing a number of front-line workers, said that it should be hung on the wall in her building for everyone to refer to.

12.3 THE DESIGN PROCESS

The organisational design that the group of managers identified as being capable of realising the desired properties of the ideal housing system for older people will be presented below. First, however, a reminder will be provided of the Viable System Model (Beer, 1985), used as a template for the design.

12.3.1 The Viable System Model

The focus of the Viable System Model is on the development of a form of organisation that understands its relationship with its environment. According to the model, there are five key functions of good organisation: operations, coordination of operational units, support and control, intelligence, and policy-making. Figure 12.1 gives a highly

simplified (compared with Figure 7.8) diagrammatic representation of the model. The arrows in the diagram represent communications between the different functions, and between the organisation and its environment.

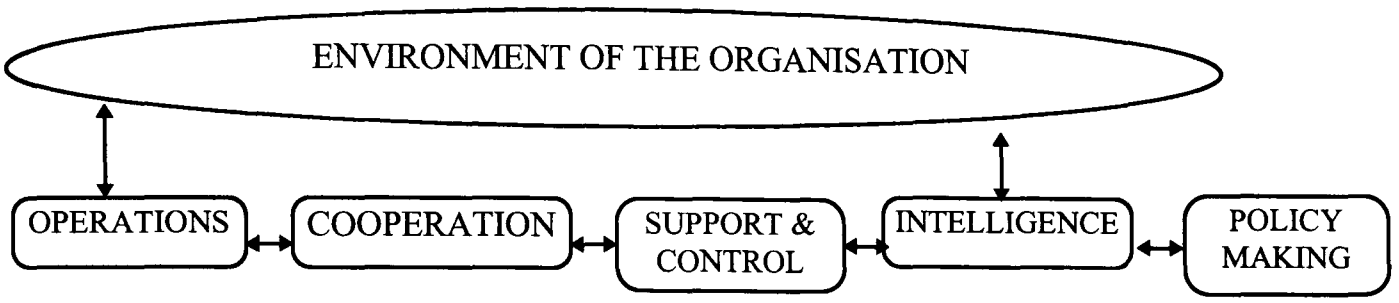

Figure 12.1 ***The Viable System Model***

Note that Figure 12.1 presents the model very differently from Beer (1985). Not only is it simplified, but it has also been rotated 90 degrees to remove the hierarchy that the managers objected to.

12.3.2 The Managers' Design

For the purposes of this research, the managers needed to orientate themselves in order to begin their design of an organisational structure. For them, the key points from the list of desired properties had to be:

- the unanimous agreement across stakeholders that maximisation of choice for the older person is best facilitated by the preservation of a diverse variety of organisations;

- the resultant need for multi-agency coordination; and

- the proposed innovations in user involvement that were actually built into the process of multi-agency planning.

It was therefore clear that the focus for organisational design needed to be at the level of multi-agency working.

Based on the Viable System Model, the managers produced a design for an integrated system of multi-agency working and user involvement that they believed would be able to deliver the kind of housing system for older people that was described in the previous workshops. The ideal properties of that housing system (presented in this chapter) are either embodied directly in the design, or the design provides a forum in which they can be discussed and implemented in the future. The integrated system of multi-agency working and user involvement is presented in Figure 12.2. Following this, the managers' designs for each of the five functions are explained. Note that any extra resource implications for their system are minimal compared with usual practices of separate and multi-agency planning: apart from the recruitment of just two paid employees (an Outreach Worker and a Coordinator), the system draws upon and coordinates people with particular expertise who already exist in the agencies.

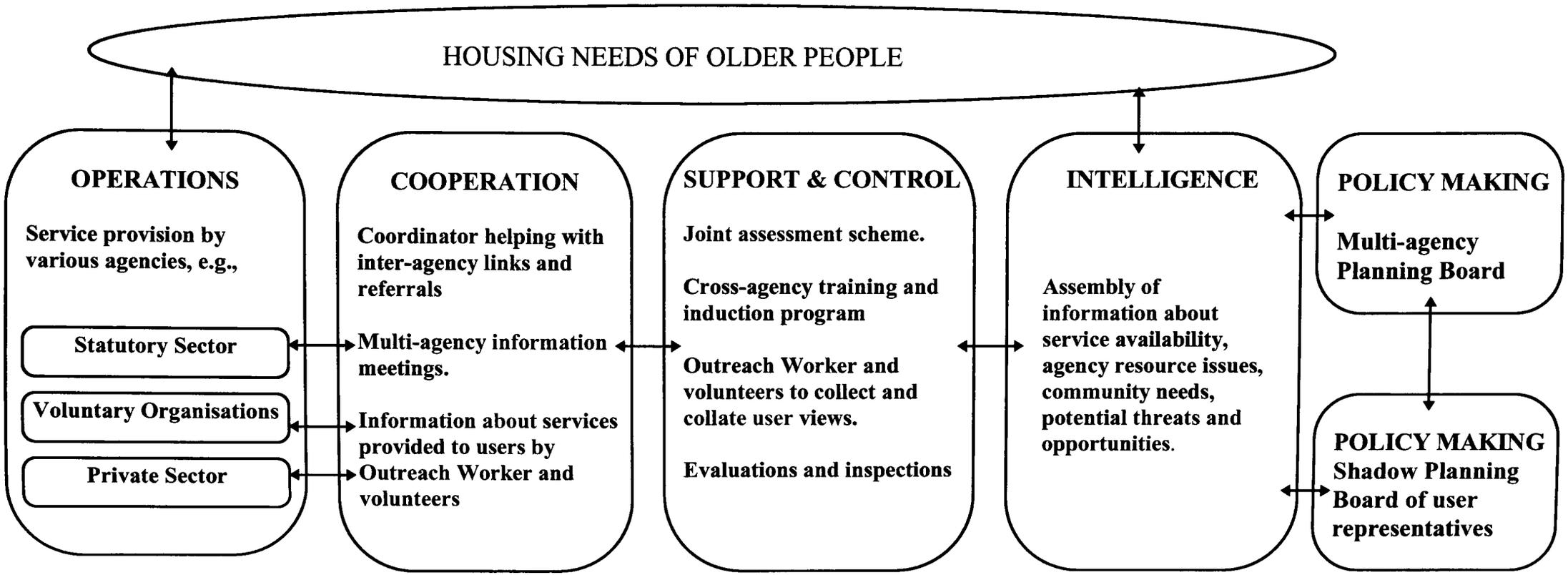

Figure 12.2 ***The Integrated System of Multi-Agency Working and User Involvement***

Operations

The operations function is carried out by all the various service providing agencies working in the area of housing for older people within the locality. There will naturally be areas of overlap in service provision, and there will be many times when two or more agencies will need to cooperate. Relationships amongst front-line professionals will grow as multi-agency working develops. However, this growth can be facilitated, and difficulties minimised, by effective coordination.

Coordination

The function of coordination is to ensure that each service provider knows others in the locality, and to provide the information that these people need in order to make effective links and referrals. This can best be achieved by an individual Coordinator, who should be employed by the system rather than any one individual agency. In effect, by helping others to make connections, this person should work themselves out of a job except that this will never happen because staff turnover in the agencies will mean that new people requiring information will always be recruited.

Coordination can also be enhanced through regular but infrequent multi-agency meetings (chaired by the Coordinator), with a clear remit of information provision rather than policy making the purpose being for each agency to let others know what it is doing.

When the desired properties of the ideal housing system were generated, there was a proposal to employ an Outreach Worker whose suggested role was to work with volunteers to gather stories from older people about their needs and experiences of services for use in both planning and the assessment of quality. The managers also suggested that, as the volunteers would come into contact with large numbers of older people, they could also provide information about services, thus helping coordination.

Support and Control

In a traditional organisation, the distribution of resources is classed as a support and control function. However, in this case, the managers designed a voluntary partnership of organisations, each with its own separate financial responsibilities. They specifically argued against the pooling of resources (to avoid the creation of a super-bureaucracy and preserve organisational diversity). However, if multi-agency policy makers were to recommend the joint purchasing of a service (see the later discussion of policy making), the necessary financial commitments would need to be negotiated bi- or multi-laterally as appropriate.

A key aspect of the ideal multi-agency system is joint assessment, allowing each older person to access all services through just one named professional. Joint assessment requires multi-agency agreement on the communication of information between agencies. It also requires training for Assessment Officers that is not specific to any one agency: this should provide information about all agencies, and should also focus on the manner of assessment (friendly, participatory, and generating options). Likewise, a cross-organisational induction programme for staff of all the agencies was proposed.

It is as part of the support and control function that service quality information can be gathered and disseminated. For example, user views on provision can be gathered via the Outreach Worker (and his or her volunteers) for feedback to the appropriate services. Also, the outcomes of rest home inspections can be made public. Evaluations of assessment and inspection procedures can also be undertaken by the Outreach Worker and volunteers, based on user views. It was further proposed to use some of the contacts made by the Outreach Worker to set up participative design workshops, using interactive IT where appropriate, to generate new service ideas and make building design more responsive to special needs. Any outputs from these quality processes that have policy implications would need to be fed via the intelligence function into the policy-making function. Ensuring that this feedback takes place would be the job of the Outreach Worker. Thus, communication should be bi-directional: to service providers and multi-agency policy makers.

Intelligence

The intelligence function of the multi-agency system is about predicting future threats and opportunities, and providing information to policy makers about how the system is, or is not, geared up to meet them. It therefore needs to be aware of the current positions and future plans of all the various participating agencies. Types of information that agencies need to provide include current forms of service available, and details of internal resource issues that may affect future availability. Also, user views that have planning implications, collected by the Outreach Worker as part of the support and control function, need to be brought in here, as do any other sources of user feedback related to planning (e.g., from residents' committees).

Externally generated threats and opportunities that the multi-agency system should have information about include major reorganisations at the national, regional or local levels; demographic trends; health trends; socio-economic trends; changes in national welfare policy; changes in planning or building requirements; other relevant changes in legislation; and details of the needs of older people not currently in contact with services (these previously unidentified needs can be discovered through the activities of the Outreach Worker and his or her volunteers).

The current information resources of the agencies need to be coordinated here so that the required information can be generated, synthesised, and appropriate recommendations made for multi-agency consumption at the level of policy making.

Policy Making

The policy making function of the system is structured in accordance with the proposal for an ideal planning structure (Figure 12.1), but without the ring-fenced funding and the control of finances by Councillors which the managers argued against. There is a multi-agency, multi-expertise Planning Board (see Appendix 13 for stakeholders' suggestions of who should sit on this), with user and carer representation, which is the main decision-maker. However, the power of this is counter-balanced by the presence of a Shadow Board made up of representatives of user groups and residents' committees. This not only comments on the plans made by the Planning Board, but also generates plans itself (drawing in ideas from other user groups, residents' committees and individuals) for discussion by the main Planning Board (which has the final say on

policy). Both Boards need to receive input from the intelligence function, including reports from the Outreach Worker on user views relevant to planning.

12.3.3 Summary

In short, the model designed by managers integrates multi-agency working and user involvement in an innovative planning and management system. The activities of the various agencies (the service providers) are primarily linked by a Coordinator, who helps people make effective connections and referrals, and chairs multi-agency meetings for the dissemination of information. However, the requests of individual users (facilitated by the provision of information by volunteers, under the direction of an Outreach Worker) should also be seen as part of the coordination function: service providers are required to coordinate their activities in response to user needs. The system is held together by a joint assessment scheme, allowing users access to multiple agencies via a single assessment, which is underpinned by a cross-agency training programme for Assessment Officers. Support and control is exercised through quality initiatives, including the use of stories about services collected from older people by volunteers and collated into reports by the Outreach Worker. Intelligence, concerning internal agency resource issues and external threats and opportunities (including information from the community about unmet needs), is gathered and fed into policy making. Finally, policy is set by a multi-agency Planning Board whose power is counter-balanced by a Shadow Board made up of user representatives. Both Boards receive the same intelligence information to inform their planning.

12.4 REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This final section will reflect back on the problems of assessment, information provision and planning highlighted by the first phase of the research in order to show how the organisational design produced by managers (based on wider stakeholder involvement) addresses them. A key, controversial issue will then be discussed: the relationship of the proposed design with the purchaser-provider split. The chapter will then conclude with a short series of recommendations.

12.4.1 Reflections

First, the main problem with assessment practices was perceived to be the disincentive to record needs that cannot currently be met. This was seen as a problem because it makes those needs invisible to planners. The present research suggests that assessment is not the only vehicle through which needs can be made visible, and the proposals for user involvement built into the model of multi-agency working (user representation on the Planning Board, participation in the Shadow Board, and outreach into the community to gather the views of older people) provide an alternative means to make needs visible. Nevertheless, having said this, assessment practices *can* actually be improved, and the model of multi-agency working has joint assessment (and training) built into it, including the generation of multiple options and the maximisation of user choice as central features.

Second, quantitative information provision to planners was generally perceived as unreliable, and aggregation of assessment data presented no significant hope of improvement. While there is no magic formula for providing reliable quantitative information (short of repeatedly conducting time-consuming and expensive surveys), the model of multi-agency working maximises use of the information that does exist. It identifies key areas of information about external conditions and the agencies' readiness to deal with them that, if provided to policy makers, would make coordinated planning easier. In addition, the model demonstrates how useful qualitative information, previously accessed haphazardly by individuals, can be systematically gathered and distributed, via the Outreach Worker and his or her volunteers, to those who need the information most.

Finally, multi-agency planning was perceived as problematic. Depending on the planning arrangements in place, the problems varied in significance. The model deals with the issue of multi-agency coordination directly.

12.4.2 The Purchaser-Provider Split

The desired properties of the ideal housing system (section 12.2) and the organisational means to deliver these (section 12.3), were envisaged by stakeholders to be the best possible practice that could be achieved. However, in seeking to implement these designs, the managers recognised that they would need to address how current legislation would affect its operation, in particular, the split between purchasing and provision that is fully operational in the Health Service, but is less distinct (at the present time) in other agencies. This issue was not only discussed with managers, but was also the subject of debate amongst the researchers, and between the researchers and

their Advisory Group. Altogether, three different views of the relationship of the model with current legislation were proposed. Each of these is presented below, and their strengths and weaknesses examined.

Dispensing with the Split

The first view is that, if this model were extended across all services, it would entirely dispense with the need for a purchaser-provider split. Service providers would be funded directly (as they were before the legislation was introduced), and would set aside resources for the multi-agency functions specified in the model.

There were two arguments presented against this view. First, it would mean discarding the purchaser-provider split and replacing it with a new split based on categories of client: there would be separate administrative structures for older people, children, people with physical disabilities, people with mental health problems, etc. This would cause problems for clients who do not fall neatly into categories, or who have multiple needs. Indeed, relationships between current agencies might be improved by implementation of the model, but new super-structures would appear that would be unable to coordinate their activities. Thus, current problems would be reproduced in a new form.

Second, if an attempt was made to create a unified structure (based on the managers' model), but extending across all agencies and embracing all client groups, then this would cure the problem of defining services by client category, but would be such a huge and unwieldy bureaucracy that it would be virtually impossible to manage effectively.

Cooperation between Purchasers and Providers

The second view, favoured by the managers in the organisational design workshop, was that each purchaser should have financial relationships with a group of providers (as at present), with the multi-agency system sitting above them all in order to provide a coordinating mechanism for everyone's benefit. This would involve both purchasers and providers in multi-agency planning. The managers argued that, when multi-agency policy is set, the agencies cannot be forced to follow it, and indeed the system that has been designed specifically disallows direct multi-agency control over agency finances. However, according to the managers, multi-agency working is so important to most service purchasers and providers that there would have to be a significant reason for an agency not to cooperate—and reasons of such significance should be foreseen through the intelligence function anyway. Where policy has implications for the commitment of agency resources, this can be negotiated outside policy meetings, and the possibility (or otherwise) of financial commitments being made becomes information from the intelligence function to be fed into policy making.

Only one argument was raised against this. In the Health Service, it is generally perceived that current providers can gain an unfair advantage over their competitors by contributing to the development of purchasing strategy. Thus, purchasers would not want providers to participate in policy making if the design for integrated multi-agency working and user involvement were implemented. This would compromise the vision of purchaser-provider cooperation discussed by managers. The researchers talked about this issue with one senior manager and one middle manager in the Southtown Health Purchaser. The senior manager confirmed that the involvement of providers in policy

making would be seen as a problem for their organisation, but the middle manager said that, in his view, the benefits of cooperation would outweigh the disadvantages. Nevertheless, this is clearly an issue that would have to be taken into account if the vision of purchaser-provider cooperation were to be pursued.

Mapping the Purchaser-Provider Roles onto the Model

The final view was that it is possible to map the purchaser and provider roles onto the model. Thus, operations (service provision) would be a provider function, but coordination, support & control, intelligence and policy-making would all be purchaser functions.

The argument against this was that it would work well for the Health Service, but would not be relevant for other agencies that have a less distinct purchaser-provider split. It may, however, be possible to achieve a compromise position where current health providers are excluded from policy making, but other providers are present.

In the view of the researchers, local agreements would need to be reached, either to fix full cooperation between purchasers and providers; agree limited cooperation (excluding current health providers); or map the purchaser and provider functions for *all* the agencies onto the model. In the latter case, for those agencies which act as both purchasers and providers, it would mean selecting senior managers with no *direct* responsibility for provision (i.e., people in Head Office, not based in the services themselves) to sit on the multi-agency Planning Board and participate in policy making. The managers went on to discuss implementation and agreed that this could only be realistically considered once unitary status had been achieved. They believed that it

would take 6 to 12 months following unitary status before the new management would be settled enough to consider innovations to what had already been agreed. However, they were optimistic about future change.

12.4.3 Recommendations

Having presented the main findings of the research, I will now reproduce the recommendations that appeared in Midgley, Munlo and Brown (1997). These relate to implementing the model of integrated multi-agency working and user involvement:

- A participatory model imposed in a non-participatory manner is inherently contradictory, and may thus be vulnerable to sabotage. The design process used in this research proved highly successful in generating both trust between stakeholders and their commitment to change. In tailoring the design for local use, consideration should be given to processes of participation and user involvement. If necessary, the methods from this research could be adapted, or even the whole process repeated, to facilitate implementation.

- In the researchers' view, because of the innovative nature of the model which integrates multi-agency working and user involvement into a coherent whole, it would be worthwhile evaluating the first efforts of implementation and making the results public.

In addition, two recommendations based on the findings of the first phase of this research should be made to Central Government. Action in both of these areas could significantly enhance the effectiveness of multi-agency working:

- While there is much that people working in the various agencies can do to improve multi-agency working, this could be facilitated by a review of legislation with a view to harmonising (where possible) the requirements placed upon the statutory agencies so that unnecessary obstacles to cooperation are removed.

- To facilitate proper debate on service development and appropriate levels of resourcing, Social Services Departments (and other agencies linked with them) should be encouraged to record needs that cannot currently be met. At the present time they are prevented from doing this because they are required to meet all recorded needs, and to record needs that cannot currently be met would place them in an impossible position. The legislation could simply be amended so that it is only mandatory to provide a service when an assessment records a need that there is a *statutory obligation* to meet. This would allow needs that there is no statutory obligation to meet to be recorded, creating the potential for these to become visible to planners and policy makers at all levels.

Effectively this research had two clients: the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and Southtown. The JRF's needs were met by production of a final report with a generalisable model and method (Midgley, Munlo and Brown, 1997). Southtown's requirement for a model of specific relevance to them has also been met, but until the necessary time period has elapsed after the introduction of unitary status, it will not be

possible to assess its potential for implementation. Such an assessment is therefore beyond the scope of the current research.

12.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter concludes by summarising that the research has identified a set of interrelated problems in the areas of assessment, information provision and planning within the housing system for older people. Stakeholders in the system, facilitated by the researchers, have proposed a model for combining user involvement with multi-agency working to address these problems and improve the system as a whole. The ball is now in the court of people working in the area of housing for older people who may wish to adapt and implement this model, and also Central Government who could facilitate implementation through a review of relevant legislation. It should nevertheless be emphasised that a great deal can be achieved at the local level even if Government support is not forthcoming.

SECTION THREE

REFLECTIONS

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF CST

13.1 INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I will look at original contributions arising out of this research with respect to the theory and practice of critical systems thinking. I will specifically look at my contributions with respect to boundary critique, Cognitive Mapping and Problem Mapping.

13.2 BOUNDARY JUDGEMENTS

The theory of boundary critique is presented in chapter seven. Throughout the research project a number of innovative approaches were used to determine system boundaries in specific situations as follows:

1. By the Use of Midgley and Milne's (1995) "Rolling Programme of Interviews":

All I knew at the beginning of the research about its context was derived from preliminary discussions with council officials and from reading general documents on housing and older people's services. From these I learnt that there was a diversity of agencies involved, i.e. local and regional government, the National Health Service, housing associations, voluntary organisations, private companies, etc. - far too many organisations to identify right from the start. Acknowledging that it would be difficult to establish with reasonable certainty who should be interviewed, I decided to treat the

above categories of people only as a starting point. Thus, boundaries to the research study were determined in three ways. First, by asking who was involved in or affected by the interviewee's activities; who else might have something useful to contribute; and who might have a different view from the interviewee. Within the semi-structured interviews were incorporated the following questions relating to the boundaries of the study: Who is affected by your activities? Whose experience or help do you call upon? Who provides you with services or sources of information? Who else has different views or experiences from your own? etc. Second, I asked for examples of specific decisions regarding needs assessment, information provision and for service planning. I analysed these through Cognitive Mapping. These revealed both stakeholders and issues. Thirdly, in interviews, I introduced issues from previous interviews and picked up any new respondent categories arising from the ensuing discussions. The boundaries were determined when no more new names of relevant agencies or stakeholders surfaced from the three activities. This approach was informed by Ulrich's (1983) assertion that the group of those actually or potentially affected can never be delimited in advance with certainty, and can be diagrammed as a generalisable method (Figure 13.1).

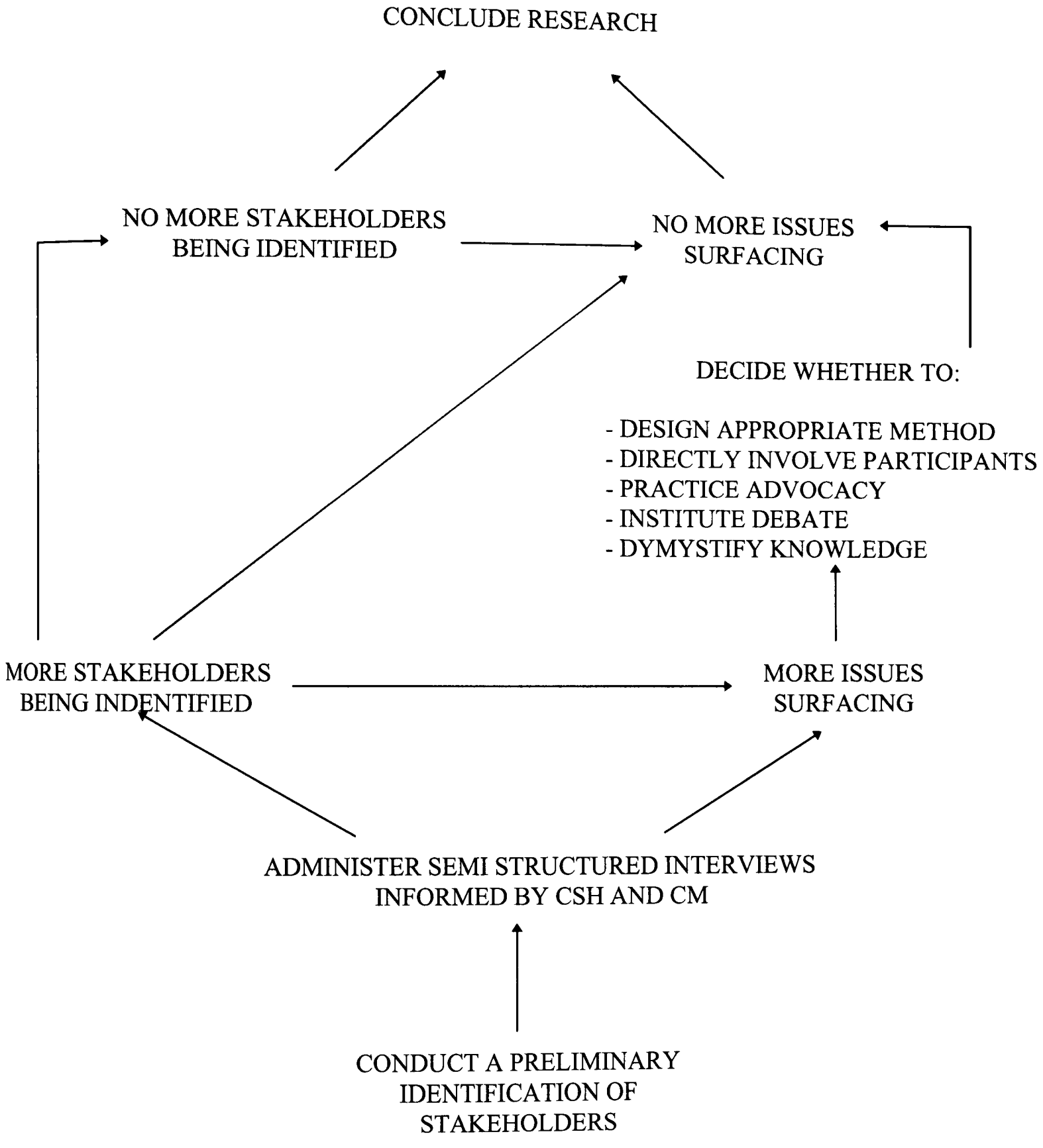

Figure 13.1 ***The Process of Boundary Setting***

2. By Integrating Aspects from Different Boundary Challenging Methods in my Interview and Intervention Schedules:

This happened in several ways. During my interviews I integrated questions from Critical Systems Heuristics (CSH) and used the questioning structure consistent with Cognitive Mapping. In the planning seminars I synthesised CSH and Interactive Planning (IP).

Questions from CSH have the capacity to raise boundary issues that might not otherwise be considered. CSH also provides for the explicit justification of boundaries. Cognitive Mapping assists in bringing into consideration boundaries that encompass both the beliefs and practices of respondents. Interactive Planning extends boundaries as widely as possible, while retaining viability and adaptability as determined by debate between participants.

3. By Debating the Ethics of the Original Research Remit:

After the first cycle of interviews I observed that the remit of the research project, which focused on information provision, was marginalising the concerns of many stakeholders. For example:

a. In the eyes of older people, there was a perceived mismatch between what was requested in assessments and what was actually provided in the way of housing services;

b. There were difficulties with multi-agency working: i.e. cooperation in the areas of policy making and planning was problematic;

c. Legislation was causing many of the problems surrounding assessment.

I therefore faced an ethical dilemma. I had to choose between continuing along the same path, which would be "safe" in the sense that it had been agreed with the funding body, or widen the boundaries. I tackled this dilemma by convening a meeting of the Advisory Group at the Rowntree Offices, at which the ethical consequences of adopting the various boundaries were explored. At this meeting it was decided that the study should not be limited to issues of the use of information from needs assessment, to inform planning but, where necessary, it should endeavour to look at broader issues: e.g. how the existing legislation impacts on the identification of older people's housing needs. I therefore increased the scope of my questionnaires accordingly.

The perception of this dilemma as being ethical in nature is in line with the understanding provided by Churchman (1979a,b), Ulrich (1983) and Midgley (1992c) that boundaries and values are intimately related. The setting of boundaries for analysis is underpinned by a given set of values and the ensuing analysis in turn reinforces these unless a challenge to the boundaries is mounted. The emergence of this dilemma also supports Churchman's idea that "improvements" are perceived differently by different stakeholders. Had boundaries been adopted as given, some of the key problems of assessment and planning might never have become visible, and the research might have generated ideas for improvement that were only relevant to a minority of stakeholders.

4. Structuring Debate in Such a Way as to Facilitate Participation:

In the second phase of the research I had to ensure that the concerns of various stakeholders (particularly service users) were not marginalised. I therefore structured the

planning forums in such a way as to allow reasonably homogenous groups confidential space in which to develop their own views. This well established technique (Mason and Mitroff, 1981; Beer, 1994; Midgley, 1997) was aimed at mitigating against domination by professional discourses, marginalising the "ordinary language" of service users. This is in line with Midgley's (1992c) understanding of the process of marginalisation and how to counter it.

5. Broadening the Normative Basis of the Research:

In this research I stipulated in advance that older people would be interviewed as prime clients of the housing services. This was for two reasons: first, the exclusion of service users could well have resulted in a design proposal that failed to meet their needs. In this respect the decision was influenced by both Churchman's (1979a,b) principle of "sweeping in" stakeholder concerns, and Ulrich's (1983) inclusion of the "affected" along with the "involved". Second, I was aware that clients of service systems very often have their views marginalised and made profane (Midgley, 1992c). This allows professional discourses to maintain a sacred status and thereby dominate the business of service delivery (see also Thompson, 1995). Local government officials were therefore informed right from the start that the research would promote the views of clients alongside other views.

Again, by running three separate stakeholder workshops in the second (planning) phase, I immediately widened the boundaries of participation beyond the small gathering of managers who had been involved in designing the methods of the second phase. The inclusion of a variety of stakeholders in this manner reflected the insight of Churchman (1979a,b) that a more comprehensive understanding can be generated by considering a

variety of views than by working with a small group in isolation. It also reflected Ulrich's (1983) idea that both the views of the involved and the affected need to be accounted for if the results of planning are to be considered normatively acceptable.

The use of "Idealised Design" (Ackoff, 1993) in the planning phase was also aimed at extending boundaries beyond what was considered to be intuitively possible. In this particular context, this challenge to the boundaries of possibility was enhanced by the integration of questions from Critical Systems Heuristics.

In the transition from the involvement of a wider range of stakeholders to that of only a few managers of statutory agencies (whose responsibility was to design a multi-agency organisational structure), it was important that the concerns of those stakeholder categories that were progressively being excluded from the design process be preserved. This was achieved through the design of problem solving methods in such a way that the normative basis for the work (in the form of "desired properties" of an ideal housing system) could be determined by a wide range of stakeholders, leaving only the organisational implementation to be handled by the managers alone.

The managers were requested to rigorously review the list of desired properties of the ideal housing system that was generated following the first set of workshops, checking if they had been provided for in the model. This review process represented a final safeguard against the possibility that managers would design their organisation to suit their own interests, thereby marginalising all the concerns expressed in the work that the other stakeholders had already undertaken. Once again, this reflects the insights of Churchman, Ulrich and Midgley that boundaries can become narrow when participation

is restricted. The possible negative effects of limiting participation to managers from the statutory agencies were minimised by close adherence to the principle, established in previous discussions, of basing the organisational design firmly on the earlier, wider stakeholder involvement.

6. By Demystifying Knowledge:

In identifying possible methods for the planning phase in Southtown, and for the possible future interaction in Northlands, the researchers requested time from the participants in the workshops and held discussions about methodology in their presence. We lapsed into systems jargon, and then a presentation of the proposed approaches and methods was made in plain English. In both cases this was followed by open discussions.

This approach was aimed at preventing, as far as possible, the marginalisation of participants in the process of designing methods. It was obviously a conscious decision by myself and my colleagues (as professional researchers) to introduce our "expertise" into the workshops (the other participants did not have the same knowledge of systems and operational research methods). Nonetheless this had to be done in such a way as to make our knowledge a resource for all the participants. It was important to make sure that we did not take on a "sacred" status, thereby making other participants feel "profane" and disempowered. Ultimately, the commitment and understanding of these groups of participants would be crucial in the implementation of recommendations for improvement. The aspect of the theory of boundary critique that addresses processes of marginalisation (Midgley, 1992c) was of use. In this particular case, it was the marginalisation of managers by the research team that was at issue.

Again with respect to the design of organisational delivery in Southtown, time was taken to explain in simple language the structures and principles of a cybernetic model of good organisation, the "Viable System Model" (Beer, 1985). In presenting this model, we were aware that we were introducing something into the intervention that, if we were not very careful, could be seen as "sacred" expertise. If the model were to be perceived as sacred, then the knowledge brought in by the managers could come to be regarded as profane in comparison. The result could have either been dependence on the researchers' expertise, or resentment on the part of the managers who would have felt the need to rubbish the researchers' ideas in order to re-assert their own sacred status. It was therefore very important for us to explain the model in plain English, encourage critical comments about it, and give the managers a genuine opportunity to decide against using it. When we did this, the managers saw the benefits of the model in comparison with alternatives. They appropriated the model as their own through a process of critique where they identified and challenged a remaining element of hierarchy in the way (following Beer, 1985) we had diagrammed it. In Beer's diagramming technique, policy making is at the top, while intelligence, support/control, coordination and operations are below it, and the environment (including the clients of the organisation) are to one side. The managers turned the diagram around 90 degrees so that the clients were at the top, and the other functions were at the same level below (see Figure 13.1).

After this critique had been conducted, and we (the researchers) had accepted its validity, the knowledge embodied in the model was easily taken on board by the managers. Here again it is clear that the theory of boundary critique (especially Midgley's, 1992c, understanding of marginalisation) informed the approach taken,

helping us identify and avoid the possible negative consequences of imposing our own expertise on the intervention. After they had accepted the model, the managers were asked to use it as a template to generate a first draft of an organisational means of delivering housing services to older people according to the specifications set by stakeholders.

7. Advocacy:

In the presentation workshops that marked the end of the first phase the Housing Department and Social Services had stated that they wanted to be the only agencies to participate. This was because they felt that the report covered some sensitive issues with respect to service provision and inter-agency relationships. This posed a threat to the holistic stance of the research approach and there was a risk that the research could reinforce the marginalisation and hence the profane status (Midgley, 1992c) of other stakeholders including service users. I had to develop a method that would allow the presentation of findings to a very limited set of stakeholders (who, in the case of Southtown, were seeking to control access to results) without marginalising the concerns of others. This was achieved for Southtown by use of a facilitation method that specifically allowed for the introduction of other stakeholders' concerns into the debate and addressed the negative emotions that surfaced: one facilitator made the presentation, one acted as an advocate for absent stakeholders, and the third facilitator remained aware of, and sought to address, emotional dynamics (see section 11.2.3).

Also, at the beginning of the organisational design process, differences between stakeholder groups had to be resolved by the managers from the statutory agencies. Here I used an advocacy method to ensure that the concerns of the other stakeholders were

taken seriously. Users had explicitly stated that, having identified the attributes of an ideal housing system, they did not want to be involved in its actual design. Also, other stakeholders like the Health Trust, private agencies and potential users, did not take part in the planning workshops. We had to try as far as possible to advocate for them. Through this advocacy process, we made sure that a wide range of interests were still addressed.

In terms of the theory of boundary critique, our advocacy technique was designed to mitigate against the potential consequences of restricting participation to managers only, the possible dismissal of the view points of other stakeholders, marginalising them in the process.

13.2.1 Contributions from Research

The foregoing experience with respect to boundary judgements contributes a number of lessons. The research has demonstrated that insights from the theory of boundary critique can be successfully introduced into interventions. Reflection on all the above examples suggests that the theory is translated into practice primarily through the selection or design of methods. Some methods specifically facilitate the exploration of boundary issues, while others enforce particular boundary judgements by including or excluding people and/or their concerns from the process of problem solving.

The adopted approach to boundary setting does however, have some weaknesses. To begin with it is time consuming. The process took approximately one year, and many interventions have to be completed in a much shorter time span. Boundary critique

would no doubt still be possible over a shorter time period, but different methods would have to be used. These methods also rely heavily on respondents' sincerity although in this particular case I do not believe that this was a problem, as respondents were very involved and serious, probably due to the importance of the subject being researched. Such an approach is also likely to come into conflict with local politics as it seeks to extend "official boundaries" beyond current agency responsibilities. Where the terms of reference do not include proposing an organisational framework, this approach could lead to solutions that may not be implemented.

However this approach does evolve boundaries based on an interaction of views arising from real life experiences. It therefore increases the possibility of research addressing issues as experienced by a wider variety of stakeholders than is normally included in systems interventions.

13.2.2 Summary

In this research I have therefore provided new insights that help bridge the gap between the theory of boundary critique (Churchman, 1979a,b; Jones, 1982; Ulrich, 1983 and Midgley, 1992c) and practice. These insights include the need to access a diverse variety of stakeholder views in defining problems, the need to take processes of marginalisation into account during intervention; and the importance of promoting and re-valuing contributions by marginal groups. In particular, I have demonstrated that the principle means by which the theory of boundary critique can inform intervention is through the design of methods. This is an original contribution to critical systems thinking.

13.3 COGNITIVE MAPPING

The methodology of Cognitive Mapping was introduced in chapter seven. In this section I will first review the use of Cognitive Mapping in this study, and will then highlight the insight provided by this research.

13.3.1 Issues Pertaining to the Use of Cognitive Mapping in This Study

The decision to use Cognitive Mapping in the intervention was taken long before my involvement. In the original proposal, it was assumed that Cognitive Mapping would make available a picture of the shaping of information at each point in the organisation. The purpose was to demonstrate how the output from one individual becae the input to decision making by the next individual. Once the research had taken off, however, preliminary experience with the research process showed that this was not feasible. Cognitive Mapping could not provide a picture of the shaping of information at each point in the organisation's decision making for a number of reasons. To begin with, many interviewees said that their decisions were not based on anything more tangible than "gut feeling" (see Map in Appendix 14). Secondly, in practice, individuals with similar roles who could identify the antecedents to their decision making did not necessarily consider the same factors in their decision making processes. This makes any attempt at generalising about information flow highly problematic. The latter is not a criticism of Cognitive Mapping, however, but rather its selection as an appropriate methodology for this study.

One thing that is clear about Cognitive Mapping is that (following Kelly, 1955) it regards reality as individually constructed. If we wish to say that there are objective social and economic constraints facing sets of individuals, then Cognitive Mapping reduces these to constraints of the mind. The consequence is that the execution of planned social and economic change becomes an irrelevance. Focusing analysis on the individual does not reveal the explanatory factors determining individual behaviour, if these factors really are structural. Jensen-Butler (1981) points out that free choice for the individual is a functional requirement for neo-classical market based models. If the individual is in fact not free to choose, then mental maps are being used in a way which prevents explanation. If entire groups are subject to 'structural pressure', then their activities and decisions cannot be understood by examining the individual alone, and certainly not by examining his or her consciousness (Jensen-Butler 1981). In my research, the vast majority of professionals in the agencies said that they had no choice, and no alternative options, with regard to the provision of housing services. Legislation prescribed the general manner in which the assessment of older people was to happen, and the specific questionnaires used were not open to alteration or interpretation. Therefore, assessment was a perfunctory act, with the "options" available to older people already prescribed. This finding supports the view that not all phenomena are usefully seen in terms of subjective decision making.

Next, there was the problem of respondents failing to cope with structured questioning. It was often not possible to get respondents to give responses in a format that was amenable to analysis using Cognitive Mapping. Eden (1988) also acknowledges this, but argues that the problem arises from constraints which derive from the culture of the organisation about how problems are described. However, an alternative explanation,

suggested by my finding (above) that most professionals do not perceive themselves as having meaningful choices, is that the requirement in Cognitive Mapping to identify alternative options for action is often not feasible. Indeed, I found the long periods of silence that often started while a respondent was trying to figure out a psychological opposite to a concept embarrassing to me and stressful to the other party. I was concerned about the effect of this on the rapport that I was trying to establish.

Also, Cognitive Mapping did not evolve a full picture of subjectively perceived problem situations. While it solicited attributes considered, and structured causes, effects and options it did not give reasons for why these might be important to the respondent. Only general goals are specified, and the reader of the map is left to interpret the specific "whys". As a result it was not really possible to comprehend the rationale behind practices or evolve a holistic picture of individual cognitions. This limitation reflects the theoretical background of Cognitive Mapping. Kelly's (1955) work assumes that human reasoning is driven by action, not the other way around.

13.3.2 Application of Cognitive Mapping in the Research Process

Because of the limitations discussed above, I decided that optimum benefits from the use of Cognitive Mapping would be obtained in the following ways:

1. The Creative Design of Methods:

Cognitive Mapping was integrated with Critical Systems Heuristics and both of them determined the structure, and to some extent the content, of the semi-structured interviews conducted in the first phase of the research.

2. Focusing on Decision Making Processes to Enhance Issue Identification:

Although I felt that Cognitive Mapping could not help evolve a whole picture of the problem situation, I thought it could at least surface some of the factors considered in specific decisions made by stakeholders, even if the reasons why these factors were considered were missing.

By analysing maps on specific decisions I was able to discern the following issues:

(i) There were differences between general views and subjectively-perceived decision-making practice. In most cases stakeholders whom officials stated were being important were not necessarily the same as those they felt were crucial for the success of specific decisions. More often than not, users only featured as important stakeholders in the abstract and not as determinants of the success or failure of decisions or plans.

(ii) Although most agencies communicated information about their services using pamphlets, users mainly acquired information about services through personal contacts.

(iii) The majority of users knew, at the most, two agencies providing services, usually those in their locality. Those who knew statutory agencies knew very little or nothing about voluntary or private agencies providing services, and vice versa.

(iv) There was no proactive approach to assessments. Assessments were based on corrective rather than preventative action.

(v) The Housing Forums for older people were merely used to articulate agency recommendations and not for generating ideas from older people.

(vi) In making policy decisions, constituent and party politics carried more influence than information based on the needs assessments that are done or the professional advice given by statutory officers.

(vii) Financial considerations, official preferences and the desire to keep up with trends elsewhere (even as far away as the USA) informed service decisions, rather than information from needs assessments.

(viii) There were clear differences in the criteria for allocating services between the Housing Departments, the Social Services Departments and the Housing Associations.

(ix) Council Officers were the main source of information for decision making. This was despite their declared lack of access to collated needs assessments.

(x) Health Services were aimed at satisfying Purchasers' expectations rather than those of users.

3. Assisting Boundary Setting:

Stakeholders involved in and/or affected by interviewees' activities were identified through analyses of the maps. This approach helped establish appropriate boundaries in that it allowed respondents to focus on what were (to them) real experiential issues rather than on pre-defined issues which I might have thought relevant, or on the importance of officially identified stakeholders. Here I was guided by Kelly (1970), who argues that:

> ...for people their most important possessions are their construct systems of themselves; of themselves in their culture, and of their culture in the world at large. Such construct systems tend to be self fulfilling as they determine people's rational and deliberate ways of going on. (Kelly, 1970).

13.3.3 Contributions

This research has demonstrated one possible application of Cognitive Mapping in a critical approach i.e., by complementing it with an emancipatory method, namely Critical Systems Heuristics, as happened in the problem surfacing phase, the first phase. It has also exposed a significant limitation of the method: it is of little use in situations where respondents feel they have no choices open to them. Furthermore, while factors affecting decision making are highlighted, the reasons why these are important are not effectively explored.

13.3.4 Summary

As far as I am aware, this was the first application of Cognitive Mapping within a critical systems intervention. Whilst it was by no means unproblematic, it indicates the

future potential of Cognitive Mapping for exploring boundary issues and decision making in a way that is directly experiential, allowing for comparisons of espoused theory and subjectively perceived practice.

Observations were made from practice that support and extend critical comments made by other authors on Cognitive Mapping (particularly Jensen-Butler, 1981). Because of the limitations already described, Cognitive Mapping is arguably best practised in parallel with other methods. There is substantial scope here for further research.

13.4 PROBLEM MAPPING

Another contribution from this research is a new problem structuring method, Problem Mapping.

I did not use a Rich Picture (Checkland, 1972) to structure the problem situation, although the first phase did a similar job to what a Rich Picture would have done: i.e. it captured the nature of the problem situation, including political aspects. It should be noted that a Rich Picture focuses on a higher resolution than Problem Mapping in that it is a picture, not of problems alone, but of the situation in which problems reside. The Problem map which was used in the study dealt with actual problems as articulated by respondents. I assumed, therefore, that it would be easier for stakeholders to relate to. The use of a Rich Picture also demands extra resources of time and pictorial literacy for effective application. In addition, Rich Pictures are usually produced in participative debate, yet it was unclear when I started the research project who the relevant stakeholders were going to be, and therefore who would need to participate in a debate.

Metaphors were also not employed to surface problems in this research mainly because I was keen to observe the advice to avoid inappropriate generative metaphors that may not be seen within a historical context (Bowers and Flinders, 1991: 34-35). Commenting on Total Systems Intervention, Tsoukas (1993) wrote that:

> ...the very use of these metaphors will not merely reveal an otherwise mute independent reality but, in an important way, will also help define that reality... How do you know that these problems are "out there", independent of the analyst's vocabulary, rather than being created by the analyst as a result of using a particular vocabulary. (Tsoukas 1993).

I was also of the opinion that metaphors, if not appropriately handled, could inadvertently propagate exhausted and irrelevant assumptions from orthodox thinking, thereby inhibiting creativity.

13.4.1 Generalisable Stages of Problem Maps

Problem Mapping was devised through the research process, not prior to it. However, on reflection, it is possible to describe it as a discrete method that can be generalised for future application. The generalisable stages are as follows:

(i) Interview stakeholders about problems they perceive. Also identify other stakeholders who should be interviewed. Continue to interview stakeholders until no new agencies are suggested as relevant.

Go through all the interview transcripts to identify relevant problems that stakeholders say they face. Only write down the problems that have subjectively perceived evidence to support their identification as problems (this removes relatively trivial concerns and unsupported assertions).

(ii) Remove duplicate problems. Synthesise problems of a similar nature into single statements.

(iii) Write the problem statements on post-it notes and stick them on a white board. Taking each problem in turn, ask if and how each of the others impacts upon it. Patterns of relationships between problems should evolve, and a network of conceptual relationships should be formed. Use arrows to represent the direction of impact: i.e., problem A leads to problem B.

(iv) Present the resulting problem map back to stakeholders as an aid to debate about problem solving.

In this research, Problem Mapping provided analytical distance from the interview transcripts. It assisted my movement away from the data to abstract thinking, and also my return to the data to ground the abstractions in reality. It presented an innovative way of structuring a problem using phenomena that had a direct relationship with problems as expressed by respondents. This made the maps appropriate foci for discussion and negotiation among stakeholders. The maps also enabled me to think systematically about data and to relate them in very complex ways. They revealed that the problem contexts clustered in three key problem areas (assessment, information provision and planning/management) which, if tackled on their own, could have had ramifications for the other problem areas. I particularly wanted this aspect to be grasped by stakeholders.

13.4.2 Contributions

This research has evolved an innovative problem structuring method that encompasses several key strengths: first, it represents highly complex problem situations in a manner that is amenable to analysis; second, it incorporates multiple viewpoints (everybody's problems can be represented); third, by using ordinary language, it makes problem situations more transparent to non-participants (a significant weakness of Rich Pictures is that they are often so idiosyncratic that they are unintelligible to outsiders); fourth, by describing problems in the terms used by interviewees, 'ownership' of the maps is enhanced; and fifth, no special skill (over and above the usual interviewing skills required by researchers) is needed to undertake it; and sixth, not all stakeholders need to be identified in advance.

Two significant weaknesses can also be identified, however. First, Problem Mapping is very time-consuming (the first phase took me a year to complete). This is usually an acceptable length of time for research projects, but in consultancy is likely to be far too long. Second, in this project the presentation of already structured problem contexts for negotiation did raise suspicions in some stakeholders. With hindsight it would have enhanced confidence if the maps were evolved collectively with them. However, there is no inherent reason why, once the problem statements have been defined, the researcher could not work participatively. This is something to be borne in mind for future applications.

13.4.3 Summary

This section has reflected on the practice of problem structuring in the study, and has drawn out the steps of a generalisable method which I call Problem Mapping. The strengths and weaknesses of this have been explored, and I conclude that Problem Mapping may be particularly useful in future situations where it is unclear who should be regarded as stakeholders: where there are multiple interacting problems; and when the researcher has sufficient time to conduct (or facilitate) an in-depth analysis.

13.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter has highlighted the major contributions of this research. These include insight for introducing the theory of boundary critique into practical interventions; use of Cognitive Mapping for exploring boundary issues and decision making in a way that is directly experiential; and use of Problem Mapping for situations in which it is unclear who should be regarded as stakeholders, when there are multiple interacting problems, and when there is ample opportunity for facilitating an in-depth analysis.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

14.1 INTRODUCTION

The time has now come to occupy a vantage point from which I reflect on what has been achieved by this study. It will be recalled that the paradigmatic home of this research was quite consciously decided as critical systems thinking. This was informed by the realisation that the paradigm is founded on the premise of expanding the horizons of the field of management to tackle, not only the objective aspects of problem contexts (as is the case with hard systems thinking), or the subjective and inter-subjective aspects (as with soft systems thinking), but also the normative aspects of defining and addressing problematic situations, which encompass the domain of power. The adoption of the research project was motivated by the desire to explore how theory and practice influence each other in the pursuit of improvement within a real life problem context. What happens when a method does not deal with a problem context as hoped, either due to deficiencies in the underlying theory or contingencies in the problem context? The basis of the research within the paradigm of CST offered exciting opportunities for exploring the theory-practice relationship, since it was felt that CST has significantly expanded the domain of competence for systems application. The thesis as a whole has completed one full theory-practice cycle. It started with an explication of CST theory, which then informed my practical application, which in turn informed reflections on contributions to the theory and practice of CST. Also, within the practical project, many theory-practice explorations were accomplished.

The first section of the thesis focused on the development of the paradigm of critical systems thinking, charting out discernible phases and their pertinent innovations. From a review of the literature, a number of key issues surfaced. It became evident that the core concept of holism, which is embraced by systems thinking, demands not a separation but a reintegration of the objective, normative and subjective realms (Midgley, 1992a). We need a pluralist approach (distinctive variety within a coherent whole) to theories of the nature of reality and our knowledge of it. This multi-rationality can provide theoretical support to the practice of selecting and mixing methods during interventions.

The issue of the selection and use of methods during interventions has also been examined closely by a number of authors within CST. A critical systemic approach to intervention requires awareness of many different methods and their underlying assumptions. One plausible and useful approach to methodological pluralism has been to mix methods in such a way that emergent properties are evolved that meet the needs of stakeholders (Midgley, 1997). "It is no longer possible to justify a critical approach from a purely theoretical position." (Mingers, 1997). In addition, the position of the researcher has been recognised as central to the whole process of selecting and mixing methods (Midgley, 1990a,b; Flood and Romm, 1996a). As has been identified by Outhwaite (1991) and Gregory (1994), researchers need to take responsibility for communicating with other stakeholders, ensuring that methods are selected through a dialogue process, but without ignoring the issue of power relations. The aim ought not be avoidance of interaction with the subject matter (the traditional scientific view). Rather, commitment and involvement ought to be regarded as essential conditions for obtaining insight and working towards improvement: "The social researcher now stands

at the centre of the research process as a requirement for understanding life" (Outhwaite, 1991:24).

In applying the above insights, the specific approach within CST adopted by this research was the Creative Design of Methods (Midgley, 1990a, 1995a, 1997). The theory of boundary critique is one aspect of this. The essence of the theory of boundary critique is that, in establishing boundaries, we are effectively demarcating that which we deem to be (temporarily) unalterable and that which is amenable to transformation. Important consequences flow from establishing boundaries, so it is necessary to reflect on these (involving other stakeholders) before final decisions on boundaries are made. Section one of this thesis therefore equipped me with insights, as well as CST guidelines, to undertake the activities covered in section two of the thesis.

Section two started by discussing the theory-practice cycle which, as I observed earlier, was used to structure the entire thesis. This section also introduced the key concept of boundary critique, as well as the methods applied in the study. A narrative of the intervention was provided, interspersed with chapters presenting the output of my research. This was then used as the basis for reflection in section three of the thesis.

Section three reflected on, and highlighted, three innovations that emerged out of the practical application of CST: first, it was demonstrated that the theory of boundary critique can inform intervention through the design of methods (boundary critique need not be an activity undertaken prior to the choice of methods); second, a critique was conducted of Cognitive Mapping, which was revealed through practical application to

have significant limitations; and third, a new method called Problem mapping was designed.

14.2 REVISITING THE AIMS OF THE THESIS

At this point in time I undertake to revisit the aims of this research. The main aim of this research was to explore the interactions between theory and practice within the paradigm of Critical systems thinking. In the context of this research the theories included those encompassed within the concept of boundary judgement, problem structuring, the methodologies of Critical Systems Heuristics, Idealised Planning and the Viable Systems Model and the methods of Rich Pictures, the twelve heuristic questions and Brainstorming.

From this broad aim the following specific objectives were evolved through the research process as presented in chapter one.

- To clarify how boundary judgements are made in practice during interventions, especially how the theory of "boundary critique" informs practice.

- To produce a critique of Cognitive Mapping, a constructivist method which was found to have significant limitations.

- To design a new problem structuring technique capable of systemically expressing the concerns of a diverse variety of stakeholders.

- Using the above, to systemically express the problematic situation facing housing services for older people.

- To facilitate a process for developing a model for the multi-agency management of housing services that is based upon the local requirements of stakeholders, including users of services.

These objectives have been achieved within the context of this study in the following ways. First, the research has evolved a new problem structuring technique. This was initially developed to meet the local contingencies of the research situation (especially the impossibility of identifying all the stakeholders in advance, and the need to deal with a multiplicity of problem definitions) as reported in chapter ten. Then, in chapter thirteen, I reflected on how this experience could inform the creation of a method that might be used more widely. Problem Mapping was the result. Problem Mapping has several characteristics that may prove useful in other research situations: as found in chapter thirteen.

Second, I used Problem Mapping to systemically express the problematic situation facing housing services for older people. The main concerns here were; promoting cooperation through the realisation by stakeholders that they all faced similar and interrelated problems, to impress upon the stakeholders the interactive nature of the problems and to make the problem map the focus of discussion rather than individual stakeholders per se. The problem maps (Figures 10.1 and 10.2), along with the text in chapter ten explaining them, have been published by Policy Press (Midgley, Munlo and Brown, 1997). Therefore, this information is now in the public domain.

In my use of Cognitive Mapping my concern was to enhance the legitimacy of the process by working with boundaries based on authentic experiences other than those officially established by outsiders. I wanted to balance the ideal with the experienced reality. The main issue was that of going beyond espoused theories and access what obtains in practice. One possible approach was the mapping of individual decision making.

I produced a critique of Cognitive Mapping (chapter thirteen) following my realisation that this method was unable to deliver the kind of information about decision making in the housing system that was initially anticipated (see chapter nine for details). This critique supported the comments made by other authors (especially Jensen-Butler, 1981), and also made two new contributions to the debate: first, I argued that, when respondents do not perceive that they have choices open to them, the use of Cognitive Mapping founders; and second, I highlighted the fact that Cognitive Mapping fails to reveal the reasons why particular choices are perceived as important by respondents. The latter is a result of the theory guiding the method (Kelly's, 1955, personal construct theory) which assumes that reasoning follows from action, not vice versa. Thus, the choice which lies at the centre of a cognitive map is described in terms of the actions leading to it, but not in terms of the reasons why these actions and the choice itself are significant.

On boundary judgement my interest was on how to apply the theory of boundary critique in a way that is consistent with the principles of critical systems thinking. That is in a way that secures improvement, promotes critical awareness and applies methodological pluralism. The purpose was to continuously maintain vigilance against

various forms of marginalisation whilst at the same time avoiding stalemate of the research process. This was also important for accessing issues that could help build up a case for seeking a mandate to modify the original agenda.

Fourth, in chapter thirteen, I reflected at length on how the theory of boundary critique informed my intervention. The key insight generated from this reflection was that boundary critique was translated into practice through the design of methods throughout the intervention. This challenges the view that boundary critique is a purely reflective activity undertaken prior to intervention, or that it is something that only has value when coercion has been identified (Flood and Jackson, 1991b) (This is the stance in TSI). I have provided concrete evidence that it is possible to make boundary critique an integral part of an intervention, and that issues of inclusion, exclusion and marginalisation are relevant in a wide variety of contexts, not just those characterised as coercive.

Fifth, this research generated a process for evolving a model for the multi-agency management of housing services based upon the local requirements of stakeholders, including service users. The model, using Beer's (1985) Viable System Model as a template, has been published in Midgley, Munlo and Brown (1997) along with recommendations for adapting it for new local uses. As far as I am aware, this is the first time that the VSM has been used to develop a system for integrated user involvement and multi-agency working.

14.3 OMISSIONS AND LIMITATIONS

A study of this magnitude based on a real life problem context cannot fail to benefit from critical reflection. There is always the desire to do something better with hindsight. The effective implementation of the multi-agency management model evolved assumes the existence of a democratic culture. Perhaps an explicit activity aimed at establishing this culture could go a long way towards ensuring a lasting success of the model. The group entrusted with ironing out disagreements between stakeholder groups with respect to attributes of an ideal housing services system could have been more representative to broaden the basis of the final list of attributes. The issue of central government legislation with its overarching influence could have been tackled more vigorously to ensure a positive climate in which to implement the model. It is all too easy however long after the intervention to ignore all the contextual factors that in fact shaped the outcome of the research. In this respect therefore I would propose that a rational way of identifying omissions and limitations is through the opening up of this thesis to critique by other parties. The benefit of such an approach is that it allows the surfacing of any weaknesses through dialogue other than monologue. It also helps address the practical problems of obtaining professional distance from my own work.

14.4 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

An academic work of this nature is bound to have limitations: the requirement to fit in with the sponsors' terms of reference; the necessity of conforming to stakeholders' programmes of work; and most importantly the inevitable problem of having to shelve theoretical exploration in order to get on with field work, all imposed restrictions on the

depth and scope of the research process. I can think of a number of issues left unexplored that may give rise to future research, but here I wish to highlight just two:

1. The nature of CST research proposals:

If we are going to conduct research that is committed to improvement within local contexts (the boundaries of which need to be critically defined), how much detail should be put in proposals? I have to ask, did the methods included in the proposal for this research facilitate or restrict my ability to take a critical approach? I certainly spent a lot of time trying to make Cognitive Mapping work, which might have been better spent in other ways. In this instance I was fortunate that the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (and the agencies in the two participating regions of the country) supported me in deviating from the original proposal. However, in another situation I might not have been so lucky. I therefore suggest that some time might usefully be put into researching the impact of intervention briefs on subsequent intervention activity. It might also be worthwhile exploring ways in which briefs might be evolved more participatively.

2. The nature of the client organisation:

In this study it was possible to follow CST principles of reflecting on boundaries as the research progressed, and also taking into account a variety of different stakeholder perspectives. This was no doubt facilitated by the fact that the work was paid for by an independent charitable body, and multi-agency working was an explicit focus of the research. If, however, a commissioning organisation wanted an intervention to be conducted within its own boundaries, would boundary critique be so easy to practice? Midgley (1995a) criticises Flood and Jackson (1991b) for taking organisational boundaries for granted in their consultancy practice, and it would be interesting to

explore the extent to which boundary critique can be practised in more traditional organisational interventions.

These two issues, and others, are worth exploring in further research. I look forward to future opportunities for conducting interventions that are informed by CST, and I will endeavour to address the above questions. For the time being, however, I will conclude by submitting that this research has made specific contributions to the theory and practice of CST (especially the theory of boundary critique and Problem Mapping), and indeed to the practice of multi stakeholder interventions more generally. It has for the first time used a constructivist method, Cognitive Mapping, within a critical intervention in conjunction with the application of VSM to organise multi-agency working. It has demonstrated the principle means by which the theory of boundary critique (hitherto articulated only at a conceptual level) can be brought to bear on practical interventions. It has provided valuable insight into the practical limitations of Cognitive Mapping and demonstrated its potential role in interventions informed by CST as well as how it can benefit from methodological pluralism. It has also evolved an innovative problem structuring method; Problem Mapping. This is a distinct method, derived from a problem context and can be generalised. As such, the research represents a signigicant contribution to the theory and practice of critical systems thinking.

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APPENDIX 1

PROJECT PROPOSAL

Developing Housing Policy using Information from Assessments of Older People

Background

Since the April 1993 implementation of the National Health Service and Community Care Act (1990), local authorities have had responsibility for assessing the individual needs of Older People (amongst others) for social services, and ensuring that these needs are met. The assessments that are now being conducted inform many decisions about service provision to individuals. However, if aggregated, they may also provide useful information to policy planners about the health, social services and housing needs of older people, and addresses the question of how best to aggregate individual need and feed the resulting information into the policy making process.

Of course, a great deal of research has already been conducted into the policy implications of both housing needs assessment (e.g., Leutx et al, 1988: Etten and Kosberg, 1989; Soane and Mathew, 1991; Whiteley and Brittain, 1993). However, this research generally makes the assumption that, if it is possible to provide an accurate picture of the needs of a population, policy making will be better informed. There is a key problem with this: it treats the relationship between good information and good decision making as unproblematic. Policy makers necessarily have to take many things into account when reaching decisions about service provision, including the wishes of powerful others (both within their own and other agencies) who they work with on a regular basis. The information they receive in the form of reports may well have to be weighed against other factors in the decision making process, so the eventual policy outcome may not wholly reflect identified needs. The current proposal is to research the ways in which information from assessments is used *in practice* to inform policy making: this will involve building a picture of the flow of such information through organisations, and the role it plays in the decision making processes of different stakeholders (Councillors, Officers, CHC representatives, etc.). A two-stage research process will be used:

- Two evaluations will be conducted of the use made of information from assessments of older people: one with a local authority in the North of England and another in the South.

- These will then be followed by a series of facilitated planning workshops to be conducted with relevant stakeholders (including service users and their advocates) to develop practical action plans for improving the use of information from assessments of older people in determining housing policy. Issues relating to the effectiveness of consultation mechanisms and the ethos of the local authority will be addressed through these.

Aims

The aims of this research are:

- To build a picture of how information from assessments of older people is actually used in developing housing policy.

- To work with stakeholders in the policy making process in order to develop practical action plans for improving the use of information.

- To test out an innovation in planning methodology that facilitates the participation of service users, their families and their representatives.

Policy Relevance

The outputs of this research will have clear implications for both policy and practice, There is general agreement that, within resource constraints, policy making should reflect population needs: this study will reveal where factors other than assessed needs are determining policy, and what can be done to improve the situation. The implications for policy and practice are therefore as follows:

- The study will have direct implications for the local authorities involved. They will be able to develop their working practices through the research itself.

- It will have implications for other local authorities involved in developing housing policy in relation to provision for older people. The outputs of the evaluations and planning workshops will offer clear recommendations that any local authority should be able to take up to improve the use of information from assessments.

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- It will have implications for other activities undertaken by local authorities and service purchasers more generally. The notion of policy making reflecting population need is not only relevant to housing for older people, but is a general principle. Similar issues of information use and decision making will exist in many planning contexts, and findings of this research should be relevant across the board.

- It will have implications for the promotion of user involvement in planning. Successful use of the planning methodology to design improvements in the use of information will result in the generation of a new model of planning which may be adapted and adopted by any agency.

This work is particularly timely for two reasons. The first is that a full year has passed since the National Health Service and Community Care Act (1990) came into full effect. Having developed and tested out their assessment practices, local authorities are now in a position to reflect on possible wider uses of the information they are gaining

about client needs, This research will form part of that process of reflection. The second reason that this work is timely is that user involvement is becoming a priority concern in many areas. By integrating mechanisms for user involvement into the planning methodology to be used in this research, it is hoped that a model for good practice can be provided that will have general applicability.

Methods

The evaluations and the planning workshops will be held in two different geographical locations in order to off-set the possibility that the results will be due to peculiar circumstances that only obtain in one area. The methods to be used are described below.

In conducting evaluations of the use of information from assessments in policy making, it will be necessary to uncover the perceptions of key stakeholders involved in the policy making process. An effective means of doing this is by using a well-tested method called *Cognitive Mapping* (see, for example, Eden, Jones and Sims, 1983). This allows the researcher and the person being interviewed to map his or her beliefs about causal relationships between elements in a decision making process. The map takes the form of a diagram with various elements linked by arrows. Where an arrow links two elements, the strength of the person's belief that there is a causal relationship is represented by a numerical value assigned to the arrow.

The strengths of this method are that:

- It represents complex information in a visually accessible form. This will be particularly important for the evaluations because of the need to appreciate at a glance interrelations between many different factors in policy making.

- It allows one to work with individuals confidentially, representing their views in a manner that is not likely to identify them when they are made public. This is crucial to the proposed research: people will be asked to discuss relationships within and between agencies, and they must be guaranteed confidentiality for the outputs of the research to be meaningful.

- Different stakeholders have different roles in the policy making process: some collating information, others using what has been collated, etc. Cognitive Mapping allows us to look at the shaping of information at each point in the organisation. We can see how the output from one individual becomes the input for the next. Cognitive Mapping can reveal the factors that affect the form of both the inputs and outputs. There is, however, a significant weakness to the method:

- Although the maps are developed together with interviewees, the researcher is still required to present a summative report of the whole evaluation exercise at the end of the day. Cognitive Mapping presents a picture of what is happening, but it is arguably not enough to base recommendations for improvement on. To be genuinely useful, such recommendations need to be developed through negotiation with participants in the research so that they can have 'ownership' of them (see, for example, the work of Checkland, 1981).

However, this weakness is corrected in the proposed research by the planning workshops that will follow the evaluations. The methodology of these is described below.

It is proposed to adapt *Soft Systems Methodology* (Checkland, 1981); Checkland and Scholes, 1990) for the purpose of planning improvements to the use of information from assessments of older people in policy making. Soft Systems Methodology is a well-tested approach that structures planning in the form of a series of workshops in which participants are asked to do the following:

(1) Produce a '*rich picture*'. A rich picture is a visual representation of the situation people currently find themselves in. It is usually a mess of numerous drawings and arrows showing the interconnections between the various facets of the situation.

(2) *Identify relevant systems to be designed.* From the rich picture, certain themes emerge. These are used to identify a list of relevant systems that need to be designed for the situation to be improved.

(3) *Elaborate the relevant systems.* Each of the relevant systems is then looked at in detail to identify who it should serve, who should do the activities associated with it, what its purpose is, what assumptions it makes, who could prevent it from working, and what environmental constraints it has to take as given.

(4) *Produce models of activity systems.* Each of the relevant systems is then elaborated further. For each one, a 'map' is produced of the activities that need to be undertaken within it.

(5) *Allocate tasks.* The process then ends with participants discussing *who* should undertake the activities, *how* and *when.* An agenda for practical action is therefore produced.

Two adaptations of Soft Systems Methodology are proposed. One of these is perfunctory, while the other represents an important innovation in planning methodology. The perfunctory adaption is that the outputs of the evaluations will be used as the input for the planning: it will therefore be possible to dispense with the first stage of Soft Systems Methodology; production of a 'rich picture'.

The second adaption is arguably more important, as it is designed to facilitate user (and advocate) involvement, It is proposed to identify different groups of stakeholders (e.g. councillors, Officers, older people in housing need, carers, etc.) and conduct separate planning workshops with each of them. The outputs of these workshops will then be collated and presented back to the stakeholder groups so that they can comment on each others' ideas. A further workshop with each separate group will then be conducted so that they can take account of the feedback offered to produce a final action plan. The outputs form these workshops will then be taken to a group of stakeholder representatives who will produce an overall plan for improvement. The purpose of separating the stakeholder groups initially is to allow people to express dissenting views

in confidence: this will be particularly important for the user group, for example, because there may be a reluctance to talk in front of professionals.

The method of planning has a number of strengths:

- It creates an intensive focus for the activity in which participants can spend an uninterrupted period of time concentrating their minds on the task in hand.

- It provides a structure so that discussions are less prone to fragmentation, fudging or drift.

- Participants are encouraged to contribute their individual expertise to the development of a common vision. It therefore respects the unique perspectives introduced by each stakeholder group and harnesses them to practical effect.

- The experience of participating in the workshops, and the report that emerges out of them, becomes a solid foundation for subsequent action and further discussion.

- Whole plans are developed so that everybody can see their place in the system.

There is, however, a significant weakness to the method which it is important to acknowledge:

Physical frailty can be accommodated by conducting the workshops in residential homes so that residents can participate without the strain of a journey. however, mental frailty is another matter. Soft Systems Methodology places an emphasis on debate, so many older people with dementia will not be able to participate effectively, or in some cases at all.

This weakness will be addressed through an exploration of the resources available in the local areas in which the research is conducted. If advocates can be identified, they will be involved. However, older people with physical but not mental disabilities will certainly be involved even if advocates for people with dementia cannot be.

Taken together, these methods of evaluation and planning offer a powerful approach to the proposed research. They allow a picture of the use of information from assessments of older people to be built up, action plans for improvement to be designed, and user participation to be facilitated.

Timetable

A timetable for this research is presented on the next page:

1 Aug. 1994 - 1 Nov. 1994 (3 months)	Preparation phase. Making and finalising contacts. Recruiting a Research Assistant.
1 Nov. 1994 - 1 Jan.1995 (2 months)	Training the Research Assistant to use the methods
1 Jan. 1995 - 1 Sept. 1995 (8 months)	Conducting and writing up the two evaluations.
1 Sept. 1995 - 1 May 1996 (8 months)	Conducting and writing up the planning workshops.
1 May 1996 - 30 July 1996 (3 months)	Writing reports and articles.
1 Aug. 1996 - 31 Jan. 1997 (6 months)	Period in which articles submitted to practitioner publications will appear, leaflets about the final report will be circulated, and copies of the final report will be sent out.

This is a total of 30 months. However, the empirical work and writing up will only take 21 of these months: the other 9 are for preparation and dissemination.

Staffing

The applicant is Dr. Gerald Midgley, for whom a curriculum vitae is enclosed. He is Deputy Director of the Centre for Systems Studies at the University of Hull with responsibility for developing and leading the Centre's community research activities. He is experienced in using the proposed methods and will train and supervise a Research Assistant who will undertake most of the empirical work. Dr. Midgley will also contribute significantly to writing up the research. The budget includes provision of his salary for a period of four months, and he will be free to contribute this amount of time to the project over the whole period it is running.

In addition, it will be necessary to recruit a Research Assistant for a period of 21 months. This person will do the bulk of the empirical work, and will also contribute to the writing up.

Dissemination

The centre for Systems Studies is committed to disseminating research results to practitioners and policy makers as well as academics. In addition to the reports required by the Foundation, the following dissemination activities will be undertaken:

The results of the evaluation and planning activities, together with the model of planning developed, should be of interest to policy makers and administrators in local authorities and other agencies. To reach this audience, the Centre for Systems Studies will publish a report of the research which will be sent out free of charge to anybody who requests it. Copies will be sent to practitioner publications for review, and local authorities will be informed of the publication of the report through a nationwide leafleting exercise. The Centre links into many different practitioner networks through various organisations and publications, and our policy is always to write a short summary of each piece of research which is then modified for particular audiences and

published in at least three different places. Thus we are able to inform a wide variety of policy makers and practitioners of our activities, any of whom can then access further, in-depth information free of charge.

The methodological innovations in this research should also be of interest to academics. This audience can be reached most successfully through publications in refereed journals. It is anticipated that at least two refereed journal papers will result from this research.

Other Support

The University of Hull under takes to provide accommodation and overheads (except employment overheads) for the researchers, as well as library facilities. The University has a policy of waiving its usual charge of 40% project costs for overheads when a grant comes from a charitable trust. No other funding has been sought or received for this work from any other source. A budget using the Foundation's standard form is enclosed with this proposal.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is proposed to conduct a major research and development project to look at how information from assessments of older people is used in practice to inform the development for housing policy. This project will also seek improvements in the use of information from assessments, involving service users in defining what form these improvements might take, so that policy can more directly reflect the needs of older people. The outputs from this research should add to our knowledge of decision making in local government in a key area of current concern and be of general benefit to local authorities seeking to improve their planning activities.

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APPENDIX TWO

A DESCRIPTION OF NORTHLANDS

Northlands is one of five metropolitan borough councils. It has a corporate structure of organisation.

In the Autumn of 1992, the Council was reorganised from the top down. All areas of service and operation were devolved down away from traditional departments, ending up with 270 areas of responsibility. These were regrouped into 15 functions and not the traditional service departments. There is no Chief Executive; the statutory titles of Head of Paid Service, Monitoring Officer, Director of Social Services and Chief Finance Officer are held by individual Executive Directors. The executive directors do not hold budgets.

The old Social Services for Adults has been replaced by the Care in the Community function. This is organised in two divisions: the Care Management Division and the Housing and Social Care Division. Staff in the Care Management Division asses needs. Housing and Social Care Division staff provide many services including sheltered housing. Homecare, Care Call and Residential Care homes. There are six teams who offer a service to people who require assessments; the Community Rehabilitation service The Community Learning Disabilities team, the Adult Teams, the Hospital Social Work Service and the Housing Needs team. Other functions include the Housing Management Function which plays the role of a council landlord, and the Corporate Policy Function which has responsibility for a whole range of policy initiatives and development, and is the home of the Research Team.

There is also a committee and elected member structure which runs alongside the administrative and officer structure. In addition to six standing committees, there are four policy or client based committees, one which is an Older Peoples' Policy Committee. The remit of these Committees is to concentrate on the individual client group and to review and look at services in relation to that client group; The Social Affairs Committee covers Housing and Care in the Community.

At the local level there are 7 Area Housing Committees made-up of tenants representatives, an area Housing Manager, Councillors that represent the area and an officer of the Public Works Department. These look at issues that are peculiar to those council areas. Minutes of their meetings are taken to the Housing Function. The Head of the Function decides whether the issues require local action or whether they are broad enough to require a report to the Social Affairs Committee. While the Area Housing committees do not control a budget, each one of them has some funds for local initiatives.

In Northlands the Newcity County Council and Northlands Health Authority is the Purchaser of Hospital and Community Health Care Services. The majority of these services are provided by the NHS Trust, Northlands Health Care. Family doctors have

been appointed as GP links and locality representatives by the Health Authority. They assist the programme of locality purchasing which centres around local clusters of GP practices. Many services for older people provided by the voluntary and private sectors within the borough are financially supported by the council, the Family Health Services Authority and the District Health Authority. Providers include Age Concern, and the British Red Cross. The Council also supports the Anchor Housing Association "Staying Put" Scheme. The Community and Health Care Forum represents many voluntary groups of both users and cares, and providers of services to older people. A Development Worker has been appointed to that forum. The Health Authority and the council have worked to establish a Joint Inspection Unit which carries out the statutory requirement to monitor the quality of residential and nursing home provision.

The Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) is the highest level committee at which the Health Authority and the council meet together. It is an advisory committee and it oversees the production of the Community Care Plan. It also has the responsibility for: overseeing the spending of joint finance, a sum of money which comes from the regional Health Authority. The JCC sets up service reviews to look closely at particular areas of work, and Working groups to carry out new pieces of work. Consumer forums are represented on the service reviews, working groups and the JCC itself . They are, however, not represented on the implementation groups like the Inter Agency Project Management Group which existed till February 1995 and the Resettlement Working Group.

The Northlands Housing Strategy Forum forms the basis of a common agenda for the future planning and coordination of initiatives from all of the stakeholders, housing associations, private house builders, private landlords, residents and tenants groups, voluntary and independent sectors in partnership with other enablers including the Northlands City Challenge, North county Development Corporation and Northlands Council.

The Social Affairs Committee does not just look at housing and how the housing stock is managed but also on how other services can feed into any of the housing stock to their best use. The Policy Committee is said to be regarded as a "stick wielder" to some extent. It has sometimes used the press to ensure that other agencies meet their obligations accordingly.

The Executive Directors take their brief from the executive of the ruling political group. They are responsible for the steering and strategic issues. Manifesto commitments are transferred into action without the difficulty of considering which department should be responsible for the change. The Heads of Functions are responsible for operational decisions. The corporate policy function researches the information needed to plan the councils services and priorities. Needs are eventually put together by this function. It also monitors the council's policies on a corporate basis. The responsibility of housing development therefore lies within the corporate policy function.

As a result of the corporate policy planning process all new initiatives are assessed, priorities determined and new service areas developed and implemented through a corporate framework. The JCC holds one meeting each year which is specifically directed to feedback on user, voluntary agency views and consumer forums. The services which are not the subject of detailed service reviews are considered during the

consultations which go towards the preparation of the Community Care Plan. The production of the Community Care Plan is overseen by the Community Care Joint Working Group. This group has membership of officers from the Council, the Health Authority and Northlands Health Care Trust, as well as the community Health Council and the voluntary sector. It assumes responsibility on behalf of the Joint Consultative Committee for identifying issues raised during the consultation process. Results of early consultation on the Draft Plan also inform the priorities adopted by the Joint Finance Working Group (JFWG). Bids for joint finance are invited on the basis of its guidelines.

As part of the production of the annual Housing strategy, the council undertakes a series of studies looking at council housing stock and Housing Association activity. The data is statistically analysed and presented as a Housing Matrix. Chi-square values are calculated for council housing stock and applicants on the combined waiting list. The figures for housing stock are then deducted from the waiting list values. Positive values are those where the relationship between demand and a stock exceeds the borough average. Negative values mean the balance is below the borough average.

The authorities try to get people's views through a number of ways including public meetings, hosted by the Community and Health Care Forum; meetings between the Council, the Independent Inspection Team and providers on the private sectors. As well as service reviews, the Community Care Plan is sent to groups representing users of services, their carers, and providers of services. Private sector providers are sent copies of the plan individually and a copy is, at times, sent to each member of the Care Home Owners Association, which may coordinate some of the group consultations. Representatives of tenants are required to feedback through their associations to tenants as to what is happening. This also ensures that information about services pertaining to Community Care is made available. As a first step there is the Lands Directory of Self Help and Support Groups. This is available in libraries, GP Surgeries, Customer Services Centres etc. Complaints on services are made through the councils Corporate Complaints procedure. The Council also takes up issues for which it does not have any statutory responsibility. It's Customer Services Centres for instance receive and pass on complaints relating to health services as well as social services.

A Care Manager is assigned to each individual who has a complex set of needs. The Care Manager is responsible for making sure that the right services are put in place to meet the service user's needs in an on going way. The Council has Review Officers as well who check that the services provided to an individual who does not need a Care Manager are right for that person. The Review Officers offer a means with which the Council may monitor and adapt care packages to meet individual needs. Services will be set up immediately for any individual assessed as needing them. Physical adaptations or equipment may take longer to install or supply. In Northlands the demand for housing still outstrips the supply .

"Even though there have been reports nationally that there is too much sheltered housing; that is not reflected in our registers"

(Regional Official, Voluntary Housing Association)

Sixty percent of people are either owner occupiers or have mortgages. Private rented accommodation is very much in a minority. In 1993 more than 50 per cent of customer complaints received by the council were from older people.

APPENDIX THREE

A DESCRIPTION OF SOUTHTOWN CITY COUNCIL

Mopshire County Council has a two tier system. It has 17 Social Services areas, and 3 of these are in Southtown. Special Needs Housing is the responsibility of Social Services while Southtown City Council is responsible for general housing. The County Council has devolved its budget quite considerably. Effectively it has not really separated out the purchaser: provider split. Policy making is centralised with a number of advisors specialising in older people being based at County Headquarters.

The Council has undergone major restructuring with an emphasis on moving away from generic social services teams dealing with all clients in a locality to the development of more specialist teams. The re-organisation has also been aimed at achieving a Purchaser-Provider split in community care activities. Purchasers agree which services are to be supplied by providers to individual clients so that service agreements or contracts are at the micro level. Responsibility for designing investment strategy is said to lie with core purchasers. These represent Social Services, Health Commissions and Council Housing.

The City Council has a business style of management. The most senior member of the civic staff is known as the City Manager, a term emphasising the strategic managerial function of the job. It has core management teams covering areas ranging from Housing and Environmental Health to Community Care and Engineering. The teams consist of heads of services and support services. Each area has a budget and produces business plans. Committee members of the council approve targets in business plans. Housing has the largest budget.

Social Services have set up a client consultation network which revolves around five identified key client groups. The three areas in Southtown city make up one locality for the Older Persons forum. One of the Area Managers; The Area Manager from Southtown North, has a lead responsibility for older people at District level on top of her normal line responsibilities.

Each City Social Services area has adopted its own approach to locality planning. Portsmouth North is the only Social Services area that has developed planning down to a neighbourhood level. A neighbourhood links together small areas and localities that make some sort of community fence; they are areas that seem to hang together in terms of community services access and other aspects. Southtown North has 3 neighbourhood groups, They are all differently constituted according to existing local services but each group has a mix of a core of the statutory agencies; Housing, Health and Social Services, Voluntary Organisations, the independent sector, the residential sector and domicillary care sector. It is for them to identify what the local needs are and advise the management group that plan services for the whole area.

The planning structure promotes the Locality Forum as the foundation of joint planning. Ideas are developed and funded at local level. Projects requiring joint funding are referred to a Community Care Planning Group. Each Lead Manager; appointed by Health, Social Services and the Family Health Service Authority, reports to the planning group which meets bimonthly. The planning group incorporates the purchaser/provider split within the Health Authority; the provider and planner within Social Services; one nominated representation from the District Councils and two from voluntary groups. Coordination is through Joint Commissioning Boards. This model is aimed at maximising the input of the voluntary sector and user groups. In Locality Planning Groups older people are represented through pensioners associations, residents associations, churches and the police.

FIGURE 1: SOUTHTOWN CITY COUNCIL PLANNING STRUCTURE FOR OLDER PEOPLE

NEIGHBOURHOOD PLANNING GROUPS	(Identifies and advises on local needs
	(Organised according to Social Services Department areas.
LOCALITY PLANNING GROUPS/FORUM	(Translates needs into service requirements
	(Provides solutions based on each of the 3 (areas of the city. North, South and (Central. ((Composed of Health, Social Services, (City Council and voluntary organisations. (They decide on priorities and local (funding.
SOUTHTOWN CITY PLANNING GROUP	(Overviews care needs for priorities across (the city. It deals in joint funding and (making bids. (Housing associations are also involved.
DISTRICT WIDE STRATEGY AND COORDINATION GROUP FOR OLDER PEOPLE	(Provides some finance.
DISTRICT-WIDE COMMUNITY CARE PLANNING GROUP	(Make decisions on county-wide policy

(FOR ALL CARE GROUPS)

In the Locality Planning Groups priorities for bids for both joint funding and for Social Services funding are set. Gaps in the services are identified and fed into the Area Forum, which makes bids for joint planning or looks at alternative ways of financing identified needs. A Development Worker does the paperwork and prepares the bids. The rest approve it. At the Area Forums, activities are identified and finances drawn from a variety of sources.

Some of the needs may find their way into the Social Services commissioning plan, some in the Housing plan and some of them will go to Health Commissions. At the management level there is Health, Housing, Social Services, Police Managers, the independent sector representing the private residential sector, the Carers Association, the Voluntary sector represented by the Director Age Concern, Southtown. Issues are communicated to the area wide planning groups through discussions as well as the formal written plans that each neighbourhood group submits. The 3 Social Services city areas do come together to plan for the city as a whole. A lot of local needs will be planned for and met by the Locality Planning Group. Often services end up being funded on a partnership basis between the organisations that are involved in the planning process.

Needs assessments are related to forum decisions through the presence of Care Managers in the Neighbourhood Planning Groups, and the use of Social Services management reports which aggregate the needs that have been identified in the assessment process. The source of information to these forums however, tends to be mostly Headquarters.

The Council Housing has its own user involvement strategies as well; the Residents Associations. These are organised on the basis of Local Groups, Neighbourhood Groups, Area Groups and City wide Groups. Area Groups discuss the wide issues like streets, schools and lighting. The City wide Group discusses issues like rent increase, any forthcoming policies like pets policy, equal opportunities, etc. etc.

Southtown city council also owns houses on estates outside the city.

The more specialised housing is provided by a combination of the public and voluntary sector.

Age concern also works alongside Southtown council for community services in providing a gardening service and also with Southtown Housing Association to run a care and repair service.

Housing strategy statements have been used to assess the local need for homes and hostels, bearing in mind existing provision and the diversity of accommodation needs amongst those in the community.

Quantifying housing need has normally relied on administrative action, the Housing Waiting List usually combined with direct advice and assistance to individuals. Objective decision assessment has taken the form of comprehensive surveys. Housing Pathways, a quantitative model of assessing unmet needs, across areas and client groups

has also been applied. It is hoped that in future, information can be accessed from the Social Services Assessments and Care Management System (ACMS) . Information is fed on to this system by Care Managers.

Current information systems operating in Southtown include HANSNET, which is a major network and POLO, the Southtown city wide network.

APPENDIX FOUR

PROBLEM SURFACING QUESTIONNAIRE FOR MANAGERS

1. What agencies would you identify as having major roles to play with respect to housing for older persons? What are their specific roles?

2. What agencies are of great relevance to your organisation? Why?

3. Who coordinates all the agencies involved in older people's housing. How good is the coordination and how is it done?

4. What, to you, entails meeting need in the context of housing for older people?

5. What role(s) does your organisation play with respect to housing for older persons.

6. Are there other aspects of housing for older persons in which you feel that your agency ought to be directly involved, but is not. Why?

7. Are there agencies whom you feel ought to be actively involved in housing issues for older persons, but who are not?

8. Do you have your own institutional policy with respect to housing for older persons? How does it differ from the others?

9. What plans do you make with respect to housing for older people?

10. How are plans made? Is there any information collated and used for planning? What are the sources you use? Why?

11. Do older persons make inputs to these plans?

12. What other considerations have a bearing on your plans?

13. Who is responsible for planning within your agency?

14. Do you conduct your own needs assessments?

15. Who has the responsibilities for needs assessment?
    - collecting information
    - collating information
    - information dissemination.

16. What determines whether you will conduct needs - assessments?

17. What type of information is pertinent to your planning needs? Why?

18. Do you get information from other agencies? Which ones?

19. How do you decide which sources to consult? Why?

20. Do you share information on needs assessment results with others?

21. What determines which agencies you will share information with?

22. What is your job/role with respect to housing for older persons?

23. What decision areas are you responsible for in your job/role?

24. How do you go about making these decisions? Do you collate information and use it for planning?

25. What information do you use in making these decisions?

26. What are the sources of this information? Why these sources?

27. What assessments are more relevant to these decisions?

28. Who do you involve from within, or outside, your agency? Why?

29. What other factors influence your decisions? Why?

30. Which agencies or individuals do you consider crucial for the success of these decisions? Why?

31. How do you go about securing their commitment?

32. What other factors are likely to affect the implementation / success of your decisions?

33. Can you give me one decision that you made with respect to housing for older people at individual or collective level?

34. How did you go about it?

35. Do you provide inputs to decisions at other levels/positions?

36. How do you go about it?

APPENDIX FIVE

PROBLEM SURFACING QUESTIONNAIRE FOR POLICY MAKERS

1. What agencies would you identify as having major roles to play with respect to housing for older persons?

2. Are there agencies, who you feel ought to be actively involved in housing issues for older people, but who are not?

3. What roles(s) does your organisation play with respect to housing for older people in the borough?

4. Are there aspects of housing for older people in which you would like to have more involvement than at present?

5. what is your organisation's policy with respect to housing for older people? does this differ from the policies of other major agencies involved in this issue? What are the effects of these differences?

6. What decisions do you make? Why these decisions? (What is the aim?)

7. How do you go about making decisions? (What is the procedure?)

8. What general information is important for such decisions?

9. In your opinion, do you have access to adequate information for the decisions which you have to take? Why?

10. What are your sources of information for decision making? Why?

11. At the conclusion of your decision-making, what sources have the most influence on you?

12. Does the nature or format of information from the various sources differ greatly? What format do you find appropriate for decision-making?

13. How do you cross-check information from the various sources?

14. What kind of assessments are appropriate for the type of decisions you have to make?

15. Do you have access to needs assessment results by other agencies? Which ones are these?

16. Under what circumstances would you consider seeking information before making a decision?

17. What determines which source you will contact/rely upon for decision-making?

18. What other factors influence your decision-making? Why?

19. How much do the views of older people themselves influence your decisions?

20. Do you have any forward planning?

21. How are plans made? Is any information collated and used for planning?

22. Can you give me one decision which you have made with respect to housing for older people?

23. What was the purpose of this decision?

24. How did you go about making this decision?

25. What information was used in arriving at this decision?

26. What were the sources of this information? Why these sources?

27. What other factors influenced your decision? Why?

28. Which agencies or individuals were crucial for the success of this decision? Why?

29. How was their commitment secured?

30. What other factors could have led to the failure of this decision?

31. Is there any instance where there was a tie or deadlock in a meeting over a housing issue and you had to make a decision? How do you resolve this and what factors influenced your action?

32. How best do you think forward planning can be achieved with respect to housing for older persons?

APPENDIX SIX

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR OFFICERS WITH RESPONSIBILITIES FOR INFORMATION COLLECTION, COLLATION AND DISSEMINATION

1. What agencies would you identify as having major roles to play with respect to housing for older people?

2. Are there agencies, whom you feel ought to be actively involved in housing for the older people but are not?

3. What role(s) does your organisation play with respect to housing for older people?

4. Are there other aspects of housing for older people in which you feel that your agency ought to be directly involved, but it is not?

5. What would you say are the important issues with respect to housing for older people?

6. What other agencies carry out assessments? Is there some duplication? If so, why is this?

7. Is there a framework for conducting needs assessment with respect to housing for older people? How is information collected?

8. What kind of needs does your assessment focus upon?

9. The information you collect - is it pertinent to other housing agencies? If so, which ones and why?

10. Which agencies need your information? Which ones have access to it; and which ones do you feel make use of it?

11. How do you decide which information to collate, what format to use and who do you disseminate it to?

12. What other factors affect these decisions?

13. Do you have aggregated information?
    What do you feel is the affect of aggregation on individual needs led assessments?
    Is there an alternative?

14. Do you maintain a data-base? What categories of information does it carry? How do you use it?

15. Do you feel that the assessments you do contribute effectively to housing policy for older people? Why? How can this be addressed?

16. Is the information which you collect adequate for the decisions that have to be taken with respect to housing for older people?

17. What format is the information which you collect mostly in? Do you think this is an appropriate format for the decision makers?

18. Do you stop at information collection, or do you go as far as monitoring its influence over decisions? Can you give an example?

19. Do you feel that the information you collect is directly used for decision-making on housing for older people? Why?

20. Is the information you collect of direct use to future planning and if so, why?

21. How do you decide when to carry out assessments?

22. How do you decide who to assess and how to assess. How do you decide to whom you will communicate your assessment results?

23. What other factors influence your decisions?

24. Can you give an example of one assessment which you carried out that is of relevance to older people

25. What was the purpose of this assessment and how did you go about it?

26. How did you decide on the timing of this assessment and how to assess?

27. Who did you involve from within and outside your agency and why?

28. How did you decide how to collate the data and who to distribute it to?

29. Was this information used to inform decision-making? How?

APPENDIX SEVEN

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR WARDENS

1. What to you are the important issues with respect to housing for older people?
2. how would you describe your job?
3. Do you decide who comes to live in facilities? Who decides and why?
4. Are your views sought? Are you able to make recommendations? How and to whom? Example.
5. Do you follow up on your recommendations?
6. What are the main problems you experience with respect to either the residents/services you provide?
7. Do you have access to assessment records of residents? What do you do with them?
8. Do you sometimes identify additional needs to those which were communicated to you? What do you do with them?
9. What do you do with needs which cannot be met?
10. What do you feel about the assessments that are done?
11. Are you aware of other agencies that can meet individual needs? how can you access their services? Do you offer advice on them?
12. What is your opinion about the collaboration that exists between the various agencies? How does this affect your work?
13. Are you able to update residents needs? What do you do with the updated needs?
14. Do you feel that residents have the facility to influence plans and policies? How do they do this?
15. Do you feel that it is possible to take care of needs expressed by residents?
16. Are there services that residents would be willing to give up in return for something of their preference?
17. What are the provisions older people value most?

18. What decisions do you take: are these based on information? What source?

19. When do you find it necessary to seek information before making a decision?

20. Do you plan your work? How do you go about making plans?

21. What sources of information do you regard as reliable? Why?

22. How do you decide what information to communicate or withhold from your superiors; residents?

23. What information do you feel could help you carry out your functions better if it was available to you?

24. What are the things you do to make residents feel at home?

25. Do you feel that you have all the skills necessary for your job? Where do you feel lacking?

APPENDIX EIGHT

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR RESIDENTS

1. How did you find out about the present services you are enjoying?

2. Which other organisations could have assisted you with your needs? Did you approach them? Why?

3. How did you choose?

4. How did you know about these other agencies?

5. What are your personal circumstances?

6. How do you manage?

7. How did you come to access your present housing and services? Why this agency?

8. What housing and services did you expect when you approached the organisation? Did you get them? Why? How do you feel?

9. Who assessed you? From which organisation? How did you come to be assessed?

10. How was the assessment done? What did you like about it? What did you dislike about it?

11. What do you feel about being assessed?

12. Did you disclose your preferences/needs adequately? How did you decide what to tell and what not to tell? What other factors influenced your decisions?

13. Do you feel that the information you gave was enough for an adequate assessment of your needs? Why?

14. Was the assessment appropriate for an adequate appreciation of your needs?

15. How many assessments did you have? Did you feel that they were all necessary? Why?

16. Do you feel that your views or preferences were adequately considered during the assessment?

17. Do you feel that the assessment led to the provision of proper housing and services/your housing needs being met?

18. Did you have needs that were not addressed as a result of the assessment exercise? Why?

19. Do you know what considerations come to bear in the processing of your requests?

20. Did the method of assessment suit you? Why?

21. Would you go through another assessment? Why?

22. What improvements would you propose? Why?

23. Did you have a copy of your assessment?

24. What were your main housing needs and what were you offered instead?

25. Did you accept what you were offered? How did you decide to accept? What considerations did you make?

26. Did you know any existing options? Were you offered some options?

27. Is there any aspect of your present housing and services that you would give up in preference for something else?

28. What do you think happened to the needs that you expressed but could not be met?

29. Do you feel that your changing needs are being taken care of? Why? How best could they be addressed?

30. Do you feel that residents do influence the provision of services?

31. Do you belong to any housing forum? Why?

32. Do you feel that there is adequate collaboration between the various housing agencies? How does this affect you?

APPENDIX NINE

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR RESIDENTS' FORUMS

1. What were your expectations in establishing this forum? Do you feel that you are fulfilling them?

2. What is the composition of your forum like? Do you feel that older people are adequately represented?

3. How well are older peoples' views articulated through your forum?

4. Do you always manage to reach a consensus? What happens when a consensus cannot be reached?

5. Are your decisions based on information? From what sources? What sources do you consider reliable?

6. How do the views of older people who are not members of your forum get heard?

7. What has your forum identified as key issues with respect to housing for older people?

8. Do you feel that older peoples needs are being adequately addressed? Why?

9. Do you feel that through your forum, older people effectively influence plans and policies?

10. Do you actually initiate ideas or do you just discuss what is presented to you by a housing agency?

11. How much do you know about the range of services and service providers? How do you know about these?

12. What do you feel about the collaboration that exists between the various housing agencies?

13. Do you have a facility for collating and distributing the views of your members? How do you decide what to communicate and to whom?

14. To whom are resolutions/proposals communicated? Do you have the opportunity to follow up? What happens to issues that cannot be addressed.

15. What other agencies do you interact with? Which ones do you prefer to deal with? and why?

16. How do you feel about the present procedures for accessing housing services?

17. What are your views of the way assessments are being carried out?

18. How do your activities link with needs assessments that are being carried out?

19. What happens to unmet needs?

20. Are you aware of what aspects are taken into consideration in assessing whether to provide a housing service to an older person?

21. What do you feel about the services that are currently being provided?

22. How can your forum improve on its current activities to become more effective?

APPENDIX TEN

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR CARERS

1. What are the key issues with respect to caring for older persons?

2. What are your personal circumstances? What problems do you experience? How do you manage?

3. How did you access the present services?

4. What other agencies could have assisted you with your needs?

5. Which other agencies did you approach? Why?

6. how did you know about them?

7. How did you choose this one?

8. What do you think about the collaboration between the various agencies? How does it affect you?

9. What were your expectations when you sought assistance? Are they being addressed? Why?

10. How do you feel about your participation as carers? What do you feel should be done to make your role easier?

11. Do you belong to any housing forum? What are the advantages?

12. What do you feel about the measures for accessing services?

13. How did you come to be assessed?

14. How many assessments did you participate in?
    How were the assessments done? What did you like about them?
    What did you dislike about them?

15. Were the assessments appropriate for an adequate appreciation of your needs? Do you feel that your needs were adequately assessed?

16. Do you feel that you gave adequate information for a comprehensive assessment of your needs? Why?

17. How did you decide what to tell and what not to tell?
    What other factors influenced your decision?

18. Do you feel that your views or preferences were adequately considered in the assessments? Would it have made a difference if you were assessed by a different agency/individual?

19. Do you think your assessment result affected policy/plans? Why?

20. What needs were addressed as a result of the assessment exercise and which ones were not?

21. How did you decide to accept the services offered? Were you offered options or did you know of existing options?

22. Did the methods of assessment suit you? What improvements would you propose? Why?

23. How many assessments did you take part in before services were provided?

24. Did you have a copy of the assessments that were done?

25. Do you know what considerations come to bear in processing your request?

26. What do you think happened to the needs that you expressed but could not be met?

27. Would you take part in another assessment? Why?

28. Are there any aspects of the present services that you would be willing to give up in preference for something else?

29. Do you feel that your changing needs are being taken care of? Why?
    How best could they be addressed?

30. Do you feel that carers do influence the provision of services?

31. What information do you feel would enable you to carry out your roles better if you had access to it? Is it possible to get this information?

APPENDIX ELEVEN

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR POTENTIAL CLIENTS

1. To your knowledge, what services are available with respect to housing for older people?

2. What to you are the key issues with respect to older peoples housing?

3. How do you know about available housing services and their providers?

4. Do you feel that the available housing services for older people are adequate? What else would you like to be addressed?

5. How do older people access housing services?

6. What are your personal circumstances with respect to housing services?

7. What are your expectations with respect to housing services when you finally retire?

8. Do you feel that there is a likelihood of your expectations being met when the time comes for you to seek services?

9. What housing agency would you prefer to deal with? Why?

10. Do you feel that older people do have influence over quality and type of services provided?

11. Do you have the facility for communicating your expectations? Do you think they influence policy/plans?

12. How would you get in touch with a housing agency?

13. Have you sought help from a housing agency?

14. Do you know of any housing forum? Have you joined? Why?

15. How would you like to be assessed? By whom?

16. How would you decide which information to submit or withhold in an assessment?

17. What do you feel about the present procedures for accessing housing services?

18. What information do you feel could help you make better decisions with respect to housing services?

19. Do you think that there is adequate collaboration between the existing housing agencies? How does this affect you?

APPENDIX TWELVE

CHECKLIST OF QUESTIONS FOR PLANNING WORKSHOPS

1. What categories of older people should housing services serve/Who should benefit from the system?
2. What should the system aim at/what should the GOALS of the system be?
3. What should the measure of success be/when is the job of the service considered completed?
4. Who should determine what the system should do?
5. Who should be able to change the system/How should change be initiated?
6. Who ought to be the decision taker/How should major decisions be taken?
7. What resources and limitations should the decision taker have?
8. What should the decision taker have/not have control over?
9. Who ought to design the system?
10. What ought to be the critical design features?
11. Who should be considered as an expert and what should be their roles?
12. How is expertise to be defined/determined?
13. Who ought to guarantee that a new system is designed and put in place?/How should the system be adopted?
14. Where should the buck stop?/Who should take responsibility for the system's performance?
15. Is there anyone who is going to be affected by the system being designed who has not yet been mentioned?/What contributions should they make to the system and how?
16. To what extent should people have their fate in their own hands?/What choice should the system avail users?
17. What is the moral basis upon which the system should be based?/What ideals should the system aspire for?/What values should underlie the system?

APPENDIX THIRTEEN

DETAILS ABOUT THE PROPERTIES OF AN IDEAL HOUSING SYSTEM

KEY

Bold & underline: **Two or more groups said the same thing**

Italics: *Residents/Carers were the only group to say this*

Underline: Carers/Campaigners were the only group to say this

Ordinary text: Professionals were the only group to say this

Bold: **Comments added by managers from statutory agencies when discussing the output from the previous workshops**

WHO SHOULD BENEFIT FROM THE PROVISION OF HOUSING SERVICES TO OLDER PEOPLE?

The prime beneficiaries should be older people themselves, taking into account any special needs:

e.g., physical and sensory disabilities.

Ethnic minorities.

Need for social support/company.

Emotional.

Services should be available for those who choose to stay in their own homes as well as those in special housing.

Wider families and carers should also benefit.

The wider community should also benefit, in that housing should be available for mixed age groups, where the special needs of older people are met as part of this (although older people should be able to choose to live separately if they prefer).

PRINCIPLES UPON WHICH THE HOUSING SERVICE SHOULD BE BASED

Choice for the older person should be available.

It is important to maintain the variety of services and organisations that currently exist.

If there is going to be a variety of services and organisations, then there is a need to co-ordinate, work together and share information.

Where preferred, housing should be provided to a mixed age group, with the special needs of older people being met as part of this.

However, carers and campaigners said that there should be a lower age limit to exclude "rowdies".

Users disagreed, claiming that such problems could be handled through the enforcement of local rules.

Managers supported the user view. They argued, for example, that noise can be reduced through good building design.

While housing services should be provided to all age groups, even in the ideal world not everyone who asks for a service will be able to receive one. Therefore needs (e.g., health) should determine access. Age alone should not be a criterion.

Services should be available for everyone in need, whether they have money or not. However, people with money should be expected to pay.

It is right to ask people to sell an owner-occupied home to pay for residential services—inheritance is not a right.

However, carers said that this would penalise them, and argued that there is no ultimate financial need for people to be required to sell their homes. Resources could be made available if priorities were shifted at the national level.

Managers supported the user viewpoint on the whole, although they said that a "rent out" option would be useful in some cases, where rent from the vacated property can go towards the cost of a residential service. The plan for a vacated property should always be discussed as part of the care package.

Welfare is a higher priority than money.

[Researchers' note: this relates to the way in which residents felt that people should be treated, ensuring that rules are not enforced so rigidly that a person's welfare is compromised. This also relates to the point made by all groups (detailed later) that, while standard forms of assessing older people are necessary, they should be flexible enough in practice to take account of individual needs and circumstances].

People should have the choice of staying in their own homes as long as possible. That is, as long as they are mentally clear and able to make a decision.

However, managers reflected on the fact that all three groups had stipulated the caveat of mental clarity, and reached a different conclusion. Even if somebody has become mentally confused, it is often still possible to provide a home-based service. This has to be a matter of judgement and planning in each individual case.

[Researchers' note: this is in the spirit of the original thinking from the stakeholder workshops. People wanted to maximise choice and only reluctantly stated that mental confusion would have to be accepted as a barrier].

People should not have to move again and again as they become more dependent. Different levels of service should be provided in the same building.

People who live together (e.g., partners, relatives and friends) should not be forced to separate when one needs to move but the other does not. If they want, both should be rehoused together.

Under-used facilities should be shared with others in the community.

Management should be kept slim and efficient. The emphasis should be on planning and service provision, not administration.

ATTITUDES OF STAFF

Respect older people. Don't treat them as if they are a nuisance.

There should be efforts to remove any "macho" culture existing amongst staff, especially Wardens who interact with many older people on a day to day basis.

Understand that older people are sometimes "backwards in coming forwards". Give them time.

Make sure all staff have a working knowledge of different cultures.

THE ASSESSMENT OF NEEDS

Assessment is necessary because, even in an ideal system, not all wishes could be fulfilled.

People should have a single assessment that leads them to all services from all organisations.

There is therefore a need to have shared computer records.

Some of the carers and campaigners felt that this could become a "big brother" system, although most said that sharing records is unavoidable if one-off assessment is the goal.

Managers suggested that it should be possible to have a procedure that depends on trained assessment officers

accessing relevant agencies for the client. This would avoid the need for all agencies to have access to all information.

Assessment should have the following qualities:

Forms, leaflets, etc., should be written in plain English.

No unnecessary personal questions should be asked.

Correct information should be provided at all stages.

Assessment should be based around participation between all involved, with the older person in the "lead".

It should aim at providing guidance for a person, not "directives".

It should result in the generation of options, not a single outcome which a person has to take or leave.

All expressed needs should be recorded, regardless of whether or not they can be met.

A standard form should be used, **but assessment should be conducted flexibly, not always by the book.**

Assessment should be conducted following an expression of need, regardless of the age of the person.

It is important to take time to inform people about assessment.

Assessment should be undertaken by a single officer, but the older person should be able to choose to have friends or relatives present—or an advocate, possibly from the voluntary sector.

It is important to provide training for Assessment Officers in the *manner* of assessment (good human relations).

Training should also provide Assessment Officers with knowledge about the range of services available.

Priorities in assessment should be set by a group of people, including doctors and outreach workers in contact with users.

[Researchers' note: later, a consensus view of the ideal planning structure, which deals with prioritisation, is discussed].

DEVELOPING SPECIFIC SERVICES

[Researchers' note: most of the suggestions for developing services arose in the residents' group in response to peoples' perceptions of inadequacies in current provision. Therefore the list below does *not* represent the ideal range of services].

If priorities were different at national level (like they were thirty years ago) then staffing levels in homes could be improved.

Likewise, it should be possible to put more resources into Home Helps to support people in their own homes.

Home Helps should do all necessary work, not be limited to light duties, such as shopping.

A "Leisure Officer" should be funded to advise on activities for older people, and organise these activities where appropriate.

Linked with the issue of leisure, transport should be funded for older people to attend activities organised in residential homes.

An advocacy service should be provided.

Managers noted that all the above services are already available in the locality (e.g., while Home Helps no longer move furniture or clean, Age Concern now offer these services). They therefore stressed the desirability of an effective information strategy to link users with the organisations that can meet their needs.

BUILDING DESIGN

There was a strong emphasis on building new houses with lifetime needs in mind. A person should be able to move into a house when young, but it should already be built to accommodate their changing needs as they get older. This will ensure a more effective use of resources in the future, and will mean that more people will be able to remain at home when they become frail.

Buildings should not be high-rise, and should have some garden space (however small).

Buildings should be near shops and local amenities.

Different size dwellings should be available **so that people can bring in their own furniture (or not, as they choose).**

It is important to "design in" certain facilities in residential homes: e.g.,

Community rooms.

Laundry room.

Hairdressing.

Medical Services.

People should have a choice of facilities (e.g., a bath or a shower).

In residential services, people should be able to have their own rooms. There should be no forced sharing.

Good sound-proofing is needed.

INFORMATION PROVISION

Information about services could be provided in the following ways:

Via Wardens.

At coffee mornings in services.

By creating a video that people can watch.

On television.

Via GPs—*face-to-face advice, not just leaflets.*

Enclosed with benefit payments

There should be an "Information Officer" to give information to people face-to-face when they enquire about services.

Users said that this could be a volunteer (based upon some peoples' personal experience of a helpful volunteer).

Managers talked about adopting a "key worker" system where, following assessment, the older person could choose the agency from which their key worker would come. They also said that there should be an "Outreach Worker" whose job it is to co-ordinate the activities of volunteers. The task of the volunteers is to collect stories about unmet needs, service quality, etc., from older people that can be fed into planning and management. These volunteers could also provide face-to-face information as required.

This model is based on a consensus about quality and user involvement that emerged from all the workshops (see the later material on planning).

A furnished flat should be made available for viewing in each major housing scheme so that people can see what they will be getting in advance of moving. It is important, however, that this flat is situated where visitors will not disturb existing residents.

Users should be provided with a standard form with which they can assess potential homes before deciding whether to move in.

As people become more dependent, they should be told about living wills and granting power of attorney.

ISSUES OF LOCAL MANAGEMENT

A key-worker system should be adopted to ensure continuity for individuals.

> **Managers fleshed this idea out, saying that the user should be able to say at their assessment if they want a key worker, and if they do, whether they want that particular Assessment Officer or somebody from a named agency (e.g., Social Services, the Housing Department, the Health Trust, etc.).**

Unannounced evaluations of residential homes and their staff are important, *particularly in the case of private rest homes.*

People should have the freedom to keep animals, *except in shared accommodation.*

Rules of residential homes should be set by a professional group in consultation with users, rather than by a Warden alone, *but these rules should be enforced by Wardens.*

Wardens should have the role of "friend" rather than "manager".

Residents should always be consulted and kept informed on issues affecting them. A Residents' Committee should have the final say on major issues (e.g., changing the nature of the service).

Residents should be able to choose whether or not to have their families involved in care planning.

There should always be freedom, and respect for, worship.

There should be provision for visitors (over-night accommodation, meals, etc.) for a reasonable charge.

HOW SHOULD SUCCESS BE MEASURED?

User views are the key to evaluation.

User views can be accessed via:

coffee mornings

Residents' Associations

Questionnaires

An Outreach Worker *(users say that this should be a volunteer, to ensure independence)*

Reviews held with individual users (one-to-one interview).

It would be particularly useful to evaluate assessment forms by listening to user views about them.

Wardens could keep an informal log book of users' stories and views, but views related to specific staff should not be channelled through Wardens.

A voluntary worker could be used as a liaison between users and management to report issues.

The views of staff are also important, not just user views.

Both qualitative and quantitative data are necessary. Qualitative information (e.g., user views) gives immediate feedback regarding satisfaction and possible areas for improvement. However, quantitative data facilitates comparisons between services. Quantitative evaluation also allows provision to be related to long-term trends.

Rest homes should be regulated and inspected, and inspections should be unannounced. A grading system could be devised (like the hotel 'star' system).

Managers debated the merits of this. While some thought it was an excellent idea, others felt that it was too simplistic; a home might have excellent decor but poor staff support, and this would be difficult to portray in a star rating. Their preference was to have summaries of assessment reports made publicly available.

When a rest home is evaluated, this could usefully involve the evaluator working in the home for a week.

THE PLANNING STRUCTURE

[Researcher's note: there was remarkable agreement on what an ideal planning structure for older peoples' housing services should look like. All the groups also produced the same innovative ideas for promoting user involvement. However, one significant aspect of the consensus was later challenged by the managers. This was the stipulation that ring-fenced finance should be provided for housing services for older people. Details of the managers' reasoning behind the challenge will be provided after the planning structure has been described].

[Figure 13.1 is a diagrammatic representation of the planning structure suggested by all the groups]:

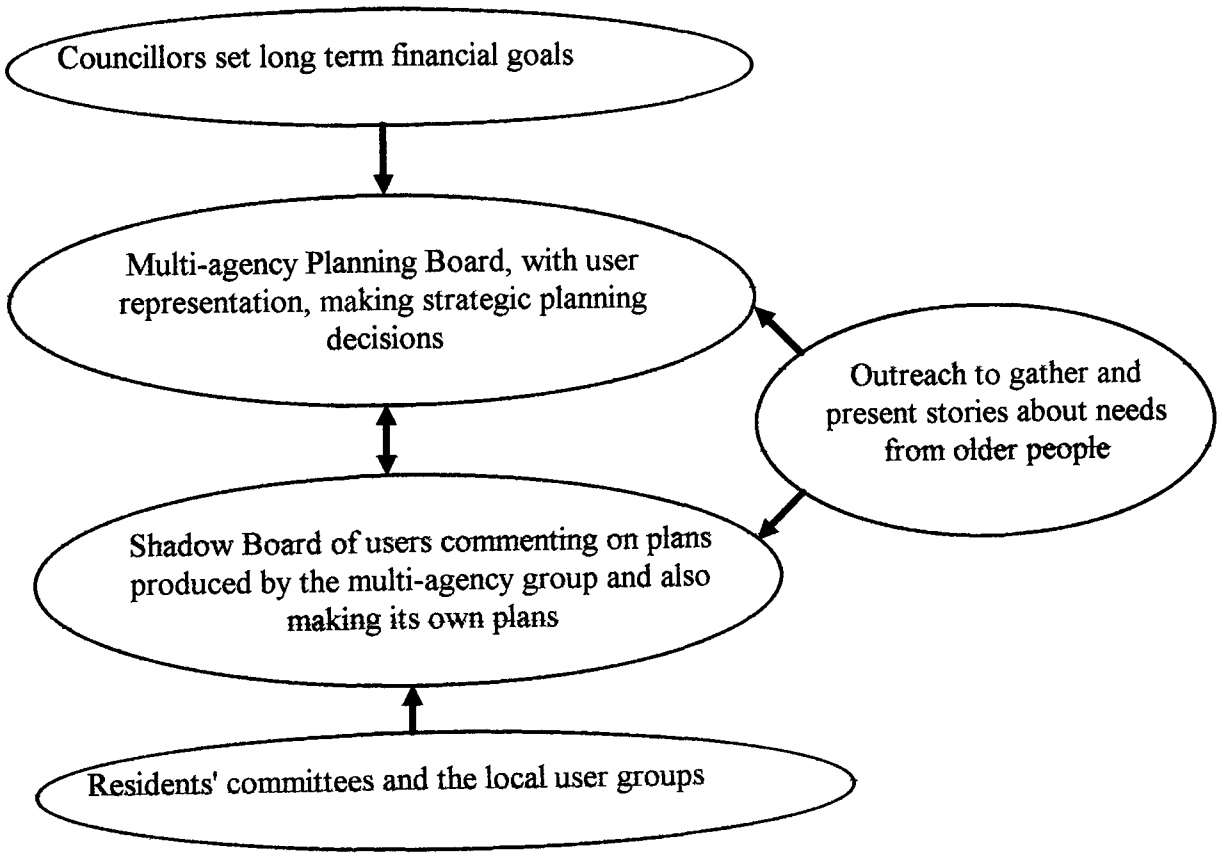


Figure 13.1 ***An Ideal Planning Structure***

[Researcher's note: This replaces some of the textual material generated by the groups].

[Researcher's note: an explanation of the diagram follows].

For medium-term strategic decision-making to be successful, long-term financial planning has to be undertaken by councillors (who are the financial controllers and also ensure public accountability). Long-term financial planning inevitably means ring-fenced finance for housing services for older people.

The Planning Board is the main decision-maker. It is a multi-agency, multi-expertise body with user and carer representation. However, the power of the Planning Board is balanced by the presence of a Shadow Board made up of representatives of user groups and residents' committees. This not only comments on the plans made by the Planning Board, but also generates plans itself (drawing in ideas from other user groups, residents' committees and individuals). Nevertheless, the Planning Board is the final decision-maker.

Because of the need to represent the views of older people not directly involved in planning, an Outreach Worker, co-ordinating the activities of volunteers, collects and collates older peoples' stories about their needs and experiences of services, and feeds these into both the Planning and Shadow Boards.

> **The idea of having an Outreach Worker co-ordinating the activities of volunteers was generated by the managers, who synthesised two of the ideas that were produced in the previous workshops: the professionals, carers and campaigners suggested the need for an Outreach Worker, but the residents said that they preferred to be in contact with a volunteer. The final outcome of an Outreach Worker co-ordinating volunteers gives the best of both worlds.**

There are three forms of user involvement in this system: representation on the Planning Board, participation in the Shadow Board, and communication of individual views via the Outreach Worker. If any one form of involvement breaks down, it can be regenerated by drawing upon the resources of the others (e.g., if interest in the Shadow Board was to drop away, it could be regenerated by involving new people identified through outreach.

[Researcher's note: the following are further issues and points surrounding the proposed planning structure]:

Plans should be fed 'upwards' from users. Planning should not just be about consultation downwards. Ideas might first be generated by a residents' committee or local user group, passed to the Shadow Board, and then be discussed and enacted by the Planning Board. Indeed, ideas may come from individual older people in the community via the Outreach Worker.

Representation on the Planning Board should include:

Users

Carers

Doctors

Solicitors (providing an independent voice)

Housing Officers

Social Services

Health Service

Person with knowledge of long-term trends (e.g., demographic)

The Outreach Worker

Architects

Environmental planners

Finance Officers

Voluntary Organisations

Councillors *(although users said only in terms of financial decision-making)*

Representative from a pre-retirement group

Representative from a builders' federation

There should be no more than twenty people on the Planning Board, and not more than two from any one of the above categories (to avoid domination by any sectional interest).

However, managers realised that two representatives of all the above will inevitably mean more than twenty people being involved. They therefore suggested that a larger group should be accepted. In addition, it was argued that, while professionals should be limited to two representatives, there should be more users (so that they can give each other support).

There should be more women than men on the planning board because more users and carers are women.

Consultation takes time, which must be built in to the planning process.

Councillors should be involved in planning *(although users said that they should only be involved in financial decision-making),* **but on the following conditions**:

They should undergo training to raise their awareness of housing issues affecting older people.

They should only work in external employment for 50% of their time, and do Council work for the other 50%. In this way they will have the time to get fully involved, but will not lose touch with outside work.

They should also be paid for their Council duties.

They should live in the areas they represent.

Managers disagreed with the residents' view that Councillor involvement should be limited to financial matters. Once ring-fenced finance is off the agenda (see below), the Councillors need no longer be solely responsible for financial management. This will free *trained and committed* Councillors to participate more generally in strategic planning.

[Researcher's note: The managers disagreed with the view that ring-fenced finance should be provided for housing services for older people. Their reasoning is detailed below].

Ring-fenced finance, combined with preservation of the diversity of existing agencies, effectively means the creation of a new purchasing organisation sitting 'above' all the other agencies—A 'super-purchaser' governing or replacing the existing purchasers. In the managers' view this would be neither feasible nor adaptable: it would be a large bureaucracy, incapable of handling the range of planning decisions that would need to be taken. In addition, it would mean the creation of an artificial dividing line between housing services for older people and other services. While current dividing lines (between Health, Social Services, etc.) may be overcome, new ones would be created that would be more difficult to justify given the residents' view (presented earlier) that need rather than age should be the defining factor in determining whether housing services should be offered. The alternative preferred by managers was agencies making a voluntary commitment to joint planning, and a similar voluntary commitment to funding jointly-agreed initiatives.

WHAT SHOULD PLANNERS CONTROL, AND WHAT SHOULD THEY *NOT* CONTROL?

The Planning Board should be about strategic planning.

Residents also said that operational issues should be discussed by the Planning Board because it is all too easy for planners to marginalise local, operational concerns.

However, this contrasts with the professionals' view. They identified a tendency for planners to become so reactive to operational concerns that they lose sight of the bigger picture.

Managers came to the view that both strategic and operational thinking are necessary, but that clarity is fostered by some separation of them. The primary role of the Planning Board should be strategic. Mechanisms to ensure operational review can be constructed elsewhere in the system.

Once the managers had decided that ring-fenced funding was off the agenda, this meant that the purchasing role of the Planning Board had disappeared. Hence, the Board could apply 'moral' pressure on individual agencies to follow agreed policies, but could not ultimately *control* their behaviour.

Other people and areas identified as specifically beyond the remit of the Planning Board's sphere of control were:

Anyone not involved in services for older people.

Individual client preferences.

Client appeals to independent bodies.

The activities of Government.

The Clergy.

The activities of specialists in the agencies.

WHO SHOULD HAVE FINAL RESPONSIBILITY FOR ENSURING THAT THIS SYSTEM IS IMPLEMENTED?

Local and Central Government.

Central Government because implementation of some aspects may need new legislation, plus the devolution of greater powers to the local level.

Responsibility also rests with the public who elect government.

However, managers stressed how little of this ideal system would require legislative

changes, and how much could actually be done straight away.

In one sense, everyone who has an input into the system has some responsibility for making it work.

WHO SHOULD BE CONSIDERED AN EXPERT?

The first group that everybody mentioned was service users.

However, the utilisation of their expertise cannot be taken for granted; there is a need to *enable* participation.

Expertise should be seen as residing in teams, not just in individuals.

In one sense everybody is an expert—the nature of expertise depends on the job in hand. However, the term "expertise" has negative connotations; perhaps "specialism" is a better word.

Specific forms of expertise (apart from user experience) that were identified include:

Medical

Financial

Legal

Building & Architecture

Welfare

Leisure

WHO IS AFFECTED BY THIS SYSTEM BUT HAS NOT YET BEEN MENTIONED? SHOULD THEY BE INVOLVED?

The next generation will be affected, in that they will be able to use the system when they get older.

This system will ultimately affect the whole community.

Specific groups who will also be affected include:

Builders.

Housing applicants on waiting lists.

The possible involvement of these groups was not discussed in the original workshops, but managers later said that builders could be represented on the

Planning Board by a representative from a builders' federation. The views of housing applicants on waiting lists could be gathered through outreach.

The younger generation will be affected, in that resources used to fund housing services will not be available for their own use.

Carers said that the younger generation should be involved through the recruitment of a youth leader or a teacher onto the planning board.

The residents also discussed this option, but concluded that first-hand knowledge of age-related needs is necessary for people to make a reasonable judgement about priorities.

Professionals said that the needs of future generations should be considered through the prediction of trends, and information about trends needs to be transmitted to the Planning Board.

In considering this disagreement, managers said that the boundaries of participation in planning cannot realistically be opened up to representatives of the younger generation without also representing other interest groups who might have a claim on resources. This would make planning unwieldy and impracticable. However, they said that it is

important to hear the views of people who are about to retire, and this should be done by bringing a representative from a pre-retirement group onto the planning board.

WHAT ARE THE KEY AREAS OF CHOICE PEOPLE SHOULD HAVE?

<u>Older people should have complete freedom of choice over their housing unless they are mentally incapable of making a decision.</u>

Also, people "at risk" may have a housing decision made for them.

As mentioned earlier, managers discussed the issue of mental incapacity and agreed that, even if somebody has become mentally confused, it is often still possible to respect the wishes they expressed when lucid, or to take account of non-verbal communication such as distress when leaving a familiar environment. Also, with respect to people designated "at risk", it is usually possible to talk

through issues of risk and leave the final decision with the older person.

An unlimited number of housing options should be offered (i.e., there should be no ceiling of three offers which, if declined, prevent another offer being made).

However, people should be helped to talk through the implications of their decisions and explore the reasons for turning down options.

People should have the choice of bringing their own furniture with them when they move into residential care.

In the (rare) cases when this is impossible, then they should definitely be able to bring items of sentimental value.

The basic principle with regard to choice over moving house should be that there is professional *input* into decision making, but the decision itself is taken by the older person.

THE VALUES THAT SHOULD UNDERPIN SERVICE PROVISION

There is value in service to the community.

Civilisation means taking care of the most vulnerable members of society.

It is important to improve quality of life and promote a happy old age.

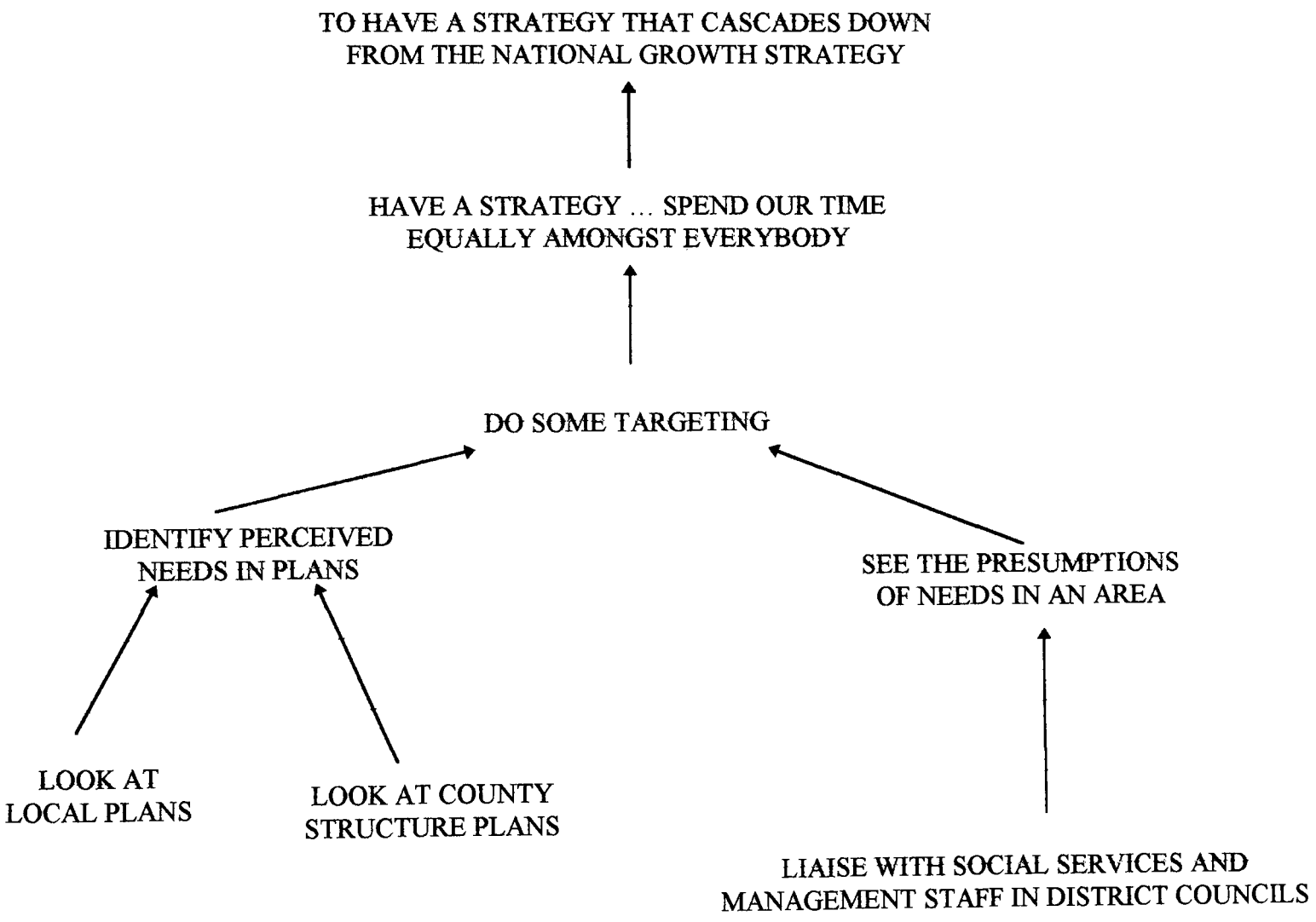
Independent living and decent housing should be seen as basic rights.

APPENDIX FOURTEEN

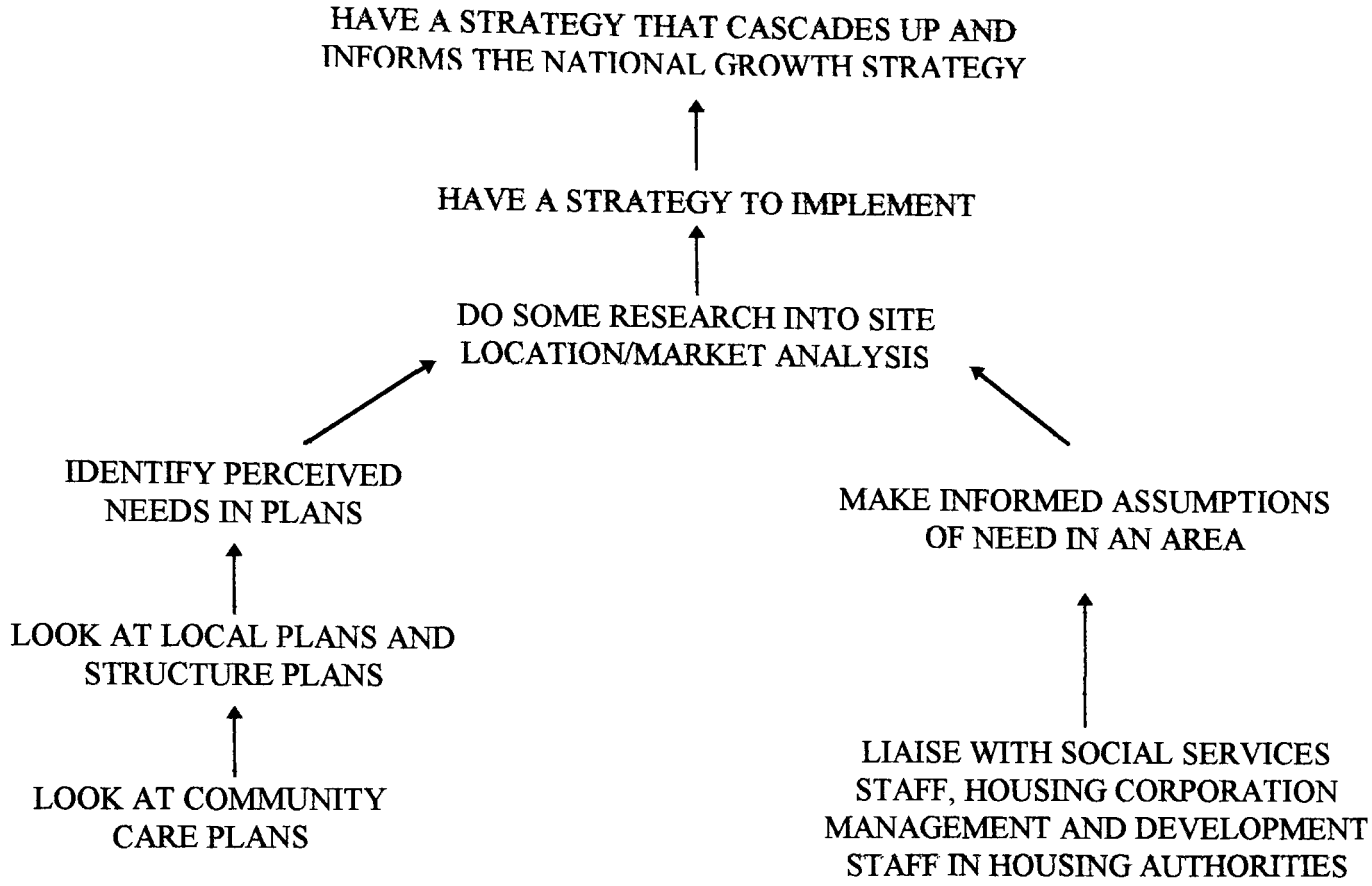
EXAMPLES OF COGNITIVE MAPS

MAP OF RESPONDENT 1. A DECISION ON SHELTERED HOUSING STRATEGY

ORIGINAL MAP



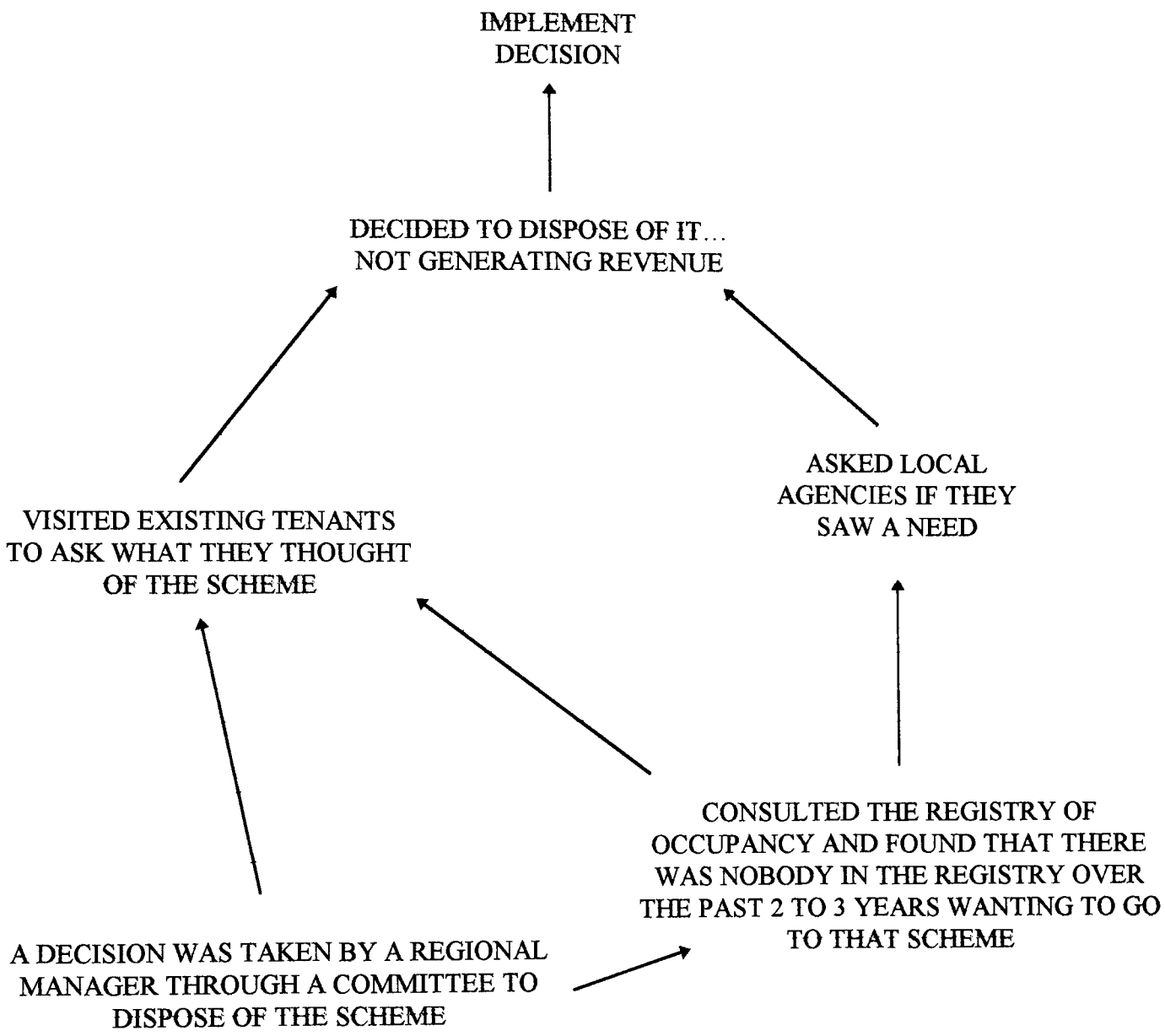
CORRECTED VERSION OF MAP OF RESPONDENT 1



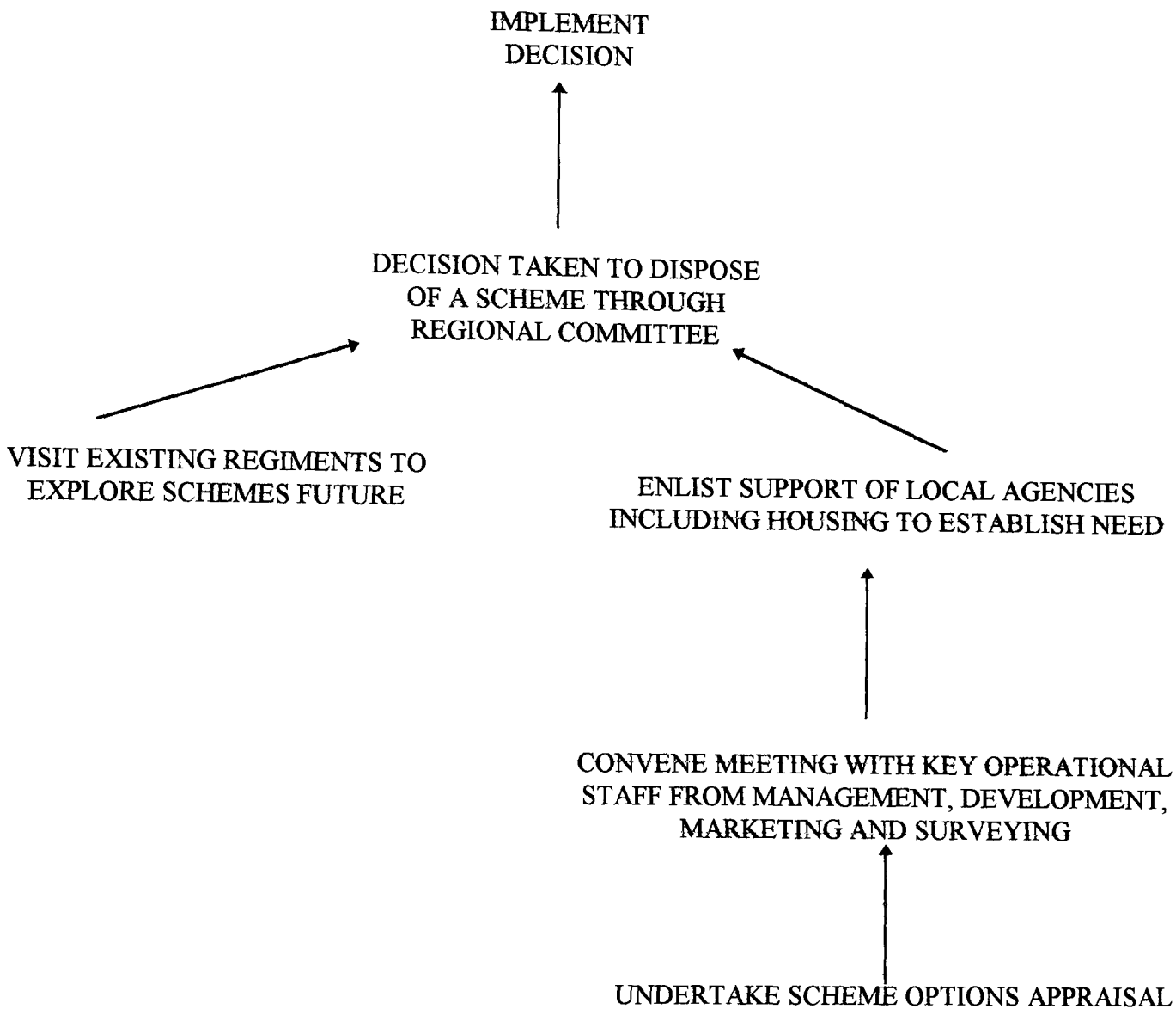
***COMMENT**: *Same as for map 2. Initial options include "Look at community care plans" which never featured in the original map. "Do some targeting" is replaced with "Do some research-------." The strategic choices "Have a strategy [rather than] spend our time equally amongst everybody" is replaced by a single strategy "Have a strategy to implement." The goal has been changed from the original one "Have a strategy that cascades down" to "Have a strategy that cascades up -------."*

MAP OF RESPONDENT 2. A MAP OF A DECISION TO CLOSE DOWN A SCHEME

ORIGINAL MAP



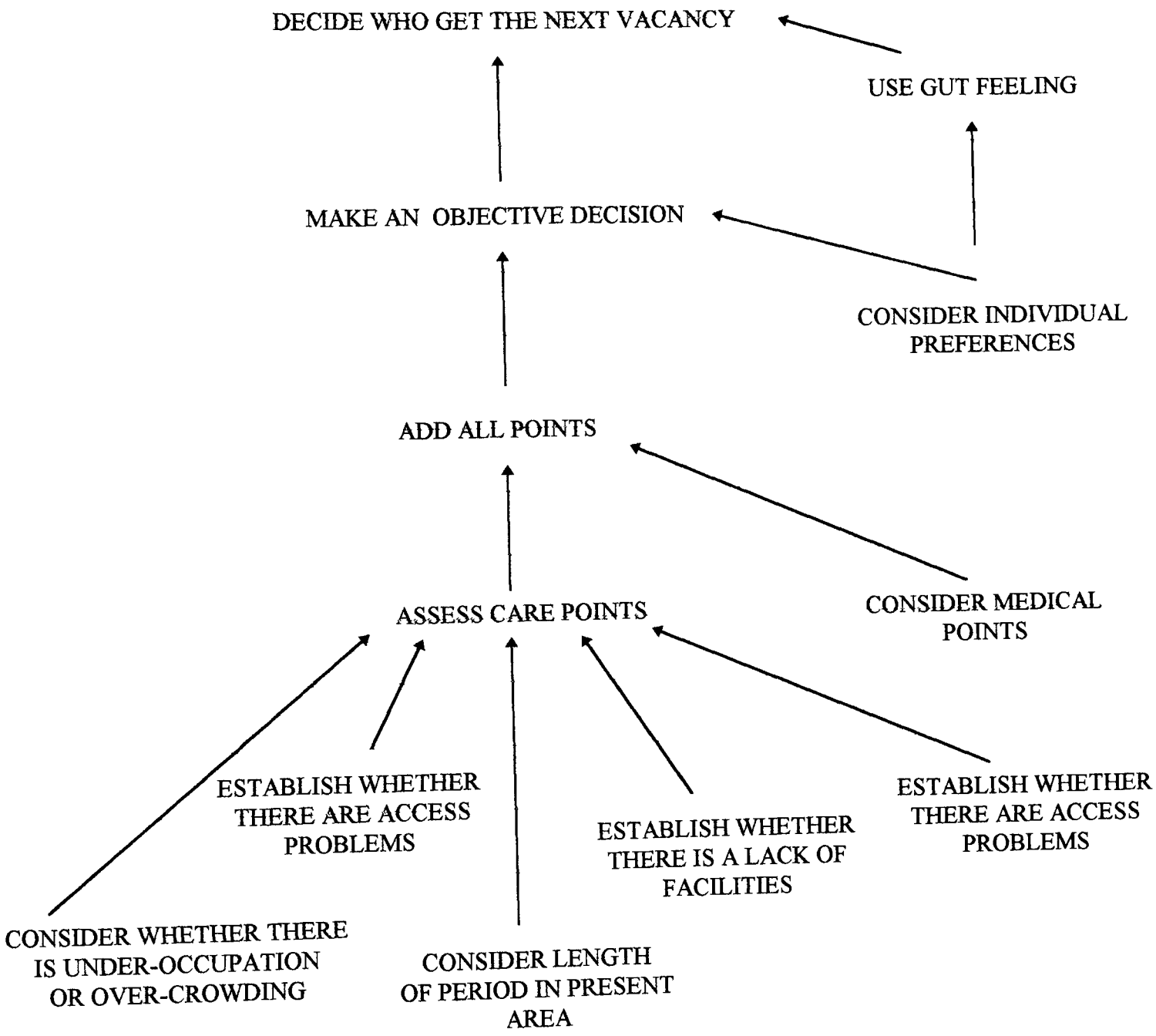
CORRECTED VERSION OF MAP OF RESPONDENT 2.



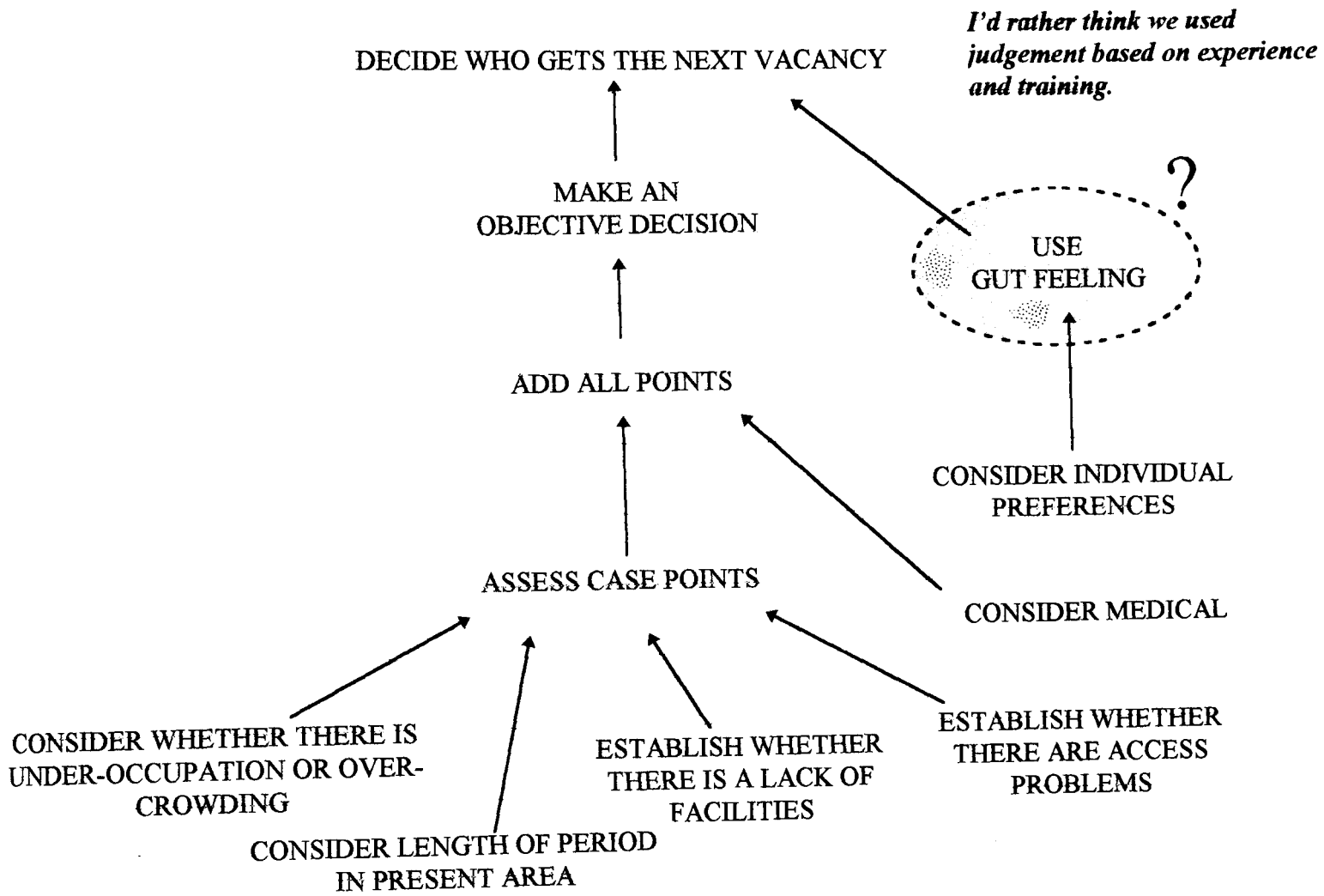
COMMENT: *Like in map 3, the revised map was not accompanied with a corrected text. For explanation of the changes see the letter from respondent in appendix ---. The corrected version starts with an appraisal rather than a decision. The strategic choices of "Decided to dispose of it [rather than] not generating revenue" has been discarded in favour of a consensus decision through a regional committee.*

MAP OF RESPONDENT 3. MAP OF A DECISION ON ALLOCATION OF PRIORITY FOR HOUSING

ORIGINAL:



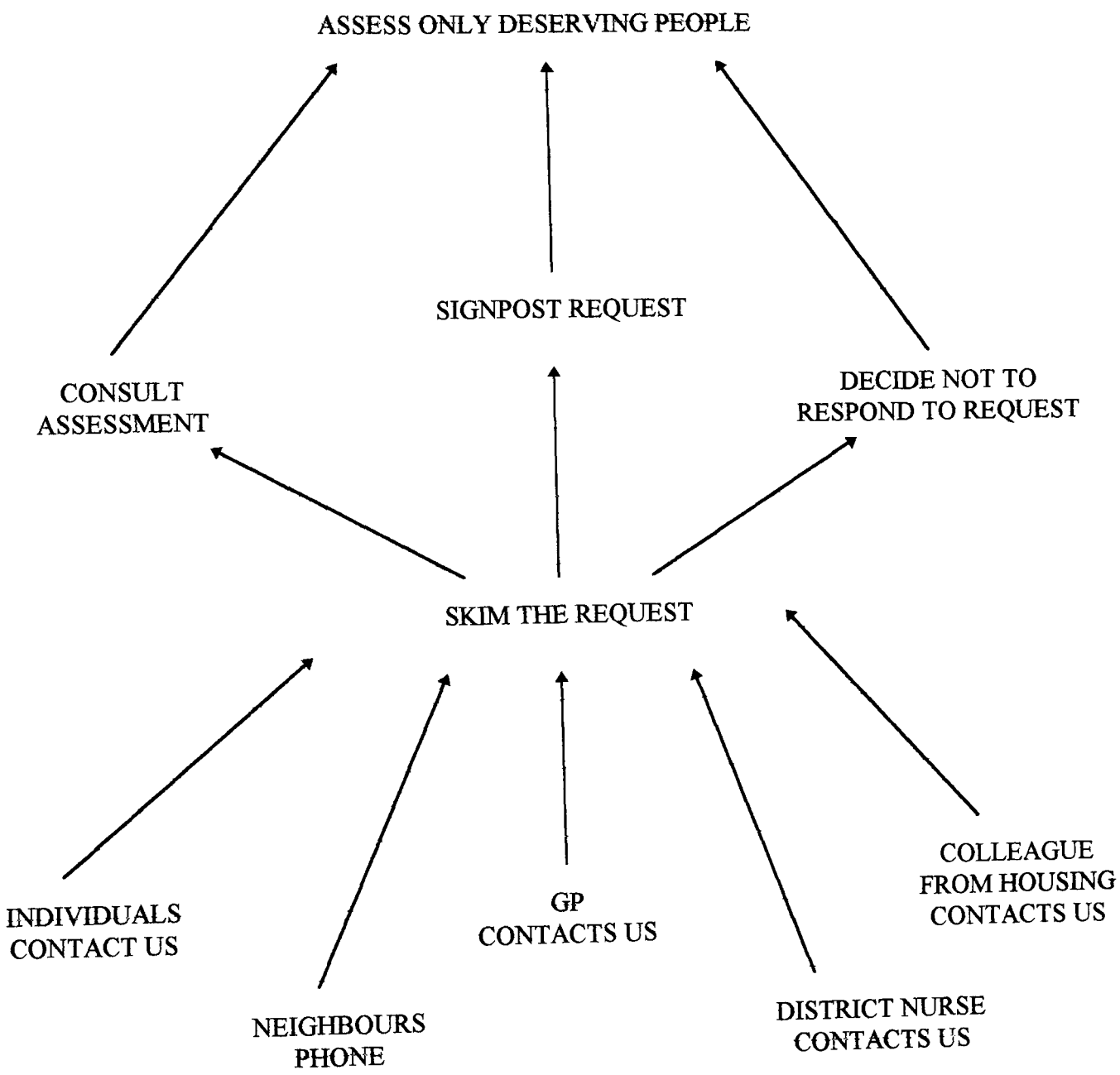
CORRECTED VERSION OF MAP OF RESPONDENT 3.



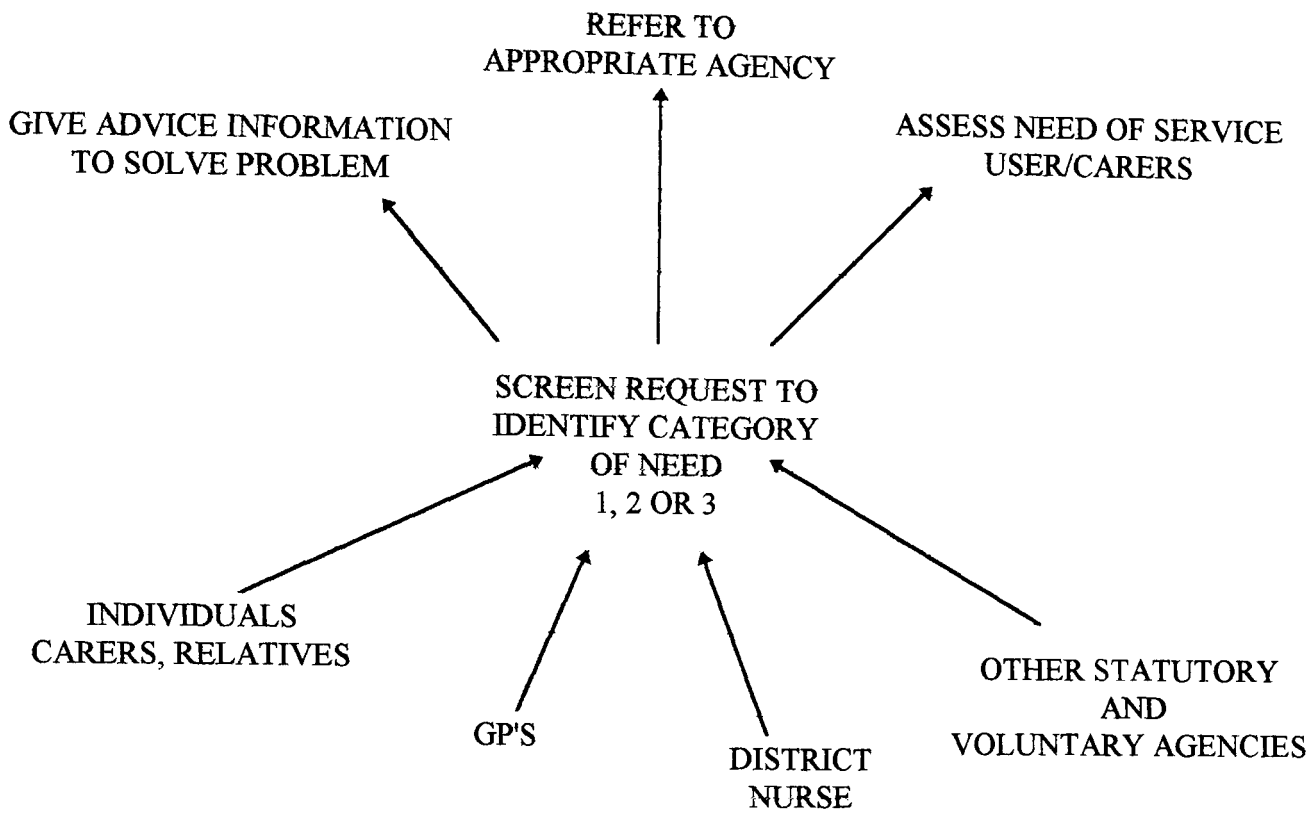
COMMENT: *I considered the comment as an indication that the map had served as a stimulus to self reflection.*

MAP OF RESPONDENT 6. MAP OF A DECISION ON WHO TO ASSESS BY A HEALTH TRUST

ORIGINAL MAP



CORRECTED VERSION OF MAP OF RESPONDENT 6



COMMENT: *Revised map not consistent with original and revised version of text. In the corrected map the following changes have been effected; voluntary agencies have been added as a source of referrals, with reference to requests for assessment the word screen has been used in place of skim and, categories of need have been added. The broad goal of 'asses only deserving people' has been discarded.*

MAP OF INITIAL PROCESS FOR DRAWING UP A COUNTY WIDE HOUSING STRATEGY FOR OLDER PEOPLE