

# Goals, Organization, and Strategies of Change Agencies

*A. W. van den Ban and C. A. Muntjewerff*

## INTRODUCTION

The objective of this paper is to apply organizational theory to some of the problems of change agencies. This might be of some help in solving these problems and, more importantly, draw our attention to problems which need more research.

For many years organizational theorists have given their attention mainly to the study of factories. More recently considerable attention has also been given to other organizations such as hospitals, research institutes, and government bureaucracies. Until now, however, not much attention has been given to change agencies. This is a pity, because there is a rather general feeling that many change agencies are not organized as efficiently as they could be.

When we speak of a change agency we speak of an organization which has a major goal to help its clients to change their behaviour. This definition implies that the intention is to further the interests of the clients. In some situations the clients decide what their interests are; in other situations the change agents do this for them or it is done as a joint effort by clients and agents. These latter situations can be dangerous since the interests of the change agents themselves, or of their employing group, can influence too much the decisions on the kind of change one tries to achieve.

## GOALS AND STRATEGIES

It is generally accepted that the optimal structure of an organization and its leadership pattern should depend on its technology, the kind of production processes performed in the organization and the environment in which it is working, especially the culture of the people (Thompson, 1967, Ch. 5). When the technology is changing, the organizational structure and the leadership pattern should also change. However, it seems to be no exception that these latter changes are lagging behind. This lag might be one of the major reasons for the organizational problems change agencies face at present.

In the developed countries the goal of change agencies has been, for a long time, to introduce rather simple changes in the production process, such as the

optimal use of fertilizers for agricultural extension services or simplified routing in the scientific management of industrial production processes. At present the goal places more emphasis on the development of people, such as the management training given by agricultural extension services or leadership training in industry and government agencies.

This change in goals has also resulted in a change in the strategies used.<sup>1</sup> Previously the change agent could give directive advice by saying: 'If you do this your efficiency will increase'; nowadays there is increasing use of a non-directive approach in which change agents help their clients to decide better ways to achieve their own goals (Batten, 1969).

In some of the former colonial countries a number of the top officials of the change agencies had been working in the colonial administration, where the goal was to maintain law and order. Now the goals of change agencies have been changed, but the organizational tradition which was fitted to maintain law and order is still influencing them (Taylor, 1965, Ch. 23). One is beginning to realize that the major resource these countries have is their own people, and therefore, development of the people should be an important objective of government policy.

However, it is sometimes doubtful whether the change agencies (which should realize an important part of this objective) are organized in such a way that they can give the greatest contribution to the development of their clients. Perhaps, too often, orders are given to clients, rather than helping them to develop decision-making ability.

### CONDITIONS FOR THE ORGANIZATION OF CHANGE AGENCIES

The technology of a change agency is quite different from the technology of a factory or a revenue office. Therefore its organization also should be different. We will first discuss some conditions which seem to hold for the organization of all change agencies and then some additional conditions which are of special importance for change agencies employing a non-directive strategy.

A major task of a change agency is communication, both from the research institutes to the clients and from the clients to the research institutes and policy-making bodies. Communication with the clients requires an efficient system of internal communication in the agency. This is not only communication from the director to the field workers, but also communication between subject-matter specialists and from these specialists to the field workers. Normally there should be communications from all field workers to the staff. In order to be able to solve the problems of the clients one should be able to use the information of all staff members. The field workers are usually best informed about the clients, the

subject-matter specialists on the latest research findings in their speciality, and the director on government policies affecting the clients. These people should co-operate as a team in which everybody feels free to present his information at a moment he thinks is useful for their problem-solving process. Also such a group of extension officers can help each other to discover the best solutions for the problems they face in their work.

The change agency and change agents have to change, themselves, continuously in order to remain leaders in the change process.

Frequent personal contacts between the change agents and their clients are essential for obtaining change in behaviour (Rogers, Ashcroft, and Röling, 1970). This implies that the change agent will frequently have to work hard without much supervision. Therefore, he has to be highly motivated to work hard. Also, in order to be able to convince his clients, he should himself be convinced that he does a useful job.

The change agent should work long enough in the same area to get to know the people and their situation, to gain their confidence and to be interested in programmes which can only have an impact in the long run, as is usually the case with the development of people. We would prefer a period of around ten years.

Nearly always a change agency will have to co-operate with other agencies to achieve its goals. Unfortunately rivalries between government agencies are quite common, both in developed and in developing countries. Frequently these rivalries have a harmful effect on the achievement of the goals of the change agency. Therefore the agency should be organized in such a way that its staff is willing to make sacrifices in order to achieve smooth co-operation with other agencies.

A non-directive strategy cannot be used if the field workers get orders to achieve certain targets, but only if they have the freedom to work on the felt needs of their clients. This makes it much more difficult for subject-matter specialists and other staff members to serve the field workers efficiently. If one gives the field workers orders, one can order all of them to tackle the same problem and provide them with the assistance needed to solve this problem. Field workers, who work on the most urgent problem of their clients, might select different problems as being most urgent in their area and therefore ask for different kinds of help from the staff of their agency.

The difficulty of solving this organizational problem is probably one of the reasons why advisory boards from the clients have frequently only a marginal influence on the programme of the change agency. For instance it is reported from the USA, a country with a long tradition in democracy, that: 'It (the local co-opted association or committee) cannot become an effective part of the major policy-determining structure of the (TVA) agency. In practice only a limited sphere of decision is permitted, involving some adaptation of general directives to local conditions' (Selznick, 1966, p. 221).

## STRUCTURE OF THE ORGANIZATION AND PATTERN OF LEADERSHIP

The previous discussion makes clear that, for a change agency, an organizational structure has to be found which stimulates an efficient communication within the organization, a good communication and co-operation with other government agencies, and a high level of staff motivation. How this can be achieved has recently been studied by a number of social psychologists and sociologists (e.g. Argyris, 1962; Bennis, 1966; Likert, 1961, 1967; Taub, 1969). Their conclusion is that the Weberian bureaucracy (Weber, 1965, pp. 125–130) is harmful for these goals. This is especially the case with the 'clearly defined hierarchy of officers'. In a modern organization we need co-operation between different specialists, each of whom is more competent in his own field than any of the others. When they have the feeling that they get a fair share of decision-making they will be more motivated to execute these decisions. The traditional hierarchy frequently creates a fear of the boss, which prevents the free communication of essential information to him. The impersonal relationships between officers make it difficult to communicate emotions and feelings which are essential both for sound decision-making and for motivation. The 'clearly defined sphere of competence' of each office and the rules according to which the office is executed prevent the essential flexibility in a rapidly changing society. It creates the danger that the officers try to further the interests of their own department rather than seeing what their department can do in the interests of the organization as a whole.

In a modern organization there is a trend towards a participative pattern of leadership, in which the staff are stimulated by an open communication about the goals of the organization and are motivated to try to achieve these goals. It also shows the confidence of the superiors in the ability of their subordinates to achieve these goals. When the subordinate faces difficulties he can expect help rather than fear punishment. Most of the decisions will be taken by a group made up of a superior and his subordinates. The superior can act as a linking pin with other groups at a higher level in the organization. The members of such a group will feel responsible not only for their own work, but for the work of the group as a whole. Likert claims that this participative pattern of leadership makes it possible to utilize the information of all groups and persons in the organization effectively.<sup>2</sup> In such a modern organization the traditional distinction between superior and subordinates is diminishing. It is not yet quite clear how far this can go.

One study has analysed the effects of different communication patterns on the co-ordination among different staff members of a change agency and their initiative (Pelz, 1966). A combination of meetings and personal contacts between staff members achieved a favourable score on both points; written communication + meetings was favourable for the personal communication, was

unfavourable for the co-ordination, and had no apparent effects on the initiative of the staff.

The staff itself was convinced that written communication was used too much and personal contacts too little to get things done. The major factors observed which blocked the development of more initiative were excessive rules and red tape, insufficient delegation of authority, and lack of recognition of merit. Lack of funds or supplies was of much less importance.

One gets the impression that the new ideas about participative leadership are applied or even can be applied to all change agents. Some change agencies have a highly authoritarian structure. In one study 100 per cent of the Block Development Officers, the superiors of the field staff, agreed with the statement: 'Without frequent and detailed inspection of his work, one cannot expect that a VLW (field officer) will do his work properly', whereas 56 per cent of these VLWs agreed with the statement 'If a VLW is quite active, he can easily get in trouble, but if he is friendly and obedient to higher authority without taking any initiative, he will not have any difficulty' (van den Ban and Thorat, 1968). One reason might be that the superiors are not aware of the social psychological research on management and therefore continue to work in the old authoritarian way. It is also possible that they are aware of these ideas, but that they have not been trained to use them properly. There are also other possibilities as we will see in the next section.

### CULTURAL FACTORS IN THE EFFECT OF DIFFERENT LEADERSHIP PATTERNS

The modern patterns of management require a lot of initiative on the part of all staff members of a change agency. Since leadership patterns in change agencies in developing countries are often rather authoritarian, and the decision-making is highly centralized (United Nations, 1961, p. 7) the participative pattern of leadership may not be the best for their cultural situation. In a rapidly changing society staff initiative has to be taken under very uncertain conditions. This latter approach is strange and seemingly unpleasant in a society where one is used to punishment for failures but rarely rewarded for accomplishments.

India provides an example of the influence of these cultural factors. Many intellectuals read regularly the *Ramanaya*, one of the holy books, for guidance in their life. A main theme in this book is that a son does well to fulfil the requests of his father, even if he knows quite well that his father was compelled to make a request, even when he did not desire to do so. In such a tradition it is understandable that one is not trained to take the initiative modern management requires of subordinates in Western society.

Perhaps this is the explanation for one of the findings of van den Ban and Thorat (1968, pp. 14-21). They found very authoritarian relations among the staff of the Community Development (CD) organization in India. Probably, as a

result of these relations, the attitudes of the CD staff towards the cultivators were also rather authoritarian. Also the CD staff infrequently took the initiative. At the same time most village leaders considered the CD staff as helpful or very helpful to them. This is truer in villages with an authoritarian BDO than in villages with a democratic BDO. In this latter kind of village the VLWs were, according to the village leaders, willing to listen to the cultivators less than in villages with an authoritarian BDO.

There are other explanations possible, but it seems that a sudden change to a modern participative pattern or leadership in a change agency in this cultural situation has no favourable effects. In the long run, the situation might be different. People become used to this pattern of leadership, and have confidence that it will be used consistently. However, without an empirical test this is no more than a hypothesis. In many developing countries the staff of the change agency is transferred every two or four years. It is just at the time they begin to become productive in stimulating change in the area. One is afraid that close ties between the staff of the change agency and some people in their area will promote favouritism. In some cases this fear may be justified when considering the provision of means and services. These frequent transfers are often detrimental to those staff or to non-directive help.

The background of this need for frequent transfers can partly be sought in the patronage system which exists in many developing countries. Often the people expect that their patron will help them with the resources he has or, as broker, to mediate with government officials and other influential people. In return these clients will support their patron in elections or with unpaid labour (Lele, 1966; Kalshoven, 1969). The clients try to give the staff of the change agency the role they know for a high-status person. That is the role of a patron. Therefore they expect this help from their agent, rather than advice on how they can solve their own problems themselves. For example, in an Indian village the senior author asked what would happen if the VLW remained in the same circle of villagers for ten years? The answer was prompt: 'He would report that he had given a lecture in village A yesterday and the sarpanch (head) of the village would confirm this, whereas in fact he stayed at home. The sarpanch can expect in return a preference in the distribution of fertilizers or seeds.' This villager expected that his VLW would only work if forced to and that he would use a kind of patron-client relationship to avoid this force. If the change agent accepts the role of a patron, which his clients expect him to take, he acquires the opportunity to influence which he would otherwise not have. However, it also had disadvantages such as the limitations placed on the development of independence among his clients. We are not aware of empirical research on this problem.

Studies of the Ministry of Rural Development in Malaya (Ness, 1967) and the Corn and Rice Production Co-ordinating Council in the Philippines (Arcega, 1969, pp. 9-25) give indications that, in such authoritarian cultures, change agencies can also be quite effective in promoting an increase in production, but

only under certain conditions. These conditions seem to be:

- (1) An interest in output goals, rather than in moving files,<sup>3</sup> and therefore the ability to make the necessary decisions without delay.
- (2) Clarity about the goals which have to be achieved.
- (3) Frequent inspection of the actual work in the field by the top leaders themselves.
- (4) A confidence in the staff that decisions are not taken arbitrarily, but that they will be rewarded if they do all they can do achieve the goals of the programme and punished for negligence or lack of industry.
- (5) The political power to co-ordinate the work of different ministries and agencies.

It is not yet sure how effective these change agencies have been in developing the decision-making ability of their clients. An increase in production is much easier to measure.

Another factor which seems to limit the effectiveness of some change agencies is the combination of the role of the change agent with that of the salesman, distributor or government grants, data collector for the bureau of census or even policemen. On this problem again there is very little research, except a study by Kalshoven (1969), who asked peasants what their image was of the change agents in Suriname. He found that they were seen more frequently as men who control farmers than as extension officers, who supply them with seeds and fertilizers or who collect data for the census bureau. Indeed the change agents spend more time in collecting census data and in controlling farmers than in advising their clients. It is not only the time involved in these various roles, what is more important is the peasants' confidence in the change agents. Most peasants do not believe that salesmen and policemen try to help them.

The difficulty is that in modernizing developing countries many new roles have to be fulfilled, whereas few capable people and little money are available. Therefore one tries to give one person many different roles, without always asking whether or not these roles are compatible. For example, the role of a non-directive change agent and the role of the man who controls the distribution of irrigation water are certainly not compatible.

### NEED FOR RESEARCH

With the increasing need for change in society the importance of the role of change agencies is increasing rather rapidly. At the same time there is a rather widespread feeling that many of these agencies are not working very effectively. It is a pity, therefore, that research evidence indicating whether or not this feeling is correct, and which factors are influencing the effectiveness of change agencies, is quite scarce. It seems to us that future research in this field should give special attention to:

- (1) The short-term and long-term effects of different patterns of leadership in change agencies on (a) the communication process within the agencies and between the agents and their clients, (b) the motivation of the change agents to work hard for the interest of clients, (c) the co-ordination among the staff members of one agency, and (d) the co-ordination between staff of one agency and staff of other agencies which work in related fields.
- (2) The role representatives of the clients can play in determining the programme of the change agency, and the way in which a non-directive strategy, which has a favourable effect on the development of the clients, can be combined with an efficient organization of the resources of the change agency.
- (3) The influence of the culture on the effects of different leadership patterns.
- (4) The effects of a combination of change in the structure of a change agency, and staff training in leadership and participation in decision-making, on the effectiveness of a change agency.
- (5) The effects of the combination of different tasks in one agency on role conflicts for the change agent and the consequent effects on the co-ordination of different activities.

### CONCLUSIONS

The optimal organization of a change agency probably depends on:

- (1) The goals the agency tries to achieve.
- (2) The strategies which are used to achieve these goals.
- (3) The environment in which the agency is working, especially the larger organization of which the agency is a part and the culture of the society in which it is working.
- (4) The staff of the agency.

The difficulty is that each of these factors might require a different kind of structure for the agency and a different pattern of leadership within the agency. To find the right balance between all these factors is not easy.