Natural feedback systems and organizational self-evaluation: a case study of a psychology department clinic.

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NATURAL FEEDBACK SYSTEMS AND ORGANIZATIONAL SELF-EVALUATION:
A CASE STUDY OF A PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT CLINIC

A Thesis Presented
By
JOSEPH P. GABBERT

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NATURAL FEEDBACK SYSTEMS AND ORGANIZATIONAL SELF-EVALUATION:
A CASE STUDY OF A PSYCHOLOGY DEPARTMENT CLINIC

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Table I. Elements of the environment rated greater than two by at least eight of the ten participants and the question: "Indicate which of these outsiders are important as feedback sources for the PSC as an organization, using the following rating scale"...

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The Problem

Human service organizations are continually involved in a process of self-evaluation, whether formalized or not. Conceptualized as open-systems, they judge the effectiveness of their operations everyday using feedback from their external environment. This feedback from such groups as clients, funding sources, and other human service agencies includes both descriptive and evaluative information about the activities of the organization. The mechanism developed to collect, communicate, and use these reactions might be called the organization's "natural feedback system."

In contrast to formal program evaluation research, a natural feedback system may be implicit, informal, and intuitive. In some cases it may effectively bring in important information. In others, there may be gaps in information or breakdowns in communication such that needed data do not reach important decision-makers. Some organizations may use feedback to serve their own interests irrespective of consumers' needs and rights. Others may use it more in line with the ideals of evaluation research, to continually question and improve their operations. To whatever use put, natural feedback systems do exist and operate as mechanisms of organizational self-evaluation.

As evaluation research becomes more specialized and technical, an attempt should be made to examine natural feedback processes. This ef-
fort should reveal previously overlooked effective ways of collecting evaluation information and might suggest new ways of evaluating human service programs. For example, if an organization's natural feedback system has valuable strengths, then efforts should be made to build upon these strengths rather than ignore them for generalized evaluation tools. Such an approach would decrease the duplication of feedback information and the waste of valuable organizational resources, while at the same time, increasing the likelihood that important informal feedback channels get used and strengthened. (For a more complete treatment of this strategy as an approach to evaluation research (see Gabbert & Sweeney, 1976.)

This paper is intended to be a beginning step in the examination of natural feedback systems. In the following pages, I will discuss different aspects of these and present a descriptive study of one aspect of the feedback system of a small-scale human service organization. This study will hopefully answer some questions about the feedback processes used by such organizations and provide examples of their strengths and weaknesses that might be of interest to program evaluation consultants.

Background: Open-systems Theory and Managerial Cybernetics

In this paper, human service organizations are conceptualized as open-systems. Within this framework, the organization is viewed as a system of interconnected and interdependent parts engaged in a dynamic process of transactions with its environment. The environment of the organization--including the receivers of its services, funding sources,
and other community caregivers--plays a crucial role in the development and survival of the organization. The organization depends upon its environment to supply it with a steady flow of inputs (e.g., clients, information about these clients, money, facilities, personnel, problem-solving technologies, etc.) and receive its outputs (e.g., terminated clients, trained students, community education programs, etc.). If it cannot maintain this steady flow of inputs and outputs across its boundaries (i.e., maintain a steady state), it will eventually perish.

Because of this dependency, much has been written about the relationship between the organization and its environment. While this relationship has been conceptualized in a number of ways (Anderson & Carter, 1974; Baker & O'Brien, 1973; Evan, 1971; Levine & White, 1961; Levinson & Astrachan, 1974; Lawrence & Lorsch, 1967; Thompson, 1962; Thompson & McEwen, 1958), all agree that activity of the environment strongly influences organizational practices. Work by Emery and Trist (1963) and others (Terreberry, 1968; Duncan, 1972, 1973) suggests that these influences are even more pronounced because of today's turbulent, uncertain times. Work by Baker (1969) and others (Schulberg & Baker, 1970; Sarata & Repucci, 1973) suggests that human service organizations, by their very nature, are particularly susceptible to the influences of their environment.

This is not to say that human service organizations are completely at the mercy of external forces. Successful organizations must take a proactive stance in relation to their environment. They adapt to environmental constraints in some cases and try to make changes in their environment in others. Rarely are they buffeted around aimlessly.
Organizations engineer relationships in various ways. To do this, they need information about the environment and their position with respect to it. While a variety of information is useful, feedback is particularly important (Anderson & Carter, 1974; Brown, 1973). Organizations must get information in response to their activities to correct past mistakes and plan for the future. Outsiders' perceptions and evaluations (i.e., feelings of satisfaction) of these activities are both important in this regard. Because of this necessity, all organizations develop natural systems of feedback collection, communication, and use. As was stated earlier, these may be formal and explicit as in an evaluation research project, or informal and implicit.

Organizational feedback and feedback systems are discussed extensively in managerial cybernetics, a subset of organizational open-systems theory (see Beer, 1959; Cadwaller, 1969; Churchman et al., 1969; Haberstroh, 1962). This area is concerned with organizations' use of feedback as a self-regulating device to maintain stability in the midst of changing environmental conditions. The organization is seen largely as a system of feedback receptors, communication networks, and decision points involved in a process of information exchange and transformation. Most of this area has become too complex mathematically to have much relevance to this study. A number of important points are helpful, though, in understanding the operations of natural feedback systems.

1. **Feedback may be either positive or negative**

Traditionally, feedback has been distinguished as positive or negative. Negative feedback is usually considered more important since it
reduces error in the organization's functioning. Without negative feedback, an open-system loses its steady state, its boundaries disappear, and it stops functioning (Miller, 1971). Positive feedback is usually considered destructive, since if left unchecked by negative feedback it will increase error in the system and move it away from a steady state. Most likely, however, both are important and needed.

2. **Human service organizations need feedback of two forms**

Human service organizations typically get corrective feedback of two forms. One of these comes from the organization's monitoring of its own activities. The staff occasionally check their own operations to see if they match the philosophy of the organization and are taking place as intended. Such routine checks help the organization keep itself on course from its own perspective. These checks may be explicit and formal as in a management information system (see Cooper, 1973; Smith & Sorensen, 1974), or implicit and informal, taking place at the discretion of staff and management personnel.

While feedback from the organization's perspective is important, the reactions of outsiders are needed as well. These reactions develop directly from transactions between members of the environment and the organization, or indirectly through interactions among environmental members themselves. (For example, two members of other agencies who have had recent contact with the organization may interact and change their reactions, or one of the members may communicate his/her reactions to another agency who has no present involvement with the organization.)

Feedback of both forms (monitored activities and environmental re-
actions) are important, but this study will focus only on feedback from the organization's environment. While this was done primarily for convenience sake, the choice was not completely arbitrary. As was implied earlier, environmental perceptions and evaluations are particularly important to today's human service organizations. Because of this, I believe they should be given increased consideration in studies of this nature.

3. Human service organizations need feedback from a variety of sectors of their environment.

Human service organizations need the reactions of many members of their environment. Typically in the field of evaluation research, only data about clients or consultees are given much consideration. If the organization is seen as an open-system, however, feedback from all groups influencing or being influenced by the organization should be given weight.

Organizations cannot and need not get feedback from their entire environment, though. Some selection of a "feedback environment" must take place, if for no other reason than it is impossible and impractical for a system to attend to all possible inputs. The selection that takes place ultimately includes the external elements that are (1) in a position to observe and evaluate the organization's activities and (2) important enough for their reactions to make a difference. Thus, the organization limits its feedback environment to those elements that are seen as important to its present or long-term needs. These selections will sometimes prove to be errors in judgment in the short or long run,
depending on the perspective of the observer. Appropriate criteria for making such judgments are difficult to determine. In this study, only the collective judgments of the organizational members themselves will be used, even though outsiders' perspectives might have been considered as well. This presents a problem for consultants building upon natural feedback systems, and will be given consideration later in the discussion (also see Gabbert & Sweeney, 1976).

4. Organizations need feedback about both goal and maintenance activity.

Etzioni (1960) and others (Anderson & Carter, 1972; Baker & Schulberg, 1973) stress that organizations must perform both goal and maintenance functions. They must successfully accomplish the goals for which they were created without causing problematic side effects (see Graziano & Fink, 1973) and, at the same time, secure resources from the environment, maintain harmony within, and build relations with other organizations in their network. To successfully perform both functions, they must necessarily get feedback about both of these.

5. Feedback exists as different forms of information.

Reactions to the organization's activities can be communicated in many forms before coded and put into a form the organization can use (see section 8). For example, the feedback may be (1) verbal or written statements given directly to members of the organization, (2) verbal or written statements from which feedback messages can be inferred, (3) messages directed through the media (radio, newspaper, city reports, scientific publications, etc.), (4) changes in the flow of resources
into the organization, or (5) observed behavior patterns from which feedback can be inferred. While only a few of these are typically used in program evaluation research, all are probably used at one time or another in a natural feedback system.

6. Feedback collection occurs at the boundary of the organization by all gatekeepers.

According to Levinson and Astrachan (1974), organizational boundaries are those demarcation lines or regions which (1) separate and distinguish the organization from its environment allowing it to develop its own character, and (2) allow organizational members to engage in useful and selective transactions with outsiders. Boundaries are highly active regions where internal and external demands often come together in conflict causing the organization to engage in vital regulatory activity. Organizational members who occupy positions at the boundary and thus serve as a link between the organization and its environment are often called "gatekeepers" (Anderson & Carter, 1974). Gatekeepers have contact with different environmental groups depending upon their organizational role. They perform a number of vital regulatory functions, one of the most important of which is feedback collection. All of their contacts with the environment provide valuable information at one time or another. In some cases feedback collection may be a major responsibility of the gatekeeper (e.g., someone in a research and evaluation division). In others, feedback collection may be a secondary responsibility, or something that occurs irrespective of any formal responsibility at all. Whatever the case, all gatekeepers have access to important in-
formation from the environment with which they have contact.

7. Feedback may reach gatekeepers through formal or informal channels. Gatekeepers have access to feedback within their formal organizational role, and informally when they are performing activities not directly related to their job. While formal channels provide much information because logically they seem more appropriate to use, total reliance on them would result in the exclusion of valuable data from more candid circles. Organizations need to use as many channels and sources of feedback as possible (Brown, 1973).

Organizations use formal and informal channels to a greater or lesser degree depending upon the situation. Duncan (1973) noticed that informal methods were used more often during situations of high environmental uncertainty. Since human service organizations typically have highly uncertain turbulent environments, they should use these particularly often. Certain problems may exist, however, to limit their use. For example, gatekeepers may be reluctant to communicate feedback received in this way for fear of violating the confidentiality of their sources.

8. Feedback is coded by the gatekeepers who receive it.

Gatekeepers do not attend to all feedback that comes their way. Certain pieces are ignored by mistake or blocked intentionally. Furthermore, once collected, it is transformed to match the needs and perspective of the gatekeeper receiving it. The process by which feedback messages are selectively allowed to cross the organization's boundary
and are then refined, elaborated, distorted, or transformed otherwise is known as a "coding process" (Katz & Kahn, 1966; Brown, 1973).

The coding process is an inevitable one occurring for a variety of reasons. Because it is impossible to attend to all incoming feedback, some selection must take place or the system will "overload" with information and eventually break down (see Miller, 1960, 1969). The process of attending to selected inputs and attaching meaning to them is a complicated one, influenced by the norms and values of the organization and the gatekeeper's role and position in it. For example, norms may specify that only feedback relevant to certain organizational practices will be accepted, or that only members of certain status in the environment will be heard. Katz and Kahn (1966) suggested that organizational members who perceive their responsibility to be in areas other than feedback collection often ignore and distort incoming information. In addition, Miller (1971) suggested that feedback transformation is increased when the information content is low and its importance is high, a condition found in highly uncertain situations. Because of the highly uncertain nature of human service systems, one would thus expect many distortion problems.

The complex coding process can have both positive and negative effects for the organization. On the positive side, coding helps organizational members get needed information while simultaneously tuning out useless "noise." It helps translate different feedback messages into the idiosyncratic language of the organization. The inevitability of coding biases presents problems, however. Valuable feedback which is lost or distorted can cause the organization to continually reaffirm itself and lose the ability to correct maladaptive practices.
Coding biases can be corrected by a few simple measures. For instance, the distortions of individual gatekeepers can be corrected if feedback from the same sources collected by other organizational members is compared and contrasted. This use of multiple feedback channels can be used very effectively to discover and decipher discrepant information (Katz & Kahn, 1966). If feedback is not collected by those who have access to it, management can push them to take more responsibility. If such feedback cannot be gathered by gatekeepers in their normal activity, or problematic distortions cannot be corrected, the organization can institute more rigorous data collection techniques or enlist the aid of an outside consultant.

9. **Feedback is communicated and stored in the system for decision-makers.**

The perceptions and evaluations received and coded by gatekeepers have little value until they reach the organization's decision-makers. The information is made available in a number of ways. The process is very simple when the decision-maker is the one who collected it. (S)he simply uses it. The process becomes more complex, however, when the feedback is needed by someone else. A communication system must be established for its distribution.

The first step in the communication process depends upon the gatekeeper's knowledge of the feedback needs of the organization (defined in this study by the organizational members themselves). The person must recognize that others in the system need the feedback collected before being able to pass it on. They must also have an awareness of the appro-
appropriate communication channels for conveying the information. For instance, the gatekeeper can know exactly who should get the feedback and decide to communicate it directly to them. In other cases, (s)he may decide to communicate it through general organizational channels (e.g., at a staff meeting). The use of specific channels will be determined by their accessibility and a host of personal factors (e.g., personal relationships between organizational members). Information can be communicated unchanged, or can be altered by the receiver in another coding process. In sum, communication is clearly complex and characterized by subtle patterns that have developed for a number of reasons. These natural processes should be examined closely, especially for possible breakdown points.

Feedback collected at one point can also be valuable in the distant future as well as the present. For this reason, organizations often develop "second-order" feedback systems (Cadwallar, 1969; Churchman et al., 1969; Scott, 1961), where information is recorded for future use. This is an operation typically employed in formal program evaluations where data are saved over time and trends are analyzed.

10. **Feedback is used by the organization and its members to modify or strengthen current practices.**

The final step of the natural feedback system involves the use of information in organizational decision-making. If everything has gone right up to this point, then it will most likely get used in some way. Whether or not this happens, and how the feedback is used, is a complicated matter. While the effectiveness of a natural feedback system ul-
timately hinges on this final process, time will not allow it to be addressed in this study.

The Natural Feedback System: Directions for Research

From these ten points, one can draw a general impression of how a natural feedback system (dealing with evaluations from the organizational environment) operates. First of all, gatekeepers interact with members of the environment and have feedback directed their way. These messages are communicated in a number of ways (section 5) through both formal and informal channels (section 6). The gatekeepers receiving the information become involved in a complex coding process during which they (1) selectively interpret the incoming messages, (2) validate their interpretations, (3) decide whether the resulting information is important for the organization, and (4) decide whether the information should be used by themselves, communicated to others in the organization, or recorded for future use (section 8). The gatekeepers involved in this process may or may not have formal feedback collection responsibility, and may or may not use "scientific" techniques for making their decisions. Finally, the feedback is made available to decision-makers and hopefully used to correct past mistakes and plan for the future (sections 9 and 10).

The specifics of how a natural feedback system operates in actual practice are unclear. For this reason, I chose to study one aspect of the natural feedback system of a small-scale human service organization. More specifically, I examined the processes used to collect, code, and communicate feedback from the organization's external environment. Hope-
fully, this study will clarify what has been discussed, and point out some of the strengths and weaknesses of these natural systems of interest to program evaluation consultants. The study was primarily open-ended and exploratory, although the following ideas were used to guide the investigation:

1. **The perceived feedback environment.**
   - To whom does the organization look for evaluations of itself?
   - What diverse elements of the environment might a human service organization see as important sources of feedback and why?
   - What are the organization's feedback needs?

2. **The organization's links to the feedback environment and use of these.**
   - What different contacts (both formal and informal) does the organization have with its feedback environment?
   - Are those contacts used to get feedback for the organization?
   - If not, what are some of the forces that prevent this from happening?
     - (e.g., --people have contact, but are unaware of their importance as feedback sources, --people do not feel that it is their responsibility to collect feedback)
   - Are both formal and informal channels used for feedback collection?
   - What are the differential consequences of the use of formal and informal channels?
     - (e.g., --feedback not communicated because of confidentiality issues)
3. The coding process used by gatekeepers.

What types of information are used as cues for making feedback impressions?

How does the coding process take place?

How do gatekeepers consciously judge what is important feedback?

What means are used to validate their impressions?

(e.g., compare it to other information in the system; initiate a search for more feedback from outside the system)

Do gatekeepers feel they are getting good quality feedback from important elements of the environment?

Are there means of cross-validating incoming feedback?

(e.g., multiple channels)

4. Communication and storage of feedback in the organization.

Does the natural system operate to get good quality feedback to those who need it?

How are decisions made concerning what to do with the feedback?

(Are there explicit rules for what should be done?; What options are available, and are gatekeepers aware of them?; When in doubt, what is done?)

Is feedback communicated to decision-makers?

What communication networks are established for feedback transmission?

How is feedback recorded for future use?

5. Strengths and weaknesses of the natural feedback system.

What are the strengths and weaknesses of the current system as perceived by the organizational members themselves?
What forces contribute to the success and failure of specific feedback situations?

What systemic forces maintain the current feedback system?

In sum, the study was not designed to answer all questions of interest about natural feedback systems. Given this general focus and open-ended research strategy, it should provide a useful first step in this direction, however. Program evaluation consultants should find the results particularly useful.
CHAPTER II

METHOD

Setting

This study was conducted at the Psychological Services Center (PSC), the primary practicum facility for the Clinical Psychology Training Program of the Department of Psychology, University of Massachusetts, Amherst (see Psychological Services Center, 1974, 1975). As both a training and service agency, the PSC functions in a number of capacities for the University and greater Amherst community. Faculty and students provide a number of direct and indirect services including individual, marital, family, and group psychotherapy, and consultation and educational services to nearby schools and other human service organizations.

Organizationally, the PSC operates around a training-service team structure. Approximately 8-10 teams operate each year depending upon the number of faculty and students from the clinical program who have committed responsibility there. Each team is composed of a faculty team leader, a clinical associate (an advanced clinical student who assists in student supervision), approximately four practicum students, and a first-year trainee. The teams' activities vary considerably depending upon the interests and styles of faculty and students. In addition, the PSC has an administrative staff consisting of a faculty director, a psychiatric social worker in charge of client intake, an administrative assistant and secretary, and a few part-time student administrative assist-
The PSC gets funding from a variety of sources, the University and Psychology Department being the most important. Funds from the University currently support the psychiatric social worker and the clinical associates. In addition, the University provides the physical setting and its maintenance, and the Psychology Department sanctions the substantial amount of teaching time devoted by faculty team leaders. Funds are also provided by an NIMH training grant, a sliding scale client fee system, and two contracts which support community-based direct service programs.

Design

This study incorporated a three-staged design using primarily intensive semi-structured interviews with members of the organization (see Lofland, 1971; Sellitz et al., 1961). The study was completed in approximately twelve weeks (Stage I--three weeks; Stage II--eight weeks; Stage III--one week).

Stage I

In this introductory stage two purposes were accomplished. First of all, a broad listing of the different individuals, groups, and organizations in the PSC's potential feedback environment was drawn up. This list included all elements in a position to form perceptions or evaluations of the PSC which might be perceived by the organizational members as important feedback sources. The list was not intended to be
definitive and final since it would be used only as a stimulus for the interviews of Stage II. Secondly, a cross-section of ten key boundary personnel and decision-makers were selected and asked to participate voluntarily in the intensive interviews of Stage II. This cross-section included the director, administrative assistant, psychiatric social worker, two faculty, three clinical associates (one of which had half-time administrative duties), and two practicum students from the various teams. Faculty, clinical associates, and students were selected to minimize their overlap on teams (e.g., a student and clinical associate from the same team would not be selected together unless absolutely necessary).

The data used to make the list of the PSC's potential feedback environment and select the respondents for Stage II were collected in four ways:

1) use of documents: Any formal documents (e.g., annual reports) containing information regarding such issues as PSC policy, organizational structure, job descriptions, and publicity were examined.

2) use of financial records and logs kept by PSC staff: Any documentation of financial flows and meetings with environmental constituents were also examined.

3) use of key informants: A number of staff who were knowledgeable of the PSC's operations and environmental contacts at the time of the study were asked for information.

4) use of participant observation: Because of my involvement as a practicum student on two teams, I was able to reflect on my own activity as a source of data.
**Stage II**

After key decision makers and gatekeepers had been identified and asked to participate in Stage I, they were interviewed individually by the author. These interviews were designed to generate information concerning the major issues of interest in the study, and provided the most important data-base for the final analysis. The interviews each took a total of 3-4 hours to complete and most often were split into two sessions for convenience. Care was taken to spread out the interviews of personnel with similar organizational roles, or who maintained similar boundaries to correct any time biases. The interview process was facilitated by an interview guide (see Appendix A) and the participants' responses were recorded as much as possible in individual booklets (see Appendix B). Audio-tape recordings of the interviews were made and transcribed.

Shortly before the respondents were interviewed, they were given a questionnaire-rating scale to complete (see Appendix C). In this, they were asked to look at the list of elements in the PSC's potential feedback environment (developed in Stage I) and make any necessary additions or corrections. Following this, they were asked to think about their involvement with the PSC over the previous academic year and use a five-point rating scale to indicate for each environmental member (1) the extent of their formal and informal contact, (2) the amount of important feedback they had received, and (3) their perceptions of its importance as a feedback source for the organization. They were encouraged to record any comments, questions, or problems with the process so they could be discussed later during the interviews.
Interviews. Semi-structured interviews consisting of two parts were conducted. Following an explanation of the study and the nature of the respondent's voluntary participation, the first part began.

This part was structured so that the respondents' individual feedback processes could be explored in-depth. First of all, the respondents were asked to discuss any reactions to the questionnaire. Most often, this discussion cleared up problems they had had and flagged general issues for later in-depth discussion. Following this, the respondents spoke briefly of their organizational involvement and contact with the environment over the last academic year.

After the respondents had been 'primed' to think about the PSC and their involvement in open-system terms, they were asked to discuss their interactions with groups in the environment rated on the questionnaire as a frequent source of contact. For each of these, they were encouraged to think of situations where they had received feedback about the PSC. Then, they were asked to discuss in as much detail as possible each of the following: (1) the nature of the feedback contact, (2) the process used to code the message, and (3) the process used to make the feedback available to organizational decision-makers. The process was continued with each highly rated group until the interviewer and respondent felt that further efforts would yield mostly redundant information.

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1The respondents used a five-point rating scale to indicate the extent of their personal contact with each element of the environment listed on the questionnaire (1 2 3 4 5). Somewhat no contact some contact much contact arbitrarily, I chose to discuss only those sectors which were rated three or above. This indicated to me that the person had had enough contact to make discussion worthwhile.
Care was taken to explore both positive and negative feedback situations so that the strong and weak points in the PSC's feedback system could be examined. Nearly every discussion of these specific situations moved into a discussion of general system dynamics. This strategy of moving from specifics to generalities was very effective, in engaging the respondents and stimulating their thinking about the PSC's natural feedback system. Much useful data were obtained during this part.

The second part of the interview stayed at the more general level. The respondents discussed their perception of the PSC's total feedback system, their role and responsibility in it, and its general strengths and weaknesses. This part consisted of four basic sections and was organized almost entirely around the respondents' remaining questionnaire responses.

A. First of all, the respondents discussed their ratings of important outside feedback sources for the total organization. For each group rated important, they were asked to explain such things as the following: (1) why it was rated important, (2) what feedback was needed (and why), (3) who in the organization needed the feedback, (4) whether or not they felt the PSC's needs from that group were met, (5) who was responsible (both really and ideally) for collecting the feedback, and (6) what personal responsibility they had.

\[ \text{Again, a five-point rating scale was used (1} \quad \text{2} \quad \text{3} \quad \text{4} \quad \text{5}) \]

\( \text{not important} \quad \text{mod. important} \quad \text{very important} \)

and only those sectors rated three or above were included for discussion.
B. Next, the respondents discussed their ratings of outside groups from which they had received important feedback. They also pointed out where they had unique access to feedback. Very little time was needed for this section since most points were usually covered during the first part of the interview.

C. In this section, the respondents discussed the factors which influenced their communication of feedback to others in the PSC (a list of PSC personnel was used as a stimulus). They also discussed people in the organization who were "feedback integrators" for them (i.e., someone to whom they could communicate information and be assured it would be distributed properly to others).

D. Finally, the respondents discussed the following general issues:
   (1) their perceptions of the general strengths and weaknesses of the natural feedback system (including how adequately their personal needs were met), (2) their perceptions of general system dynamics affecting the natural feedback system, and (3) their ideas for building upon and improving what has been used in the past.

   The interviews were completed with the respondents discussing their general reactions to the study. Criticisms of all aspects of the research were solicited at this point.

---

3Again, a five-point rating scale was used, (1) no important, (2) some important, (3) much important, feedback, (4) feedback, (5) feedback, and only those sectors rated three or above were included for discussion.
Stage III

A short period of time was set aside after the interviewing to clear up any problems before the final analysis. During this time, many of the participants were approached informally and asked to clarify confusing points from the interviews.

In addition, approximately four months after the interviews were completed, the study's initial findings were presented at one of the PSC's weekly colloquium meetings. Approximately 40 percent of the staff attended including most key decision-makers. During the meeting, discussion was encouraged and evaluations of my research were continuously solicited. These reactions were audio-taped and used as a valuable validity check during my analysis.

Data Analysis

Most of the data collected in the study were analyzed in a qualitative fashion (see Lofland, 1971). Information was extracted from transcriptions of the interviews and applied to the questions of focus mentioned earlier (pp. 14-16). As with any qualitative study, much interesting information was eventually deleted from the analysis. I included only those pieces which seemed important and had the clear support of the interviewees. Unless indicated otherwise, I used the following guidelines to make my judgments:

(1) The point was made by at least three people from different positions in the organization (usually this included over half the participants).

(2) The point was offered unsolicited by at least three people.
(3) If only one person mentioned the point, it was clear they were
definite about it (labelled as such) and had solid evidence to
back it up. (I checked out most of these informally later.)

An attempt was made to examine the respondents' ratings of the en-
vironment in a more quantitative fashion. Unfortunately, my sample was
too small \((N = 10)\) to show much significance. At best, simple descrip-
tive statistics proved useful. These have been included in the appro-
priate place in the discussion.

Before presenting the findings, two points should be made. First
of all, the analysis took place to a certain degree throughout the study,
although it was intensified after all the data were collected. This was
done so that hypotheses developed early in the course of interviewing
could be explored in later sessions, allowing for a "flexible strategy
of discovery." Finally, as both a member of the organization and prin-
cipal investigator in the study, I had to be aware of any biases that
might have colored my findings. While this did not seem to be a big is-
sue, I was aware of it, and continually solicited the critical comments
of those associated with the study for help. Possible areas of bias will
be mentioned where appropriate within the text.
CHAPTER III

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study explored one aspect of a human service organization's natural feedback system. Earlier, this general process was outlined and four components were focused upon. These included the following areas: (1) the selection of a "perceived feedback environment" (i.e., external elements seen as important sources of feedback by the organizational members), (2) the establishment and use of contacts at the organizational boundary for feedback collection, (3) the execution of a complex coding process during which gatekeepers selectively attend to incoming messages, determine their validity, and transform them into the "language" of the organization, and (4) the internal communication and recording of important feedback needed for decision making. In addition, a fifth area of focus was included, so that general strengths and weaknesses of the organization's natural feedback system could be explored. At this time, I would like to present the findings most relevant to these five areas of focus. Their significance to the field of program evaluation research will also be discussed.

The Perceived Feedback Environment

Information for this section was obtained from the participants' ratings of the environment and interview responses. The list of environmental elements developed in Stage I for the ratings consisted of 129 different individuals, groups, and organizations separated into nine
categories (see Appendix C). While this could have been shortened considerably, it did offer the participants a complete view of the PSC's external environment and was particularly helpful for stimulating discussion during the interview.

Table 1 shows the environmental elements rated as important sources of feedback for the PSC by at least eight of the ten participants. These ratings show that the participants feel that the PSC needs evaluative information from a variety of areas of its environment. While feedback from clients and consultees was important, that from the psychology department, clinical area, and area human services was also given considerable weight. The importance of these different areas was clarified during the interviews.

Insert Table 1 about here

Clients and Consultees

Everybody interviewed agreed that general feedback about the treatment process was needed from clients. Feedback specifically for the student therapists and their PSC team was needed as well as more general information for the total organization.

We must ask our clients what they think, how they feel about their therapy and their therapists' competency. Are there things blocking their treatment here? (Intake worker)

How do they relate the help of a particular student to the services of the PSC as a whole?—Do they relate to a particular student or to this as a place where people are like that? (Intake worker)
TABLE 1

Elements of the Environment Rated >2 by at least Eight of the Ten Participants and the Question: "Indicate Which of These Outsiders Are Important as Feedback Sources for the PSC as an Organization, Using the Following Rating Scale":

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>/</th>
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<th>/</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not Important</td>
<td>Moderately Important</td>
<td>Very Important</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Elements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>clients and consultees</td>
<td>individuals--adults, adolescents, &amp; children; couples, families, Amherst High School--Individualized Program Center, former clients, dropouts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Psychology Department</td>
<td>chairperson, executive committee, graduate affairs committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinical Area, Psychology Department</td>
<td>director, area meeting, curriculum committee, practicum and internship committee, clinical faculty not teaching in PSC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-University funding sources</td>
<td>None--(Potential sources of funds rated &gt;2 by seven of ten participants)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Area human services</td>
<td>referral agencies, Franklin County Mental Health Center, Holyoke Mental Health Center, Student Mental Health--UMass., Counseling Center--Mt. Holyoke College, Amherst Resource Center, Children's Aid and Family Service--Northampton, Comprehensive Children's Center, Franklin-Hampshire Counties Area Outreach Team, Everywoman's Center--UMass., family services (general), children's services (general), youth services (general), elderly services (general), UMass. Health Services, local private psychotherapists, area schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General community</td>
<td>community members at large, local media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clinical Psychology and related disciplines</td>
<td>Professionals in clinical psychology, faculty and students in other clinical psychology programs, members of other human service disciplines.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous individuals and groups</td>
<td>Programs affiliated with PSC (e.g., L.I.F.T., Olley pre-school).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Did they get helped with what they came in wanting help with? Was there a good change? Also want to know if there is stability in the change. It would be interesting to see who don't become our clients, people we could have an impact on but don't reach (faculty).

Although the questionnaire responses do not reflect this, people felt that feedback from consultees was also very important. This is probably related to the participants' overall lack of direct involvement in consultations this year.

I ask for feedback a lot in consultation. It's important. Sometimes I ask for it too much I was told this year. You need direct feedback from those you work with (student).

Nearly everyone mentioned the importance of feedback from former clients and dropouts (i.e., premature terminations), implying the need for some kind of follow-up. There was an uneasiness about the pragmatics of follow-up, though, given the annual turnover rate of students and faculty. While no one discussed specifics, everyone felt these could be worked out if given attention by the organization.

Consistent follow-up is needed. Why are cases closed? This is something we don't do at all that is very important (student).

What I'd really like to know is why people drop out, especially during the initial intake process, but also after they have been seen for a few sessions (intake worker).

Former clients and consultees are less important than current ones because the PSC has changed over the past few years. There are too many changes in personnel and operations for this to be real valuable over an extended period of time. Feedback within a year should be top priority, though. It would be helpful for planning for the following year (director).
Clinical Area

The perceptions and evaluations of the clinical area of the Psychology Department were needed just as much if not more than those of clients and consultees. The PSC's primary task has been to provide training for graduate students in the clinical area. This feedback about this obligation was a high priority for everyone interviewed. The clinical area has had the most direct control over departmental resources (faculty time and T.A. money).

Furthermore, these needs have been exacerbated by on-going boundary problems. The boundary between the clinical area and the PSC has been very unclear. Faculty and students have been members of both an academic department and the more community-oriented PSC, a situation resulting in confusing role orientations and ambiguous lines of authority. For example, it has been unclear whether the director has had the authority to make decisions on his own and tell other faculty what to do. In the center he appears to be in charge, but in the clinical area he is just another faculty member with one vote. The participants felt this boundary confusion dictated the need for a close communicative relationship between the clinical area and PSC decision-making machinery. Clear communication of feedback was seen to be a critical part of this relationship.

What we need here is dialogue. It all becomes confusing because of the PSC/clinical area fusion. Curriculum and research ought to be directed by the area in conjunction with the clinic. The area ought to be responsible for knowledge and the clinic responsible for personal and skill development. Another issue, what's going to give when our program deadlines get tightened up because of the economic pressures? Dialogue around these issues is sorely needed and it'll have to be
forced if it's going to happen (intake worker).

The clinical area should be stating clearly what its aims with respect to training are and what the PSC's role within this should be. The clinical area does not state things clearly enough, too much room for interpretation (teaching associate).

Area Human Services

Area human service agencies were also seen as an important source of feedback. Table 1 shows that a number of individual human service organizations were rated highly by the participants. These selections were based on at least five general factors: (1) the geographical proximity of the organization, (2) the amount of interaction with the agency in referral and cross-referral work, (3) the extent of overlap in client populations, (4) the similarity in professionalism of the agency, and (5) the perceived power and status of the agency in the community.

A variety of kinds of feedback was needed. First of all, it was felt that other agencies could be a good source of general feedback about the PSC's work with clients. Agencies seeing the PSC's current or former clients were in a good position to offer unique feedback which might not be heard otherwise.

I get feedback from clients from time to time in my intake work and therapy, but I get feedback about other places more often than about the PSC. We're more likely to get negative feedback about ourselves from other agencies who see our clients than from our clients ourselves. We should solicit it from other agencies, explaining that we want to keep ourselves clean--keep a tight ship. Other agencies like Student Mental Health, Children's Aid and Family Service, and Franklin County Mental Health could offer us a lot of information. Sometimes the feedback is due to the craziness of the client or peculiarities in our relationship with that agency, but that's good to know as well (intake worker).
The PSC also needed evaluative information that would help it maintain good relationships with key referral sources. Since most of the clients seen at the PSC have been referred by other agencies, these agencies have had an important position of influence. Continual public relations with them (including feedback solicitation) was very important, particularly since they have become uneasy in the past about the quality of treatment provided by transient student therapists. Feedback was needed here to enhance the organization's survival, rather than improve its operations.

PSC occupies a certain place in a series of events—problem detection, problem resolution. Most of these agencies are important because of their referral power. They have a direct influence on whether or not we get to work and with who. Also, people outside need to be aware of what our functions are. For example, we do no emergency work. Something people usually don't know. Also, I heard a comment where somebody referred to us as a training clinic where they could only send certain types of clients—not necessarily true. Misinterpretations of our service can contribute to a lot of negative feedback and bum raps (faculty).

Feedback from other agencies was also needed to help students develop a better awareness of the community's resources. Students need to hear what other agencies thought about the PSC, so they would be better prepared when initially approaching them.

Along these same lines, many discussed the need for information of a general nature from agencies, in addition to feedback (i.e., the perceptions and evaluations of the agency's activities). This again pointed to the need expressed by the participants for healthy, multifaceted relationships with members of the environment, where feedback sharing would be only one important part of the total relationship.
Joe, you have been stressing their reactions to our output functions, but there are other inputs that are important. Often we can get bits of information concerning cases which are extremely important. This information you can easily get from referral agencies if you have a good relationship. Can be very important to how we can function (faculty).

Thus, human service agencies were important sources of feedback for a number of reasons. They could provide information for improving client services and for maintaining a sufficient inflow of resources. As this last quote implied, multifaceted relationships with these agencies was needed, so that both feedback and other information could be collected.

Psychology Department

The last area of the environment given attention by the participants was the psychology department. The department acts as the primary buffer between the PSC and the university. Thus, in many ways it controls the input of vital university resources into the PSC (i.e., faculty, student and secretarial time, and T.A. money). Because of this, most felt that the PSC needed continual feedback from key figures in the department (see Table 1) so as to maintain their good-will and support. Immediately pressing issues included the department's feelings about the PSC as a training site for departmental students, and a site for scholarly and research activity.

In the university, they want to see if we are training and producing scholarly work. Non-clinical faculty want to see how much the PSC can be used for more laboratory research. Do those faculty see our approaches to research and therapy as up with the field? I would like to see dialogue about whether clinical application is up with the best in current
movements in psychology, it being a healthy and productive endeavor. Are our methods of exploration consonant with others emerging in psychology? (faculty)

Most of the participants accented the need for the development of a relationship with the department that included feedback collection as only one part. There was much emphasis put on the need for sharing ideas and discussing problems as informally as possible. This was particularly important given the PSC's past conflicts with the department over theoretical and economic issues.

There is much rivalry and jealousy. People just don't know what is needed to become a clinician. If the department pushes our area to move to more of a research tradition, students will lose the humanistic side. There needs to be communication around the issue of becoming a clinician. Channels of communication need to be opened up. In the psychology department we need dialogue, not feedback (intake worker).

Other Sectors of the Environment

Other areas of the environment were mentioned by the participants but not given much attention. For example, the university, and non-university funding sources were only discussed briefly, seen as "keep yourself covered" administrative areas not causing any problems. Negotiations with the university have usually been taken care of by the department and outside funding has not constituted much of the PSC's operating budget. It was recognized that connections must be kept with key individuals from these areas so that problems do not occur unexpectedly.

Comments about the general community, the field of psychology, and other human service disciplines were vague and general. All were given
a low priority.

Three interesting sources of feedback emerged from discussion of miscellaneous individuals and groups. One of these involved local professional organizations serving as discussion centers for topical human service issues. The newly formed peer standards review organization (PSRO) was a good example. This regionalized group composed of a cross-section of interested parties in health care (e.g., consumers, practitioners and government officials) has reviewed complaints against private practitioners. As yet, it has not had much power or influence over organizations like the PSC, but its potential value as a feedback source was clearly recognized. At one point, feedback was sought from the local mental health directors' association. Unfortunately this group had become inactive at the time of the study and could only be seen for its potential value as well.

Two other interesting sources of feedback involved people occupying unique boundary-spanning roles with respect to the PSC. One of these included students and faculty working in the center who have recently returned from a year at another practicum facility or internship placement. They have been in a unique position to work as a trainee both inside and outside the center, disentangling themselves from the university and gaining exposure to other organizational systems. Because of this, they have been able to offer particularly insightful feedback.

The L.I.F.T. organization, an outreach family therapy team associated with the PSC, has also been important. While L.I.F.T. has been an extension of the PSC, it has operated in the community and consciously down-played its institutional affiliation. L.I.F.T. typically has seen
multi-problem families who have been to a number of agencies without success. Thus it has seen many of the shortcomings of traditional agencies like the PSC. In addition, L.I.F.T. has assembled bi-monthly "network meetings" where agency personnel involved with these difficult families engage in collaborative problem-solving. Thus, L.I.F.T. has been in a unique position to get feedback about itself, the PSC, and the area's human service system.

**Summary**

In summary, the following points have been made about the PSC's selection of a perceived feedback environment. First of all, feedback from a variety of areas of the environment in addition to that of clients has been important. Feedback has been needed to improve the PSC's goal activity (training and service), and maintain its survival in the long run (e.g., insure the sufficient inflow of appropriate referrals). It appears that more emphasis has been placed on survival needs, a point to be discussed later.

Secondly, certain groups have been in a unique position to offer feedback not usually collected in typical evaluations. For example, other agencies seeing the PSC's clients and dropouts often hear feedback that the clients themselves would feel reluctant communicating directly. It thus seemed important to make connections with other agencies to get any feedback they have heard. Groups with a unique insider-outsider status and close ties to the community were also seen as valuable. The L.I.F.T. team was seen highly in this regard.

Finally, while the participants spoke a great deal about the PSC's
feedback needs, they also began to talk about the kinds of relationships most advantageous to the collection of such information. From their comments, it appears that much important communication occurs naturally within the context of close, working relationships with outsiders. The specific nature of these relationships was important and was explored in more depth during the next phase of the study where the participants discussed their outside contacts and feedback collection.

The Organization's Links to the Environment and Use of These Information

For this section was obtained primarily from the interviews. Ratings of the participants' environmental contact and feedback collection were gathered, but did not provide much information for the analysis. It appeared that the participants had based their ratings individually on a variety of assumptions, making it difficult to compare and contrast them in any systematic way. The rating process itself did stimulate the thinking of the participants and provided a useful focus for discussion, though.

Earlier the participants had expressed a number of feedback needs. During this section, it became clear that very few of these had been met. Members of the organization had had a number of contacts with outsiders, but only a few were consistently used to collect information. Most feedback collection occurred sporadically and was dependent upon the individual relationships and chance encounters of gatekeepers. There have been no formal mechanisms (e.g., questionnaires, surveys) operating, and the informal ones (e.g., phone conversations) have not
effectively provided data for directing program improvements. In my opinion, only a minimal amount of outside feedback has been collected, that necessary to maintain the survival of the organization with the minimal amount of change.

In spite of these problems, there have been a few strengths which could be built upon by an evaluation consultant. These have included most importantly: (1) the L.I.F.T. team (mentioned earlier), and (2) the close, informal relationships of gatekeepers that have facilitated on-going feedback collection.

In the following pages, I will discuss these strengths and weaknesses and present an analysis of the reasons for the PSC's feedback collection methods. To begin, I will focus on the important sources of feedback mentioned earlier (see Table 1), describing the PSC's contact and feedback collection with each.

Clients and Consultees

The PSC has had extensive contact (both formal and informal) with clients and consultees. Everyone interviewed had had at least some formal contact. This ranged from a T.A. who had directly seen 3-4 clients and had extensive vicarious contact through his/her supervision of other students' cases, to the administrative assistant who occasionally spoke with clients at the front desk. Many interviewed had had occasional informal contacts (i.e., contact outside work role) as well. Six of the ten participants spoke of at least one situation where they had conversed with a PSC client outside their professional role.

Some feedback was collected during therapy and consultations, al-
though extremely limited, and focused around the "therapeutic" relationship itself rather than the organization as a whole. Personal feedback was given a much higher priority than feedback about the organization. Very little, if any, follow-up of former clients was done. Only two of the eight participants seeing clients put effort into such activity. There was no follow-up of dropouts although most felt this was very important. In sum, the minimal amount of feedback collected was not that useful to the participants. Most felt that formal mechanisms were needed, especially for follow-up of former clients and dropouts.

We get only minimal feedback. If we get any it's informal, from the extreme ends of a positive-negative dimension. It's never consistent or solicited, only bits and pieces. For the most part these bits and pieces are not used too much. Sometimes if they are general in some way and big enough, they affect morale. For instance we recently received a gift of $100 from a former client that helped build morale as it went through the informal channels. This informal feedback usually gets shunted back to the person responsible for the case. This informal feedback wouldn't be that good in a formal evaluation system because it's too little and extreme (director).

I always do some direct treatment myself in addition to my supervision of students and a teaching associate. Thus, I get multi-level feedback. The most characteristic quality of feedback from patients is that it's very variable. I've gotten feedback from patients that has shown where therapy has been excellent and other cases where it has shown that there have been some terrible mismatches between what the person wanted and what the person got. That's interesting feedback in and of itself, but not really that informative because of its variability (faculty).

I do call people back after a few months, try to keep a running contact. It's purely personal. I imagine I'll even contact a few after I leave here next year. I'm not aware of too many others who even do what little I do. A big weakness is that we do no follow-up. We don't seek out why we fail. We don't follow dropouts (teaching associate).
Thus, some feedback was collected, but not nearly as much as the participants would have liked. As the general tone of these quotes indicates, more systematic information collected at the organizational level would have been preferred. While there were some similarities, the clinical area of the psychology department provided a more complex situation.

**Clinical Area**

As should be expected, there was much contact between the staff and the clinical area of the psychology department. In fact, because of the extensive overlap between the two, it was difficult for the participants to clearly distinguish one from the other. As was discussed earlier, everyone working in the PSC has received departmental credit through their clinical area involvement. In addition there has been much overlap in the decision-making machinery of the two.

Given this situation, feedback collection was a confusing and difficult issue to discuss. It was difficult enough for the participants to decide who was part of the environment and who was part of the organization at any point in time.

In spite of the confusion, the closeness between the PSC and clinical area provided some feedback benefits. The clinic had existed for over thirteen years with mostly positive support from the area, with faculty and students consistently choosing to work there year after year. The on-going contact provided by the closeness made the regular discussion of important feedback fairly easy. Virtually all of this has been collected informally, within the context of personal relation-
ships. Occasionally, formal discussion of the PSC took place during clinical area meetings (the primary decision-making body of the area), but no questionnaires or surveys have been used to assess the clinical area's perceptions and evaluations of the center.

Unfortunately, most interviewed felt these strengths were not enough. Seven of the ten participants said (unsolicited) that more open discussion of feedback was needed. While enough feedback has been collected to maintain the survival of the center, and direct a few program improvements, there has not been enough for regular self-examination. The students, in particular, hoped that clinical area meetings could be used more often to discuss the center and its role in the training program. In this way, PSC decision-makers could get the feedback they have needed to help them meet the needs of faculty and students.

Area Human Services

The PSC's contacts with area human service agencies have been minimal. No relationships have been established in a systematic way by the organization as a whole. Nearly every agency did receive at least periodic contact, though. Most of these were made by the director, other faculty, and the social worker in charge of intake. This was not too surprising since they have been most permanent of the PSC's fairly transient staff. Most of the contacts were formal ones, focused around casework and the referral process. Some were informal, though, occurring in the context of personal relationships developed. For example, one of the respondents regularly played tennis with members of three key
agencies, where both social and business issues were discussed. Students and teaching associates, on the other hand, rarely had contact with outside agencies. All who were interviewed felt reluctant approaching outside agency personnel even though they often had the opportunities.

The minimal amount of feedback collected from outsiders has been largely unsolicited and variable, and communicated indirectly. Most interviewed, however, felt that it could be collected more systematically in the future if it was given a higher priority. For a number of reasons which will be discussed later, they felt reluctant to do this.

My general feeling about feedback is that the most important feedback is rarely given spontaneously by anybody, the most important being critical feedback as to things that people think you've muffed or weren't doing properly. You have to go out after that kind of information and I'm not aware that the PSC anymore than any other clinic does go out after it. There is a kind of gossip network where some kind of evaluation goes on and occasionally one hears that about the PSC. At one time I remember when we were thinking of instituting a sliding fee schedule rumors began to circulate that we were too expensive. I heard from various sources of instances where people hesitated in using our services because they were quite sure they couldn't afford it. The information about the sliding scale hadn't reached them (faculty).

I've gotten nothing direct, but some indirect feedback about two people who work here. I heard some school personnel sharing perceptions of two PSC faculty, trying to decide who the parents of a kid would respond to better (student).

I have a friend who's a local psychotherapist. S/he has told me about clients of his/her own who have dropped out of here. Apparently they have had problems with our one-way observation policy and norm to see couples or the family when there is a sick adolescent involved. S/he doesn't think highly of the PSC so s/he selects negative stuff. My guess is that his/her experience is not unique. Other local psychotherapists have similar feedback that we don't get because we don't seek it out (teaching associate).
I have a lot of contact with their intake worker over there, both in people we can't handle that we refer over there and people referred here from there. Plus a lot of questions about observation, student supervision, etc.; feedback from clients that have seen people here and decided not to return, being not clear about the quality of the services we offer . . . . I also have a lot of contact with people in the community. I was on a committee at continuing ed. crime prevention program, had contact with Franklin County Headstart, Children's Protective Services where I trained a student, Pelham Conservation Commission, Council for Aging, ran for school committee. I'm a personal friend of the former principal of Pelham schools. Overall, I feel I could get a lot of information from people if I asked for it (intake worker).

As these quotes indicate, at least some important feedback has been collected from agency personnel through the informal connections of gatekeepers. Again though, the participants felt that more was needed to insure the PSC's proper self-examination. They felt that the PSC has basically collected only enough information to maintain its survival. Feedback for survival was collected in a couple of ways. Incoming referrals have been monitored by the intake team and administrative assistant, and the director and a few key staff have used their personal friendships with outsiders to keep agency relations in order. Thus, as long as sufficient referrals have come in, the PSC has felt secure with outside agencies.

It's amazing that we have done as well as we have in monitoring our referral process. We never have gotten in serious trouble. We always seem to get our internal needs for clients met despite continual fluctuation in our needs. There must be some mysterious feedback-monitoring device for checking up our referral process that must allow us to do it with few problems. It doesn't seem to make much difference with our referrals. We always seem to have enough cases to meet our training needs. I try to maintain safety valves with people like University Health Services and Amherst Resource Center. I do things like playing tennis weekly with key people and asking questions once in a while. I find you have to
be very selective in who you hook up with. Sometimes it takes years. The relationship comes first and feedback second. The best relationships get formed informally. The first six years here I put an enormous amount of energy in relationship building. I built up good-will so that it isn't so necessary now. These relationships are set up for survival purposes, to maintain the agency in the community. Agencies are about surviving 80 percent. A typical evaluation doesn't get at this. Now with funding dependent on evaluation, people go through the motions (director).

The issue of feedback for survival mentioned here was a crucial one in the study. Key decision-makers have tended to respond only to the reactions of outsiders holding some power over the PSC (i.e., control of resources). While other feedback useful for directing program improvements has been collected and responded to occasionally, it has definitely been given lower priority.

**Psychology Department**

Given the PSC's formal ties to the psychology department and physical location within the same building, one would expect considerable contact between the two. The fact is, however, that very little contacts have been established. Occasionally, PSC faculty and students have met with other department members within the context of a course, committee involvement, or department politics. In addition, a few have met on a purely social basis. There have been no regular forums for discussion of PSC-department concerns, however, and dialogue around particular issues has taken place only occasionally during departmental committee meetings.

Very little direct feedback has been collected from the department through these contacts. As a general rule, it has not been sought out
except during crises, when the PSC has wished to improve its negotiating position. This has been due mainly to the long-standing conflict between the two. The staff has felt for many years that the department has disliked the center and would do whatever it could to destroy it. Thus feedback has not been sought because they have felt that they already knew what they were going to hear. The participants did report hearing a lot of feedback indirectly. Because of their clear distrust of the department, however, it was difficult to determine how much was fact and how much projection.

L.I.F.T.

As described earlier, the L.I.F.T. organization, an offshoot of the PSC, has been in a unique position to collect the perceptions and evaluations of the community members. During their outreach family work, they have had contact with people seen by many agencies in the community. Because of this, they have worked very closely with other agency personnel. Being a relatively new organization, L.I.F.T. has also had much contact with outside funding sources and the university in its efforts to get established financially. Through these contacts and close working relationships, L.I.F.T. has been able to collect much useful feedback about itself and other agencies like the PSC.

L.I.F.T. has assembled a support network of agencies to help get that feedback about how we're working with clients and with them (the agencies). Relationships have been established so that people can be more open with feedback. I don't know that we intended feedback-sharing when we started, but we have gotten to the place where it happens. We have an on-going forum, a place to have face-to-face dialogue between people we're working with. It makes feedback easier.
You have to establish a group norm where people can talk about their failures. We learn more from our failures. Our meetings are fairly pragmatic, too. You have feedback coming out from a specific focus on mutual cases. . . . The nature of the cases we get are necessarily really difficult and the people have gone through a number of agencies before they get to us. We deal with multiple agency contact people, and we deal with the failures of a number of other agencies. In having our contacts with these other agencies we try to learn from their mistakes, but we also get in touch with their shortcomings including those of the PSC. These are typically those that result from setting up a traditional agency where people have to ask for help and make appointments and have to get themselves to the source of help. You are typically going to lose those people who don't consider themselves in need of help or who are hostile to what they see as intrusions or unwarranted interventions in their private lives or who are too disorganized to get themselves to the source of help. So in that sense, the PSC being conventional, there is that kind of feedback. The other feedback is that we meet with a network of agencies all of whom are part of the network because they may have or may in the future refer cases to L.I.F.T. One becomes aware of the jurisdictional or territorial interactions between agencies and how certain problems may be difficult to deal with because they fall between the agencies' functions and what the agencies prefer to offer. One gets feedback to the PSC because of the types of cases we prefer to see (faculty).

While much useful feedback has been collected by L.I.F.T. itself, very little has been collected from L.I.F.T. by the PSC. In fact, some of the participants (particularly students) weren't even sure what the L.I.F.T. program was. Virtually all contact with it has been through a faculty consultant and the director of the PSC. Both agreed that L.I.F.T. has not been used as a source of feedback as much as it could. The director indicated, however, that he had intended to use L.I.F.T. more for this purpose, and was beginning to meet regularly with the program's administrator.
Feedback Collection within the Context of a Close Relationship

Overall, very little systematic feedback collection has taken place in the PSC. Some important feedback was collected, though, within the context of close relationships with outsiders. In fact, the development and maintenance of close relationships with feedback sources was seen to be one of the most important strengths of the PSC's natural feedback system. Close relationships could be used regularly to get candid, up-to-date information from key figures in the environment. Generally, these were used only sporadically and for survival oriented situations. Most felt, however, they could be used more regularly to collect both goal and survival related feedback.

Feedback facilitating relationships were characterized by the following important qualities: (1) a strong personal bond and "informal" connection, (2) mutual trust and respect (especially of confidentiality), (3) a long-term commitment to helping each other, (4) an openness to feedback, and (5) the opportunity for reciprocal helping and feedback-sharing.

Earlier, the distinction was made between formal and informal contacts. Basically, formal contacts involved business situations where the gatekeeper was clearly an organizational representative. Informal contacts were less tied to business and more personal, grounded within the context of a friendship. The feedback facilitating relationships discussed in the interviews were of this latter type, based on a strong informal connection. For example, one of the respondents developed close friendships with a number of individuals in other agencies through his/her involvement with them on cases and projects. A few of these had
become more intimate and incorporated into the rest of his/her life, while others remained much more business-like. No matter what degree of intimacy involved, however, all of these bonds made conversation around work issues easy, comfortable, and candid. Because of these relationships, s/he had ready access to feedback on a variety of levels that otherwise would not be available from the same people or organizations.

Establishing a close, informal connection with outsiders was extremely helpful no matter how long it took to develop. For example, one of the intake workers reported establishing fairly close bonds with prospective clients after just a few minutes with them on the phone. In general, though, the more important feedback-facilitating bonds were developed over a period of months or years.

Sometimes as intake person I did some crisis counseling over the phone. I had two or three people that gave me feedback when we were through. Most of it was about how much they appreciated my taking the time to listen, but they also had some critical things to say about the PSC and other agencies. They just offered it. That unsolicited feedback seemed to stand out. It's only happened when I've taken fifteen to twenty minutes with someone. Generally I ask them if they have any questions for me at the end. That is generally when I've gotten feedback, giving them the opportunity to talk or ask questions. The feedback happens only after some personal contact has been made (intake worker).

In all of these relationships a certain level of trust, respect, and openness to feedback was present that allowed outsiders to communicate their feelings without major reservations. They could trust that the gatekeeper was interested in their impressions, and would take the time to listen openly. They knew s/he would give them a fair hearing,
be sympathetic to their concerns, and discuss any differences of opinion openly and honestly. If the feedback addressed agency concerns, they knew the information would be passed on and followed up by their friend. Furthermore, they could trust that their confidentiality would be respected if they so desired.

Within this context, the feedback process took on a different quality than found in traditional evaluation research. In evaluation research, feedback collection is generally considered a static process, occurring at best a few times a year. Within the context of these relationships, however, feedback was collected whenever the information and need was there. Furthermore, these situations usually resulted in a dialogue between insiders and outsiders over the often complicated issues at hand. The ramifications of the situation could be explored in depth by both parties and future directions for dealing with the information could be charted. Since these relationships were usually on-going, similar feedback could be discussed over and over, leading to progressively refined data for the system.

For the most part, the development and use of feedback-facilitating relationships has been dependent on the individual efforts of PSC staff. It was felt that in the future, however, more could be developed at an organizational level by promoting the development of formal contacts. Once the staff were more involved with outsiders in a formal way, many informal feedback-facilitating relationships would develop naturally over time.

You need formal channels begun to then initiate the informal ones which then become the most valuable vehicles for feedback.
There's a need for an evaluation headset. Evaluation is dictated by the system, then you open up valuable informal channels (intake worker).

When we first have contact with outside agencies our first agenda should be to establish ourselves: to figure out what goes on in their agency so that we can feel comfortable working with them. If we need any information at that point, it's what their agenda with us is. Later as we work more together we can establish a closer relationship. At that point we would probably feel more comfortable sharing the kind of feedback you've been talking about (faculty member responding during PSC presentation).

Shortly after the presentation of the study's results to the PSC, an interesting development took place which supported the PSC's investment in stimulating such outside connections. A few weeks after the presentation a decision was made to send small groups of staff to outside agencies to strengthen the PSC's inter-agency relationships and open-up feedback channels. At least one person from each practicum team was placed on these groups. While this was a positive step towards stimulating an interest in community relationships, only time will tell whether or not this particular action will get team members more involved formally and informally with outside agency personnel. It does indicate, however, that the PSC values the development of feedback facilitating relationships with outsiders.

While informal relationships have generally enhanced feedback collection, they have occasionally introduced problems of their own. The closeness of the relationship has sometimes made it more difficult to ask for feedback than would otherwise be the case. Respondents experiencing this difficulty based their feelings on a couple of factors. For some the difficulty involved problems of mixing business with pleasure.
They did not want to burden their personal lives with work matters. Others feared that asking for "privy" information in an informal conversation might be construed as devious or manipulative. They did not want to jeopardize their friendships by probing too much into touchy political areas.

For other respondents, the difficulty involved knowing what to do with feedback directly collected. It was sometimes difficult for them to determine whether or not their friends' feedback should be communicated within the PSC or kept confidential. Rather than risk putting their friends in a difficult position with others in the organization, they would keep the information to themselves or avoid situations of this nature altogether.

I don't like to mix business with pleasure, so I don't use my informal contacts to solicit feedback very much. Sometimes it also feels difficult to break the confidentiality of feedback sources, but if it's important it can be passed on in another form (intake worker).

An enormous amount of my contact is informal, more in a social context. It depends on the situation, but that feedback through informal situations can be difficult to judge its validity, decide what to do with it, or feel its importance. So and so in this agency was dealt with poorly. Then how do I decide to go to the worker? It's hard to do it without the worker feeling defensive. It's difficult also to reveal the source. It's hard to follow-up these situations so I usually let them go (director).

I heard about a situation where this woman who had lived with a student therapist spilled out all this stuff he had shared with her in confidence. You know he would just tell her things that were going on with him. Later after they split up she...had no qualms about using his experiences as ammunition against the PSC. This stuff gets too complicated. I couldn't even go to the therapist who was involved. It probably would've done nothing but piss him off even more. It wouldn't have been productive. You're always going to have clashes like this going on. I just file it for myself and
try not to spread it around. Most people don't talk about this kind of stuff because they don't have that many contacts outside (student).

All this is not to say that such problems have caused major difficulties. Generally, the stronger the relationship, the easier it has been to deal with uncomfortable situations openly and honestly. Gatekeepers could be honest about their information needs while maintaining the pleasure and integrity of their friendships.

Summary

For the most part, very little feedback has been collected from the environment by the PSC. There has been some contact with important sources of feedback (as rated by the organizational members themselves), but little information has resulted. Only a minimum amount of feedback has been collected, that necessary to maintain the organization's survival. While no clear understanding of the maintenance process was found in the study, further exploration of this aspect of natural feedback systems seems important for the future. I would hypothesize that natural feedback systems are most valuable to organizations like the PSC because of their ability to implicitly monitor key aspects of the environment (i.e., individuals or groups with power) and maintain the organization's survival with a minimum amount of change.

In spite of the clear problems with the PSC's feedback collection, there have been a couple of important strengths. One of these has involved the L.I.F.T. program, whose close collaboration with local agencies has resulted in much useful feedback for the PSC. While very lit-
tle of this has been used internally up to this point, efforts at improving the PSC's natural feedback system could easily incorporate it in the future.

The other strength has involved the informal efforts of several staff who have been able to form close, feedback-facilitating relationships with outsiders. Because of the familiarity, openness, and trust in these on-going relationships more feedback-collection has occurred than would be possible in standard evaluation procedures. Further evaluation efforts could benefit from these by developing more effective ways of stimulating their development and using the resulting data.

System Dynamics

Another important aspect of the PSC's natural feedback system usually not considered in standard evaluations emerged from the interviews. This involved the larger systemic dynamics that have influenced the participants' lack of feedback collection. Information of this nature which would be of tremendous importance to a consultant building upon the natural feedback system was offered enthusiastically by the participants during the interviews. Most of their comments about general system dynamics were made unsolicited during discussions of specific feedback situations. For this reason, I believe they were important concerns, in need of special attention.

A number of important issues emerged during these discussions. The most striking of these was that none of the participants felt personally responsible for soliciting much (if any) environmental feedback. At best they felt a "reactive" responsibility. That is, they would be
happy to collect feedback if it was initiated by an outsider, but not if they had to solicit it themselves. The only possible exception was the director who felt responsible for feedback collection, but has not had the time or resources to initiate it all by himself. In the past he has put considerable effort into establishing relationships with various areas of the environment and seeking out feedback from them. Most recently he has pulled back, much to the dismay of the staff. They were quick to place as much of the blame for the feedback collection problems on his shoulders as possible.

People just offer their feedback. It never occurred to me to ask for it. I'm not interested. It's not my responsibility even though it is important for the PSC to get feedback of this nature. Perhaps the director should be, with it delegated to others. It is an organizational responsibility (student).

I'm not responsible for getting feedback from dropouts. If a student was interested in doing it that would be fine. The director would probably have the responsibility... (intaker worker).

No, it's not my responsibility to get feedback from clients or any of those people. If I ever hear anything I pass it on to the therapist or the director, but it's really not my job. It's the responsibility of people like the director, the intake worker, or students who are more involved (administrative assistant).

Most interviewed did not feel part of the larger organization. They felt involved in their personal work or that of the others or their PSC team (if they belonged to a team), but only in rare cases did anyone besides the director feel connected elsewhere. Many did not even think of the PSC as an organization at all. As will be discussed in more depth later, this was due mainly to poor internal communication. People
were not up-to-date with others' activities and feelings. Furthermore, most had experienced frustration in seeing few changes result from feedback collected and communicated in the past. In essence, most felt it senseless to collect feedback for an organization foreign to them and unresponsive to their input.

When I think of the PSC, I don't think of it as a place where I am very involved, even though I'm involved in the programs I just mentioned. Really involved in my therapy and consultation, but when you ask me about the PSC I don't think of it as an organization. This will be the first time I've done that. I don't think of the structure of it. I have no idea who the important people are and what they do to keep the PSC running. Part of it is my problem, but it's also an organizational function as well (student).

I don't feel like much a part of the PSC. Probably a function of having been on the same team two years. That team doesn't feel like a part of the PSC. The director is seen as the sole person responsible for the PSC. He is the only central person who's in a position to do anything. I think feedback should be talked about among the team leaders, but I don't have the sense of them being a part of the PSC. There's the director, intake workers, T.A.'s, secretaries, and students and then separate from this are the faculty team leaders and students. This reflects the powerlessness of the PSC. The team leaders are not committed to it (teaching associate).

Discussing my commitment to the PSC is hard to do because there's been a change in my commitment. I still want to do my job but I have less of a commitment. I can do my job well -- that has been established in the past -- but it's been overlooked so why the hell should I care. I have a very edgy feeling about this place so I don't go out of my way to try to make things run smoothly. If they choose to use me in some way, fine. If they don't, O.K. (intake worker).

I don't have the time to get feedback in a systematic way and nobody else is interested. Most people are narcissistic and not concerned with the totality of the PSC except during a threat in the department. People see it as too time consuming to get involved in larger issues. Most people aren't that sensitive to outside the PSC. I wish it were an organization where people felt more a part of it than just their teams. Except on rare occasions during a threat do people feel a part of this place (director).
In my opinion, much of the problems have been related to the PSC's close and oftentimes confusing ties to the clinical psychology area. Because the boundary between the two has been so unclear, it was difficult for the participants to determine whether the PSC was an autonomous agency or merely an extension of the academically oriented clinical area. Roles have been ambiguous (e.g., student or mental health worker) and lines of authority have been particularly unclear. For example, the director who has also been a faculty member has had very unclear powers. In some ways, he has been in a double-bind situation. Students and faculty have placed primary responsibility for the PSC's operation on his administrative shoulders, but at the same time have only given him the same meager powers possessed by other faculty. Agency accountability has been severely diminished because of the central staff's ability to operate almost entirely under a system of academic autonomy. Within this system it has been very difficult for feedback collection responsibilities to be delegated from the top down, and for decisions to be made with feedback collected spontaneously by the staff.

I have a long-term commitment and investment in this place so I feel part of it and some responsibility. But the way it's organized is such that it often appears that a great commitment isn't called for. The clinic is administered by a single administrator in a way which does not often require the input of staff or students, and it runs quite well and one has the impression that that sort of input is not needed. This is also related to the way the clinic is organized into teams. In a sense you have a secretariat or administrative unit that does a lot of housekeeping and provides a support function. Much of the clinical investment takes place in teams, general investment as well. There's less in the umbrella organization of the PSC. It's a funny kind of organizational structure as regards to feelings of involvement or loyalty of commitment. I've worked in other clinical settings and it's much less possible here to have the kind of intimate connection and commit-
ment to the institution. Well, I've gone back and forth on it. At times I felt it was a bad thing, but at other times I think it's a good thing. I think it's probably necessary within the peculiar nature of universities and training programs and prima donnas that one gets in academic facilities. Given the primary mission of the clinic which is to do training and research and that the director doesn't have the usual kind of authority that directors of other clinics have, and the lack of the necessity of an intimate relationship to the community, I imagine that this is the only kind of organization that's possible. It has some great advantages and disadvantages. One of the things you lose is that quality of commitment (faculty).

Who's responsible here? Well, it's funny. Faculty like the director have administrative responsibilities, but yet we're all seen as equal. It makes responsibility very complex. I would guess it's everyone's responsibility (faculty).

The situation has been complicated by another set of factors. The PSC has tried to be both a service and training oriented facility, but has had many problems balancing these over the years to everyone's satisfaction. The complex nature of these goals and oftentimes competing interests in the environment has made it difficult to respond to a lot of incoming feedback. For example the director mentioned that "if everyone in the community felt the PSC should be doing family therapy and that individual therapy was rotten, some people would still want to do and get trained in individual therapy." To avoid problems of this nature, the staff have largely avoided such situations.

As was stated earlier, the PSC has developed a fairly successful operation in spite of seemingly poor feedback collection. Because of the PSC's continued survival, some just assumed that most of the organization's information needs were getting met. Given their low feelings of commitment, it was easy to assume the best and avoid disrupting the status quo. In addition, a couple of people openly admitted to the
threatening aspects of feedback. They did not want to discover weaknesses that would demand major reorganization. With all of these factors taken into consideration, it is not too surprising that very little external feedback has been collected by the system.

I'm not invested in the PSC. The inertia of it continuing on makes me feel that feedback isn't that important. It always seems to bail itself out. That inertia makes the PSC unresponsive to feedback, resistant to change. It makes you feel like feedback will make little difference. I don't think that the teaching associates care about feedback (teaching associate).

There is a lot that could be done and there is very little that is being done. It would be nice if someone like you, Joe, could do it. I say this all with a certain ambivalence because feedback carries with it a threat. It's nice cognitively but more difficult in actuality. It can be very confusing in an agency like this with different purposes and a strange location. It's difficult to know how to meet that external feedback when internal constraints are too heavy (director).

The system dynamics presented here might be summarized by the following points: (1) PSC members have not felt responsible for collecting feedback and it has been difficult for an effective system to be legislated administratively; (2) the staff have not felt a part of the larger organization and have felt frustrated offering inputs; (3) the boundary between the clinical area and the PSC has been very unclear, increasing the staff's role confusion and severely disrupting decision-making; (4) the complex nature of the PSC's goals and competing interests in the environment have made it difficult to respond to feedback; and (5) feedback collection has sometimes appeared unnecessary and threatening. Points of this nature are important, especially when thinking of refining a natural feedback system. They will be mentioned later during dis-
cussions of the PSC's internal communication processes and feedback system improvements.

The Coding Process Used by Gatekeepers

In this part of the study an attempt was made to discover the ways gatekeepers have judged information from the environment to be valid and useful organizational feedback. Unfortunately, for a number of reasons, this proved to be a more difficult task than originally anticipated. Very little illuminating information was obtained. From the participants' point of view, this was a difficult area to explore because of their lack of conscious feedback activity. Since for the most part they perceived themselves as collecting very little organizational feedback, it was difficult for them to focus on the finer aspects of how they cognitively proceeded in such situations. In addition, there were some problems with my method of inquiry. Because of the exploratory nature of the study, it was difficult exploring any one aspect of the feedback process in depth. Since this area demanded extra effort that I did not have, much had to be left unclear.

In spite of these problems, some of the participants were able to discuss the coding process of which they were aware. Their responses seemed to fall into three general areas: (1) feedback cues, (2) general coding processes, and (3) feedback distortion.

Feedback Cues

Up to this point, feedback has been referred to as verbal in na-
ture, transmitted directly within the context of a conversation between the outsider and organizational member. Feedback has also been communicated in other less direct ways. The participants mentioned a number of cues that they have used to judge incoming information.

Some of these cues involved the incoming flow of people into the PSC. For example, every spring there has been a period of negotiation, where faculty and students decided whether or not they would work in the center the following year. The outcomes of these decisions over the years (i.e., trends in the number of faculty and students working in the PSC) have represented important indications of the clinical area's satisfaction and dissatisfaction with the PSC.

Incoming clients and referrals have also been important indicators of feedback. Positive feedback has often been measured by the extent to which clients come to the center and are referred by ex-clients and other agencies in the community. In fact, to my knowledge, client referrals have been the only feedback consistently recorded by the staff.

Feedback has also been measured by the success of students on the internship and job market. Since most of the clinical area's students consistently get prestigious internship and job placements, most felt that this has represented good feedback for the center. Many of those interviewed used this informally as a rough indicator of the PSC's success as a training facility.

Thus, other indicators of feedback in addition to direct verbal statements have been used by members of the PSC. Most felt that these could be used to develop a more refined on-going system of evaluation. For example, staff inflow could be recorded each year, and faculty and
students could record the factors involved in their decision about working in the PSC. Using the staff's informal criteria in this way to develop more formal measures would be an excellent way to extend their present evaluation efforts and increase their interest in systematic evaluation methods.

**General Coding Processes**

The various processes used by PSC members to determine the importance and validity of incoming feedback were vague. Most generally, participants made judgments using their own intuition and impressions of the situation. If the feedback corroborated their own impressions of the PSC or brought something new and interesting into the picture, they judged it to be important. Most felt that they could make a more accurate decision about its validity if they had had an on-going relationship with the source. Because of their past involvements in similar situations, they knew when to trust the person's perceptions and opinions. In addition, a few had developed their own personal criteria for making assessments, taking into consideration such factors as how soon feedback was introduced into the conversation, how emphatic the source was in making their points, and how often the same kind of feedback was communicated by different sources. A few others checked the feedback by speaking with others in the organization whose opinions they trusted and respected.

Most of the feedback I heard came informally through my (psychology department) support group. I determined its validity by checking it against my own feelings, and because of my trust in the people. We had a fairly close relationship in
the group. It seemed important because it was the first stuff I heard from this group of students. It seemed to be the most important things on their minds to say to a clinical student (student).

The feedback one gets from clients is directly related to the treatment process and has to do with the kind of on-going evaluation that one makes of clients during therapy and the question of whether you get feedback about the person's outside life has to do with the kind of therapy you do or the stage of therapy you're in. If the patient is feeling good about therapy, they are very likely to tell you about the good things that are happening outside. If they're mad at you at that point or for other reasons they may not tell you about good things or that the therapy isn't helping them. The feedback that one gets from other sources seems to me has different motivations, different reasons for being given to you and has to be evaluated differently. The consumer organization or social advocacy organization may have some particular axe to grind (faculty member).

You need to stress that when you deal with mental health, human service matters you have to deal with unrealistic thinking. We are dealing with heavy issues that have been problematic throughout history. We deal with people at the extremes of an emotional continuum. Plus, we deal with highly explosive, anxiety-arousing situations. This really puts feedback in a different category. It makes it very difficult to interpret and deal with. Feedback and evaluation becomes highly complex. We're not putting out cans of beans and do they taste good or not. Maybe what is needed is what Erik Erikson said in his discussions of psychohistorical research; you not only have to deal with information and fact, but you also have to know about the motives and the interrelationships of the sources of information and yourself (faculty member).

As this last quote sums up, determining the importance and validity of the perceptions and evaluations of outsiders was a difficult task. Unfortunately, there have been no organization-wide mechanisms for insuring that such determinations have been accurate.

Feedback Distortion

Because the PSC staff have relied mostly on their own judgment and
that of close associates to determine the importance and validity of incoming feedback, there has been much room for feedback distortions. It was difficult, however, determining the specific ways this might have occurred. Feedback was not "tracked" through the system to see how it was altered at different communication points. Nor were the staff's impressions ever compared with those of outsiders. My findings in this area were necessarily limited because of my sole reliance on the self-reports of those in the PSC.

Most interviewed were sure that they and others in the PSC had distorted feedback in one way or another. As was stated earlier, most felt that the PSC has generally resisted negative feedback. This has been done in at least a couple of ways. Negative feedback has either been avoided or suppressed, or the sources have been discounted and their negative reactions rationalized away. One of the participants discussed two specific situations where particularly negative feedback was actively suppressed because it might "lower staff morale." Another person stressed that it was always possible to discount feedback in a specific situation because of the ambiguity of feedback processes in the human services. S/he mentioned several situations where it had been difficult to determine fact from fiction.

Everyone agreed that some distortion of feedback was inevitable, and would need to be corrected for in a refined evaluation system. One suggestion was the creation of a forum for discussion of feedback where the individual impressions of the staff could be checked against one another (e.g., an occasional staff meeting devoted to feedback sharing). Most felt, however, that more careful, systematic data collection tech-
niques would be needed to get reliable and valid information.

Summary

In sum, little detailed information was collected in the study about the PSC's feedback coding processes. A few general points emerged, however. (1) Feedback has been communicated in a variety of ways, both verbally and non-verbally. Much of the non-verbal feedback (e.g., staff and client flow) used informally by the staff could easily be recorded more systematically to provide better data for decision-making. (2) The staff have tended to rely mostly on intuitive processes to judge the importance and validity of incoming information. (3) Because of this, they have probably distorted and ignored much of what has been communicated by outsiders. Unfortunately, I was unable to discover specific distortions that have occurred. It was apparent, however, that no matter what has specifically taken place, future evaluation efforts could easily incorporate ways of correcting them.

Communication and Storage of Feedback in the Organization

Everyone interviewed agreed that there have been major problems with the PSC's communication and storage of incoming information. There have been no easily accessible formal channels (i.e., general staff meetings) within which the staff could plug-in feedback, and the informal, world-of-mouth channels have only been effective during situations of extreme importance. Furthermore, the staff have kept almost no records of information collected over the years, thus making any on-going
system of review and planning virtually impossible. In spite of these
clear problems, there have been a few strengths that could be used by
an evaluation consultant in developing a more refined evaluation sys-
tem. Hopefully, both strengths and weaknesses will become clear in the
following, more detailed discussion of this important aspect of the
PSC's natural feedback system.

Formal Channels

Up until the time of this study, feedback communication had not
been addressed directly by the PSC. Thus, there were no formal channels
designated specifically for the transmission of this type of informa-
tion. There were a few formal channels, however, used for the transmis-
sion of other organizational information. Occasionally the perceptions
and evaluations of outsiders were communicated through them (e.g., T.A.
supervision, group clinic meeting, intake meeting). Unfortunately most
in the study felt that these have not worked very effectively for feed-
back.

This feedback was very important for students working here,
but I didn't take it anywhere in particular. It didn't dawn
on me that there was a central place to take it to, where
anything would come out of it. The people I think of shar-
ing things like this are people in my class and my friends.
Not central people (student).

We may be getting feedback. I don't know. It's not shared
here. There are no vehicles for sharing it (teaching asso-
ciate).

There is no means of communicating between the staff. There
are no formal mechanisms. . . . You can't be heard except
by the director. There are no means of communicating to one
another (intake worker).
In spite of these problems, there has been at least one potentially important communication strength in the PSC practicum teams. As was stated earlier, the PSC's primary organizational structure has revolved around eight to ten practicum training teams. Each of these (composed of a faculty team leader, an advanced student teaching associate, and several student trainees) has carried out the PSC's functions of training and service. The participants felt that the teams have served as real communication centers for them. The groups have been small enough to allow everyone's full participation, and most have felt comfortable discussing a variety of organizational and personal issues without reservation. Because of the low priority of environmental feedback, though, not much of this has been discussed on the teams. Most who were interviewed, however, felt that in the future the teams could be a good place to initially take information of this nature.

Feedback does get shared on teams, although most of this is internal. Sometimes people will bring up feedback or information they have received from outside (faculty member).

Teams could serve a small group function for discussing feedback. The weakness is that it doesn't go to the important people (teaching associate).

It came informally. That's the kind of thing you talk about with friends, or I'd bring it up on team if it seemed important. We often talked about the PSC and what it's like to become a therapist. Our team was a good place to bring up issues like this. The teams feel like a safe place to bring up things, but the norm is established that to take it elsewhere is banging your head against the wall. The only stuff that goes beyond team has to do with superficial task maintenance sorts of things (student).

These quotes indicate that there have been few effective links between the teams facilitating the integration of important information
discussed on them. Two mechanisms were operating with marginal success, however. Both could be used more effectively, in the future, if feedback sharing was given higher priority.

First of all, there have been weekly "PSC meetings" where clinically relevant presentations and discussions led by insiders and outsiders have been held. Discussion of organizational issues like environmental feedback has occurred occasionally, but for the most part they have been ineffective in this regard. One of the obstacles has been that their function has been educational rather than administrative. Also, staff attendance has been poor, especially for faculty who have held the ultimate decision-making power. In spite of the difficulties, the participants did think that they could serve a useful purpose. For example, groups with unique access to feedback like the L.I.F.T. team could occasionally give a presentation of their findings.

There has also been a communication network established with the teaching associates. They have been primary links between the teams and intake unit, having met regularly as a group with the intake workers to discuss case distribution. In addition, they have also met weekly with the director to discuss issues related to student supervision. In this way they have been the only group in the PSC to have regular contact with all levels of the organization.

While these connections have stimulated the communication of some important organizational information, they have not had much impact on the distribution of environmental feedback. First of all, information of this nature has had a low priority. In addition, the two groups have had no real decision-making power since the faculty holding the
power have not been present (except the director). Information such as feedback could be shared and discussed, but it was difficult to see it have an impact on the organization. The teaching associates interviewed, however, all felt that feedback sharing should be an important part of these meetings. They hoped that in the future evaluation issues would be given higher priority and that the role of these meetings in the decision-making process would become clearer.

The supervision group helped me have a socio-emotional connection to the PSC. It provided me with a little bit of information about the other teams and made it easier for me to talk with the other T.A.s, to share my perceptions with them, etc. The intake meeting was helpful, too. It helped me have more power and less hassle. Although those groups were primarily internal, there was some room for external feedback coming in (teaching associate).

The intake meetings were pretty worthless. It was a forum where very few of us had the energy to deal with such things. The meetings were run poorly and none of us had any authority. We should have been more effective and should have been able to carry through on things. By the end of the year we ended up just dealing with mere case distribution. We should have discussed how clients come here and their perceptions, why we've had fewer referrals this year, why we get a certain type of client, and what more effective ways of distributing clients there are (teaching associate).

Everyone in the study felt that additional formal channels were needed to improve the communication of evaluation issues. The director felt that if the resources could be found it would be useful to create an evaluation unit to take primary responsibility for coordinating evaluation input. Most others felt, however, that general communication needed to be improved first, before such a step was taken specifically with feedback. They suggested that regular staff meetings (including all faculty) be held to discuss agency-wide administrative concerns.
During these meetings feedback discussed on the teams could be shared with the larger organization (including all key decision makers).

The feedback system could be improved best by having mandatory staff meetings, where we would discuss our goals, where we are, where we are going, and any feedback that relates to this (intake worker).

Feedback should be a priority. Staff meetings should be held once a month where feedback such as this can be brought up. This place needs shaking up before anything good will happen in terms of evaluation (teaching associate).

I would like to see more meetings where everybody could get together to discuss what's going on here. If I felt that the PSC was a more interesting and open place I would go to more of them. I'd be pleased to see them mandatory. Yes, we should have mandatory staff meetings and task groups formed from these. I'd like to see more involvement of the managers with the workers (student).

As these quotes indicate, the initiation of regular staff meetings was an important issue. In fact, it was so important that shortly after my study was completed, such meetings were initiated by the director. Over the past year, a few of these have even been devoted to discussions of environmental feedback. It will remain to be seen, however, if they can provide the integrative function intended.

Informal Channels

With formal channels being so limited, one would expect that much feedback would be communicated through informal channels. Generally this has only occurred in situations where the PSC's survival has been jeopardized. During such situations, the limitations imposed by poor formal channels have been overcome by people going directly to the decision-makers they felt would have the most immediate influence. In nearly
every case this has been the director who has been seen as the primary (or only) integrator for incoming feedback.

The director is the only feedback integrator for me. Really he's more of a feedback receptor. I don't think he integrates it that well (intake worker).

If it's really important I take it to the director. After all, he's the one in charge and no one else would really be in a position to use it. He's the only one in a position to integrate it in any way (student).

Communication of most external evaluations has been haphazard and limited, though. The director has appeared too busy for discussions on an on-going basis and most have not been invested in the feedback process enough to seek out others. Some of the participants did communicate feedback to others when they knew explicitly what the person's feedback needs were. For example, if they knew that a particular practica team was trying to evaluate one of its projects, they would pass on any relevant information they knew. My impression was that the more people knew other's activities in the PSC and their feedback needs, the more likely they were to informally communicate evaluation data they heard.

Because of the poor formal communication in the center, though, most were unaware of others' activities and feedback needs. Given this, gatekeepers most often kept such information to themselves, or communicated it to a friend or close work associate (e.g., a fellow T.A. or team member).

I did have some experiences with the juvenile courts that others in the PSC might want to hear about and know. I usually would only talk about this sort of thing with another stud-
ent who has had similar experiences (student).

I communicate things to the people I see most often, my team-leaders, the other T.A.s, the secretaries, and my friends. Some of those I communicate more to because they seem to be more interested in things like this and like to hear what people have to say. Others like [ ], you just don't know how s/he's going to use what you have to say. S/he's curious, but has a malicious streak (teaching associate).

Informal communication channels appeared to have much potential utility. Much important organizational information was passed through them, in spite of their limited use for the communication of environmental feedback. They were used so often because people could communicate important, and sometimes personal, issues privately at their convenience. The participants felt that such channels could be used more for the communication of feedback if their use was stimulated by the organization.

As implied earlier, one important way to do this would be to make the feedback needs of different organizational members explicit. To do this, formal communication would have to be improved. Once formal connections were established and people were aware of each other's needs, they would be more likely to share information informally at their convenience.

The teaching associate network was a good example of this process, even though other issues were involved. Because of the T.A.s close association through their intake meeting and supervision group, they were able to discover many of their important individual needs. All three interviewed reported developing close informal associations with their fellow workers that stimulated much discussion of related PSC business.
Through the T.A.s there is an informal network of communication. Not a lot, but it was helpful at times. It depended on how much I wanted to use it. The passing of information was done more informally in our offices, but the contacts were stimulated by our T.A. meetings (teaching associate).

With the T.A.s, feedback discussion occurred informally, but the formality of our regular meetings created and stimulated the informal activity (teaching associate).

Thus, informal communication channels were important for at least a couple of reasons. During extremely important situations, they allowed people to get crucial information to the director quickly so that immediate action could occur. In everyday situations, they were useful for people to discuss information with close work associates and friends in a comfortable way. For them to be truly valuable in an on-going evaluation system, however, such channels needed to be stimulated by formal ones. In formal situations (e.g., intake meeting) the staff would have the regular contact necessary to feel comfortable with one another and be aware of each other's various feedback needs.

Feedback Storage

Virtually no external feedback has been recorded by the PSC. As a result it has been impossible for anyone to look systematically at important trends occurring in the short or long run. There have been some possibilities in the staff's past activities, however, that could easily be refined in the future.

One of these involved work done by the administrative assistant, who has compiled very brief statistical information on cases and their referral sources. In the future, more specific information could be
recorded from both. For example, clients could be asked why they chose to come to the PSC and what their expectations about coming were. Referral sources could be questioned about their perceptions of the center's services and reasons for making the referral. Their responses could be recorded and used along with the other data on the books.

Another possibility has involved the final case reports completed by all therapists. While these reports have only included information specific to the particular case, a few people felt that a short section could be included at the end for any organizational feedback received from the client. This seemed especially useful since most therapists in the clinic have used their final sessions to get client's evaluations of the treatment process. Thus, the data have been available and could easily be recorded along with the other information included in the reports.

During my final sessions I always try to solicit feedback from the client. I suppose that it might be useful to include some of that somewhere in the final report. Occasionally I do hear things that others would find useful (student).

There are two kinds of notes in the folder, process notes and intake, progress, and final reports. Only occasionally is there feedback with reporting from that. It would be interesting for people to include some section for feedback of the kind you're talking about, though. Maybe people would pay more attention to it (teaching associate).

Finally, a number of students and teaching associates felt it would be useful to keep files on frequently contacted agencies in the community. Everyone had contact with these groups at one time or another and occasionally received feedback useful for others. In addition, they developed a basic knowledge of the external system useful for newer stud-
ents just beginning to have outside contacts.

Although time demands would be a problem, most felt it would be worth the effort to establish a file that would describe each important agency, provide space for regular updates of the staff's experiences there, and provide space for records of that agency's perceptions and evaluations of the PSC. The data in these files would be readily available for new students to look over, and could periodically be monitored by the administration.

Summary

This chapter has presented some major problems with the PSC's methods of communicating and recording environmental feedback. The small amount of feedback collected by the organization has not been communicated effectively to decision-makers except during situations where the organization's survival has been in jeopardy. Virtually no feedback has been recorded and saved for future review and planning. In spite of these problems, a number of strengths were found that could be used by an evaluation consultant. For example, most interviewed felt that important discussions could occur on the practicum teams if environmental feedback was given higher priority and the teams were better integrated with one another. Furthermore, it was believed that increased integration of the staff through formal means (e.g., regular staff meetings) would increase the amount of important informal feedback communication. Possibilities for extending existing feedback recording included adding a section on organizational feedback to final case reports, and creating files on each agency from whom feedback might be received.
Organizational Dynamics

There have been a variety of reasons for the poor communication and storage of feedback in the PSC. Most of these were discussed earlier in the section on feedback collection, so will only be mentioned here briefly.

As was mentioned earlier, environmental feedback has been given a low priority in the PSC. Only during situations of extreme importance have the staff been mobilized to collect and communicate the perceptions and evaluations of outsiders. In the absence of administrative directives, they have chosen not to engage in such activities on a regular basis.

Furthermore, general communication has been a problem in the center. The teams and staff have maintained a very individualistic, isolated position in the total organization. It has been difficult for the staff to feel connected to others in the organization and be aware of their feedback needs.

Decision-making processes have also been problematic. Because of this, many of the participants were frustrated sharing information in the past. Only rarely had they seen the organization respond effectively to their communications. Because they felt their input would have little impact, most were reluctant to speak with others and attend organizational meetings.

From my perception, most of the problems have been a function of the PSC's relationship to the clinical area of the psychology department. For many good reasons, the center has been a sub-unit of the clinical area and has maintained close academic ties. This has provided a set-
ting for both faculty and students to integrate their academic and applied interests. Unfortunately, this arrangement has made it difficult for the PSC to develop a separate identity. Most often it has been perceived as an extension of the clinical area which promotes everyone's individual academic autonomy. Thus, faculty and students have been free to respond to their own needs without committing themselves to the center. The staff have felt little responsibility to communicate feedback unless the center has been in clear jeopardy.

The ambiguous status of the clinic has also made internal lines of authority and accountability confusing. For example, it has been unclear whether the director has had the authority to make decisions and tell other faculty what to do. Most in the study understandably misperceived him to be the director in charge and were frustrated with his lack of clarity. What most (especially students and T.A.s) have not fully understood, however, is that he has had no clear authority. He has had no control over the faculty's pay and has been given no clear powers by the clinical area. In effect, he has really been just another tenured faculty member with one vote. Because this has never been acknowledged by the system, the decision-making process has often been convoluted and frustrating for those involved. Thus, most have chosen to not report any feedback or become involved in meetings that might result in further frustration. In addition, it has been difficult for the director to push faculty into taking administrative responsibility for feedback activities, since if tenured, they can really do whatever they please.

As was mentioned in the section on feedback collection, decision-
making has been complicated by another set of factors. The complex nature of the center's goals and the diverse and sometimes competing interests in its environment have made it difficult to respond to feedback. For example, I learned that the PSC had been receiving increased pressures from the local schools (a primary referral source in the past) to provide more services for children. At the same time, however, faculty in the clinical area were becoming less interested in this type of endeavor. This situation was both difficult to resolve and communicate about to the schools who might not fully understand the training demands of the center. Since feedback of this nature has raised issues of internal balance difficult to resolve (especially within a problematic decision-making system), most staff have chosen to not collect or communicate much feedback.

Thus, the communication and storage of feedback has been a problem for a number of reasons. Feedback has not been a priority of the PSC and organizational problems have made communication beyond the practicum teams difficult and frustrating. There were some strengths, however, that could be refined to improve the PSC's feedback processes. In the next section, I hope to explore more fully some of the ways that the PSC's entire natural feedback system could be refined, building upon strengths and taking into consideration the dynamics of the system.

Summary: Strengths, Weaknesses, and Refinements

In the preceding chapters, a number of points were made about the PSC's natural feedback system. My analysis has shown a variety of
strengths and weaknesses that could be used by an evaluation consultant to build a more effective, on-going evaluation mechanism. In this chapter, I would like to review these briefly, and offer some ideas for how the natural feedback system of the PSC could be refined.

The participants reported needing feedback from a variety of areas of the environment, both academically and service-oriented. The perceptions and evaluations of these outsiders was needed to both insure the continued survival of the PSC and improve its training and service operations. Most felt it was important to just keep information updated from people within key areas of the environment. More specific feedback was needed when clear boundary problems had arisen or important new directions were being pursued by the staff.

Unfortunately, the PSC's natural feedback system has had many weaknesses. Everyone interviewed felt that the clinic had not developed a truly effective system for meeting its evaluation needs.

First of all, there have been no formal mechanisms (i.e., questionnaires, rating scales, etc.) for collecting feedback of the type typically found in standard evaluation research. Some useful information was collected occasionally in informal ways by the staff, but never in sufficient quantity or quality to be truly useful for decision-makers. Furthermore, information has been selected purely for survival and system maintenance purposes. There have been very few attempts (formal or informal) to collect information that could lead to systematic improvements in the quality of service and training.

In addition, information collected has been subject to at least some coding distortions. While no specifics were determined, most felt
that the organization subtly resisted negative feedback that would imply
the need for changes in the staff's operations. In the very least, it
was clear that no systematic procedures were used to insure the import-
ance and validity of feedback collected by gatekeepers.

Finally, the PSC's internal system of communication and storage of
feedback has been very poor. There have been no formal channels operat-
ing, and the informal ones have only been effective during situations of
extreme importance. At the time of the study there were no regular
staff meetings where issues of this nature could be discussed by key de-
cision-makers and most felt isolated enough from the PSC as a whole that
they did not communicate much feedback to others informally. Virtually
no feedback has been recorded in any way that could be used for adminis-
trative review and planning.

As was stated earlier, there have been a number of important rea-
sons for these weaknesses in the PSC's natural feedback system. At one
level, the problem has been one of organizational initiative and prior-
ity. Individuals and teams have been given no clear responsibility for
collecting or communicating feedback by the center's administration. In
addition, the staff have not felt enough of a personal commitment to the
center to assume that responsibility on their own.

At a deeper level, I have felt that the problem has been primarily
a function of the PSC's extremely close relationship to the clinical
area of the psychology department. The PSC has developed very little
identity of its own and lines of authority and accountability have been
confusing. Decision-making with feedback has been convoluted and frus-
trating and it has been difficult for the director or anyone else to
clearly initiate feedback activity.

In spite of the clear weaknesses in the clinic's national feedback system, there were some important strengths that could be used by an evaluation consultant. These have included: (1) a number of close informal relationships with outsiders that have made feedback collection easy, (2) certain groups with unique access to important feedback, (3) a variety of evaluation coding criteria used informally by the staff to judge outsiders' satisfaction with the PSC's services, (4) the individual practicum teams which have served as important communication centers, (5) informal communication channels that have been stimulated by formal ones, and (6) a variety of record-keeping possibilities that could easily extend the staff's current activities.

(1) One of the most important strengths has involved the informal efforts of the director and a few interested faculty. Over the years they have formed close, informal relationships with key individuals in the center's environment, and used these to get evaluative information during crucial times. For example, when it appeared that the center's referrals from the schools were down, the director was able to approach his friend from the schools who lives on his block. Because of their informal relationship, he was able to get candid, first-hand information concerning the school's perceptions of the clinic and satisfaction with its services. Although these relationships have tended to be used only during times of crisis, there was every indication that they could be used much more often and efficiently. Nearly everyone that was interviewed had established close relationships with outsiders that could be used regularly for feedback collection. All they needed was the mo-
ivation to use these, and a place to channel what they heard.

(2) Another strength has involved groups that have had unique access to important feedback because of their position in the community. For example, other agencies seeing the PSC's former clients have often heard feedback from them that would not be said directly to their former therapist. A questionnaire probing for this and other kinds of information could easily be sent to such agency personnel.

In addition certain groups within the center have been valuable feedback sources because of their unique "insider-outsider" status. For example, every year there have been a number of students working in the center that have recently returned from a year at another practicum facility or internship placement. Because of their experience both inside and outside the center, they have been able to offer particularly insightful feedback about the quality of the PSC's service and training. The L.I.F.T. team was another group with this insider-outsider status. Their outreach activity and close association with other agency personnel has given them unique access to feedback about the PSC. Questionnaires given to both groups could provide extremely valuable data. In the very least, they could be given more of an opportunity to share feedback they had heard.

(3) I also found that the clinic's staff have developed informally a number of excellent coding criteria for evaluating the organization. For example, many of the participants have individually monitored the number of faculty and students choosing to work in the center each year, using any trends they have noticed as an indicator of the clinical area's satisfaction with the PSC. In the future these numbers could be recorded
more systematically year after year, and faculty and students could be asked to discuss on a questionnaire why or why not they chose to work in the PSC. In a similar way, the staff have informally looked for trends in incoming referrals from key agencies in the area. A decrease in referrals has been an indication of problems with that agency. Most felt that the referral process could be examined much closer in the future.

(4) There were a couple of strengths that could be used to extend the PSC's poor internal communication. For example, the staff have related most closely to their individual practicum teams, seeing them as a comfortable refuge in an alienated system. A small part of each practicum team meeting could be devoted to a discussion of environmental feedback and evaluation issues. For these discussions to be truly effective, however, the teams would need to be linked together as a larger organizational unit. Everyone interviewed felt that the institution of regular staff meetings (including all decision-makers) would be the best way to achieve the needed integration. My analysis also suggested that improvements in decision-making would be needed to make the meetings effective. For this to happen, lines of authority between the PSC and the clinical area of the psychology department would need to be clearer.

(5) Increased formal channels of communication would help the PSC take advantage of the strength of informal ones. Informal channels have been very valuable because of their convenience and efficiency during times of crisis. For example, the teaching associates have met regularly to discuss intake and supervision issues. The bonds established because of those regular contacts have facilitated much informal discussion of related issues at other times. The participants felt that in-
creasing the entire staff's formal contact over evaluation issues would greatly increase the amount of important informal communication as it has for the T.A.s over other issues.

(6) As a final note, there have been a few possibilities for improving the storage of feedback in the PSC. At the present time feedback has not been recorded effectively at all, but could easily be initiated with increased interest on the part of the staff. One way would be to develop rating forms or questionnaires using the evaluation coding criteria used informally (see (3) above). Another way would be to expand the final case reports, including a space for the discussion of organizational feedback heard from clients. Files could also be kept on key collateral agencies in the community that would include a place for general information about the agency and feedback heard about the PSC. New students unfamiliar with the community would have a place to go for information, and the administration would have records of outside student contacts and environmental feedback.

Summary

In spite of many clear problems, there have been a number of strengths in the PSC's natural feedback system that could be used by an evaluation consultant. By taking into consideration the dynamics of the system and showing the staff how easily they could extend what they were already doing, the consultant could achieve at least three benefits. First of all, a tailor-made evaluation system could be developed for the organization, taking into consideration subtleties that might be excluded by standard evaluation tools. In addition, the natural feedback system's
functional utility for the organization could be assessed directly, allowing for greater integration of the evaluation data into decision-making. Thus data from the refined system would have a greater chance of being used directly for program improvement. Finally, this approach would increase the staff's interest in evaluation research by showing them how they could easily extend their current procedures in a way that would ultimately benefit them.

Conclusion: Implications for the Field of Evaluation Research

This thesis was intended to be a beginning step in the examination of human service organizations' natural feedback systems. Different theoretical aspects of them were discussed and a descriptive study of one aspect of the feedback system of a psychology department clinic was presented. I believe that this work has important implications for the field of evaluation research.

First of all, this work has shown that organizations informally evaluate their activities by collecting feedback from their environment. Even though this mechanism may not be formal, data-based, or extensive, it does exist with some strengths as well as weaknesses to at least maintain the survival of the organization. The clinic focussed on here appeared to have no visible signs of self-evaluation, yet it did have a natural feedback system that has helped maintain its survival over the last thirteen years.

One of the major weaknesses of a natural feedback system, though, is related to this survival function. Evaluation research is typically
thought of as a mechanism designed to question and hopefully improve the goal operations of an organization. Objective data are collected to question premises and practices in an attempt to bring about constructive changes. There was every indication from this study, however, that natural feedback systems work best to implicitly maintain the organization's survival with minimal change. The staff of the PSC have not collected much feedback that would lead to program improvements. In fact, many of the respondents felt that the organization has resisted negative feedback that would lead to intensive questioning of organizational practices. Most generally, feedback has been solicited only during crises or when the staff have wanted to move in a new direction. Furthermore, they have tended to concentrate on parts of the environment that have been perceived as powerful (i.e., having the ability to directly control or affect the inflow of needed resources). Thus in many ways, the energy of the natural feedback system has been in direct contradiction with the basic goal of evaluation research.

In spite of this problem, there have been many strengths worthy of attention. An evaluation consultant can build upon these and develop an on-going system of evaluation better able to direct program improvements. More precise ways of collecting and coding information already collected can be instituted and the staff can be opened-up to added evaluation input from groups previously given short shrift. Of course, the consultant can never hope to develop a mechanism of self-evaluation that would make the organization totally accountable. In my opinion, real accountability only comes through a balance of evaluation forces in the community. Only when efforts at consumer evaluation and control become more
sophisticated will true accountability occur.

By building on the strengths in the organization's indigenous evaluation system, however, the consultant can perform at least three valuable functions. First of all, the approach allows the consultant to develop a tailor-made evaluation system, taking into consideration the subtle needs of the particular organization under scrutiny. The consultant can also develop a better understanding of the system and how evaluation fits into it. (S)he can see exactly how the system is blocked to negative feedback and how incoming data are integrated into organizational decision-making. In this way, the consultant is actually in a better position to see that the refined evaluation system actually gets used to direct program improvements. Finally, the consultant can increase the staff's interest in evaluation research by showing them how easily they can extend what they are already doing. Thus, the consultant using this method can initiate a developmental process that sensitizes the organization to evaluation research and increases the staff's use of refined evaluation methods so that they can become increasingly accountable to members of their environment.

As this study has pointed out, there are many strengths in a natural feedback system no matter how poor it may seem initially to a rigorous evaluation researcher. A few important generalizable strengths were found in this study. For example, it was found that much useful feedback sharing occurs within the context of close, informal relationships. Much insightful information about the activities of the PSC was communicated between close friends and work associates. A formal evaluation system should strive to accommodate these. In the very least, in-
formation from such relationships could be discussed occasionally at regular staff meetings.

The PSC has also had strengths in groups, like the L.I.F.T. team, that have unique access to important feedback because of their status in the community. Most certainly, other human service agencies would have similar outreach groups that could be a valuable source of feedback. Their data could be reported at organizational meetings or be recorded in periodic questionnaires.

A very important strength was represented in the staff's implicit evaluation coding criteria used informally to judge outsiders' satisfaction with the PSC. For example, some staff have informally monitored the number of students and faculty choosing to work in the center each year, and have used any up or down trends as an indication of the clinical area's satisfaction with the center. Future evaluation efforts in other organizations could easily incorporate criteria such as these in the formal measures they develop. These measures would be based on an accurate knowledge of the system and would have the greater acceptance and support of the staff.

Limitations

Of course, this particular study has had a number of limitations. Before ending, I would like to mention those of which I have been aware, and discuss some of the avenues for future research they suggest.

First and foremost, the basic conceptual approach was limiting in itself. The theory outlined in the introduction implied that human service organizations look both inward and outward for feedback, and
that when looking outward, they do so in the logical manner described (see pp. 12-13). This may not be the case, however. Human service organizations may never look outward for feedback, or may do so only when internal monitoring has failed to solve serious problems. Furthermore, when the organization does look outward, it may use other procedures than have been discussed here. For these reasons, this study was limited in at least two ways. First of all, it only looked at the processes used by the organization to collect feedback from outside its boundaries. Secondly, it focussed on only one model of how feedback collection occurs at the boundary. Because of this, the study might best be thought of as a test and elaboration of one model of one aspect of a human service organization's natural feedback system.

The study was also limited because the decision-making processes of the organization were not examined directly. Some insight was gained indirectly because of the respondents' strong feelings about this aspect of the agency's operations, but not enough to draw any firm conclusions. Serious attempts to refine natural feedback systems should examine feedback's role in decision making. This point is crucial given the vast problems with the use of evaluation research by programs.

Problems also resulted from the study's design. For example, data were collected only from people inside the organization. Because of this, it was difficult to determine what was really the "important" feedback environment, and what coding distortions were taking place at the boundary. Organizations may believe that feedback from some areas is unimportant, when others outside feel strongly otherwise. Also, organizations might subtly resist negative reactions to their activities.
that would disrupt the status quo. In the future it would be advantageous to check the perceptions of environmental members in these two areas, and track feedback through the system to check for distortions.

Because of the exploratory nature of the study certain areas that emerged as important to explore further could only be touched upon. For example, early in the study, I discovered that two areas, organizational survival and the use of informal relationships for feedback collection, were important. Unfortunately, I was unable to actively explore them. In the future, it might be interesting to study specifically how an organization uses feedback to maintain its survival. It would also be interesting to explore the contributions and limitations of informal relationships in a feedback system.

Summary

In sum, this thesis was a useful first step in the examination of natural feedback systems. It has not answered all of the questions of interest about them, but has laid some interesting groundwork for further research in this exciting new area. Work in this direction has important implications for the field of evaluation research. Approaches building on the strengths in natural feedback systems offer the opportunity for greater staff interest and involvement in evaluation research, and more effective evaluation systems tailor-made to specific programs. These possibilities clearly make further exploration worth the effort.
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APPENDIX A
Natural Feedback Systems and Organizational Self-Evaluation Interview Guide

1) Explain study and respondent's participation
2) Organization and its environment; correction of list of environmental elements
3) Respondent's role in the organization
4) Established contacts with the environment
5) Examples of feedback situations
6) Respondent's perception of total feedback process
   --elements important as feedback sources for organization
   --elements important as feedback sources to respondent
   --elements from which respondent gets important feedback
   --feedback communication patterns
   --perceived feedback integrators
   --identification of feedback storage and memory system
7) Respondent's assessment of feedback system and suggestions for improving it
8) Respondent's impressions of the interview and feedback for the interviewer

1) explanation of study and respondent's participation
   --be as concise and clear as possible and HAVE PATIENCE: people will undoubtedly have trouble getting in your frame of mind.
   --the study: study the way people in the PSC collect, process, and communicate feedback (perceptions of and evaluations of
the PSC's activities) from the PSC's environment (individuals, groups, and organizations outside the PSC that influence its functioning or upon whom it wishes to have influence)

--study emphasizes process used to collect, code, communicate, and store feedback rather than content of outside evaluations.

--results will be used to see how a "natural feedback system of this nature can be built upon to improve methods of evaluation.

--respondent's participation:

--voluntary interviews with ten staff randomly selected from a cross-section of the organization

--two parts to interviews (feedback situations in-depth and general perceptions of total system)--3-4 hours, total split into two parts

--only interested in respondent's personal experiences and opinions (sum of everyone's individual ideas will be my data)--"If I ask you very personal questions, I'm only doing so to get information about the organization and not about your abilities or performance."

--responses strictly confidential--only large tabulation of results will be fed back to PSC.

--feel free to interrupt me or take issues at any time I welcome your feedback throughout although I'll ask specifically for it at the end.
--need permission to tape the interview.

2) Rating scale: any problems?
--discuss participant's overall experience with questionnaire, rating scale, difficulties? mistakes? corrections?

3) respondent's role in the organization
--brief description of what person does in the organization
--want to get at interactions and relationships with outsiders that might allow for feedback collection
--how much a part of the PSC does the person feel?
   no part 1 2 3 4 5 very much a part

4) established contacts with the environment
--discuss significant contacts (rated 3 or greater)
   formal contact--in your job; formal representative of PSC
   informal contact--general activity in spare time, while in another role
--it's important to understand how person rated their contacts

5) examples of feedback situations
--for each element where there is contact (or general group) move through the following process: (try to get examples of both effective (good feedback communicated to those who needed it) and ineffective (some problem in process) feedback situations)
--have person describe nature of contact with this part of the environment (formal, informal)
--what kind of feedback from this sector? global reactions? general comments on relationship? specific to certain goal or maintenance activity? direct or indirect messages? (goal:
therapy, training, consultation; maintenance: sufficient inflow of resources, etc.)

--get person to think of feedback received lately (push person for their recollections of how people from these sectors have reacted to our organizational activity and perceive what we do--determine basis for judgment--avoid projections)

--how was feedback impression received?
  --formal or informal channels?
  --who initiated the transaction?
  --direct or indirect communication?
  --what kind of data? verbal, written, media, behavior, etc.
  --what aspect of organization's functioning is it in reference to?

--how did person decide whether the feedback message was valid?
  --did he seek it out further? ask for elaboration and clarification?
  --communicate it to others in the system? or outside?
  --get someone else to gather more information on the matter?
  --compare it to other information in the system? storage?

--how did person decide whether the feedback was valuable to the organization?
  --how important was it? was it documented in a letter?
    did person record it at the time?
  --how aware is the person of selecting feedback to attend
to? of channeling feedback? aware of distortions?
--how was it decided who in the system the feedback was important for?
  --clearly stated by person?
  --organizational role dictates?
  --organizational policy?
  --other?
--how responsible did the person feel for getting the feedback and doing something with it?
  --responsible at all?
  --proactive responsibility?
  --reactive responsibility?
  --primary or secondary responsibility?
--how was the feedback communicated in the system?
  --who did you think to communicate it to?
  --was it communicated? why or why not?
  --communicated to whom? why?
  --are there explicit rules for this?
--was the feedback recorded in some way (filed) so that others could look at it now or later for comparison, etc.?
  --why or why not?
--is the person happy with the way the situation was handled? why or why not? handled more effectively?

REMEMBER: GET EXAMPLES OF BOTH EFFECTIVE AND INEFFECTIVE FEEDBACK SITUATIONS. SUMMARIZE BRIEFLY BEFORE MOVING ON (GOOD PLACE TO BREAK)
6) **Respondent's perception of total feedback process**

--discuss ratings of

--the environmental elements according to their importance as feedback sources for the organization as a whole (important feedback sources would be those that are both in a position to evaluate the organization's performance and whose evaluation makes a difference)

--why have those been rated as important?

--who in organization should get feedback from this sector? why?

--who in system is responsible for collecting feedback from those important sources? (really--ideally)

--where does person's own responsibility fit in? (really--ideally)

--which of the environmental elements are most important as feedback sources for person's individual role performance?

--why are these important? different than for total organization?

--who's responsible for collecting that feedback? (really--ideally)

--where does his responsibility fit in? (really--ideally)

--is the person getting his feedback needs met? why or why not?

--discuss ratings of the amount of important feedback collected from elements

--unique access to feedback?
--get person to look at a list of PSC personnel and discuss factors that influence communication of feedback to individual personnel (highlight issues mentioned earlier). Explain why or why not.

--get person to indicate feedback integrators (i.e., someone to whom s/he could communicate feedback and be assured that it would get to the proper place in the organization) Explain.

--get person to discuss record-keeping (i.e., statistics, files, reports)

SUMMARIZE DISCUSSION

7) Respondent's assessment of total feedback system and suggestions for improving it.

--what are the strengths in the current system used by the total organization?

--what are its weaknesses?

--are the feedback needs of the respondent getting met? why or why not?

--why does the current system operate the way it does? (what are the systemic forces operating to maintain the current system?)

--how might things be improved for both you and the total system? (really--ideally)

8) Respondent's impressions of the interview and feedback for the interviewer.

--any problems with my conceptualization of the feedback process?

--leading questions?
--left out anything important?
--accented anything too much?
--does respondent feel that I will have an accurate picture of feedback process when study is through?
--would respondent's reporting be much different if interview was done at different time of the year?
--does respondent see alternative and possibly better or more economical ways of examining the natural feedback system?
--any other comments?
APPENDIX B
Natural Feedback Systems and Organizational Self-Evaluation
Interview Booklet

Respondent?
Position in organization:
Date of interview:
Chronology of interview: _____ of 10
Number of sessions:
Place of interview:
Length of interview:
Tape number: Transcribed:

Important comments:
Comments about list of environmental elements:

Respondent's role in the PSC:

1 2 3 4 5
/ / / / /
no part large part

Ownership of PSC--How much a part of the PSC do you feel?

Established contacts with the environment (comments):
Examples of feedback situations (comments):
Elements rated as important to organization as a whole

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Elements</th>
<th>Why important</th>
<th>For who--why?</th>
<th>Other's responsibility</th>
<th>Respondent's respons.</th>
</tr>
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<td></td>
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<td>Real</td>
<td>Ideal</td>
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Elements rated as important to respondent's role performance

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<tr>
<th>Elements</th>
<th>Why?</th>
<th>Other's responsibility</th>
<th>Respondent's respons.</th>
<th>Needs met?</th>
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</table>
Respondent's rating of environment according to importance and quality of feedback collected (comments):

Unique access to feedback? (comments):

Communication patterns (comments):

Feedback integrators? (comments):
Memory store:

Strengths of current feedback system:

Weaknesses of current feedback system:

How are respondent's needs getting met in this system?
Why does the current feedback system operate the way it does?

How might the current system best be changed and improved?

Impressions of the interview:
APPENDIX C
NAME: ________________________________

On page is a list of individuals, groups and organizations that I've found to be part of the PSC's "external environment" (i.e., outsiders that influence our functioning as an organization or upon whom we wish to have influence). Because this list would be so cumbersome and confusing otherwise, I've tried to organize it as much as possible. Hopefully, though, my groupings and abbreviations will not affect its accuracy or usefulness for the following tasks. As a check on what I've done, it would be helpful if you'd look it over and make any additions or corrections that seem appropriate. For example, you may want to add an important "environmental element" I've left off or alter (or add to) the categories I've devised. After you've finished with this, please perform the following tasks:

1) **Indicate which of these outsiders you have had contact with this year.**

Think about your involvement with the PSC this year and the variety of interactions you might have had with people from these groupings. Think about both interactions that have been directly related to your work in the PSC (formal interactions) and those that have been more informal (non-work related). In the space provided by each grouping, try to indicate the extent of your contact using the following five-point scale. Do the best you can with the scale and make any side-comments that seem necessary to explain the nature of your contacts.

```
/ 1 2 3 4 5 /
No Contact Moderate Contact Much Contact
```

Comments:

2) **Indicate from which of these outsiders you get important feedback about the PSC as an organization.**

Think about your contacts with these outsiders and the times you've gotten information from them concerning their impressions of and satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) with the PSC and its operations. Keep in mind that people from these groups may have communicated this feedback to you in a variety of ways (e.g., verbally, through their actions, through publications or media presentations, etc.). Some of this feedback may have seemed more important for the PSC to hear than others. In the space provided by each grouping that you have had some contact
with this year, try to indicate where you've gotten important feedback about the PSC using the following five-point scale.

1 2 3 4 5
No Important Feedback / / / / / Some Important Feedback
/ / / / / Much Important Feedback

In addition, if you feel you have a relationship with some people from these groupings, that allows you unique access to important feedback, please indicate that by circling the grouping.

Comments:

3) Indicate which of these outsiders are important as feedback sources for the PSC as an organization.

Think about these different individuals, groups, and organizations in terms of their importance to the PSC, as feedback sources. In other words, where do we need to maintain good relationships with the outside and where do we need high quality feedback to help with this? In the space beside each grouping, indicate its importance as a feedback source using the following five-point scale.

1 2 3 4 5
/ / / / / Not Important Moderately Important Very Important

Comments:

The PSC's External Environment

Clients and Consultees  Non-University Funding Sources
University Psychology Department Area Human Services
Clinical Area General Community
The Field of Clinical Psychology & Related Disciplines
Misc. Individuals & Groups
Clients and Consultees

1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____ Individuals, adult
1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____ Individuals, adolescents
1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____ Individuals, children
1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____ Couples
1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____ Families
1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____ Homemakers, Greenfield
1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____ IPC, Amherst High School
1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____ Continuing Education, UMass
1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____ Community Advancement Program, Holyoke
1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____ Department of Welfare, Northampton
1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____ Franklin County Headstart
1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____ Children's Protective Services, Greenfield
1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____ Franklin County Home Health Aids
1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____ Former clients or consultees
1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____ "Dropouts" (prematurely terminated clients or consultees)
1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____ Others? _______________________________________________________________________

University

1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____ Office of Grant and Contract Administration
1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____ Provost's Office
1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____ Dean of Social and Behavioral Sciences
1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____ Accounting Office
1) _____ 2) _____ 3) _____ Audio-visual
1)  2)  3)  Duplicating Services
1)  2)  3)  Parking Office
1)  2)  3)  Personnel Office
1)  2)  3)  Physical Plant
1)  2)  3)  Procurement Office (Purchasing)
1)  2)  3)  Treasurer's Office
1)  2)  3)  University departments (excluding Psychology)
1)  2)  3)  University student body
1)  2)  3)  University store
1)  2)  3)  Others?  

(University human services listed later)

Psychology Department

1)  2)  3)  Chairperson (Myers)
1)  2)  3)  Associate chairperson (Averill)
1)  2)  3)  Executive Committee
1)  2)  3)  Graduate Affairs Committee
1)  2)  3)  Undergraduate Affairs Committee
1)  2)  3)  Personnel Committee
1)  2)  3)  Research Funds Allocation Committee
1)  2)  3)  Department Meeting
1)  2)  3)  Colloquium Committee
1)  2)  3)  Human Subjects Committee
1)  2)  3)  Graduate Student Organization
1)  2)  3)  CUSP
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<td>Secretaries</td>
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<td>Non-clinical area heads (Feldman, Royer, Well, Epstein, Bogartz, Levinger)</td>
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<td>Non-clinical faculty</td>
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<td>Non-clinical graduate students</td>
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<td>Undergraduate psychology majors</td>
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**Clinical Area**

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<td>Clinical director (Raush)</td>
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<td>Incoming clinical director (Harmatz)</td>
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<td>Sally Ives</td>
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<td>Job placement committee</td>
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<td>Practicum and internship committee</td>
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<td>Faculty not involved in PSC</td>
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<td>Graduate students not involved in PSC</td>
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<td>Others?</td>
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116
Non-university Funding Sources

1)  2)  3)  NIMH training grant (S. Schneider, Division of Manpower & Training, 'NIMH)
1)  2)  3)  Franklin-Hampshire MH-MR Area Board (I. Jacobs & B. Zinkin--area director and associate director)
1)  2)  3)  Amherst town officials (e.g., Drake, Hayward, & Wisnecki)
1)  2)  3)  Other regional town officials (Pelham, Hadley, Sunderland, etc.)
1)  2)  3)  L.I.F.T. funding sources (Joint Children's Committee, CHINS, etc.)
1)  2)  3)  Potential sources of funds
1)  2)  3)  Former sources of funds
1)  2)  3)  Others?

Area Human Services

1)  2)  3)  Referral agencies (e.g., Direct Information Service, Jones Library, Amherst)
1)  2)  3)  Franklin County Mental Health
1)  2)  3)  Holyoke Mental Health Center
1)  2)  3)  Student Mental Health, UMass
1)  2)  3)  Counseling Center, Mt. Holyoke
1)  2)  3)  Student Development Center, UMass
1)  2)  3)  Amherst Resource Center
1)  2)  3)  Hampshire Day House, Northampton
1)  2)  3)  Children's Aid and Family Service
1)  2)  3)  Comprehensive Children's Center
1) 2) 3) Area Outreach Team
1) 2) 3) Threshold
1) 2) 3) Everywoman's Center, UMass
1) 2) 3) Other MH/counseling services?
1) 2) 3) Northampton State Hospital
1) 2) 3) Eastspoke
1) 2) 3) V.A. Hospital, Northampton
1) 2) 3) Wing Hospital, Palmer
1) 2) 3) Other residential treatment centers?
1) 2) 3) Family services (general)
1) 2) 3) Children's services (general)
1) 2) 3) Youth services (general)
1) 2) 3) Elderly services (general)
1) 2) 3) Employment services (general)
1) 2) 3) Legal aid services (e.g., Hampshire County Court Resource Project)
1) 2) 3) Community action services (community organizing, consumer protection, etc.)
1) 2) 3) Welfare advocates (general)
1) 2) 3) Social organizations (general)
1) 2) 3) Women's centers (general)
1) 2) 3) Gay organizations (general)
1) 2) 3) Third World organizations (general)
1) 2) 3) Alcoholism centers (general)
1) 2) 3) Drug centers (general)
1) 2) 3) Speech therapy clinics (general)
1) 2) 3) University Health Services, UMass
1) 2) 3) Other area hospitals/medical centers
1) 2) 3) Local physicians
1) 2) 3) Local attorneys
1) 2) 3) Local private psychotherapists
1) 2) 3) Local clergy and religious groups
1) 2) 3) Amherst schools
1) 2) 3) Northampton schools
1) 2) 3) Hadley schools
1) 2) 3) Springfield schools
1) 2) 3) Other local schools? ________________
1) 2) 3) Hampshire county courts
1) 2) 3) Hampden County courts
1) 2) 3) Franklin County courts
1) 2) 3) Other court systems? ________________
1) 2) 3) Hampshire County welfare
1) 2) 3) Hampden County welfare
1) 2) 3) Franklin County welfare
1) 2) 3) Other welfare? ________________
1) 2) 3) Others in general? ________________

General Community

1) 2) 3) Community members-at-large
1) 2) 3) Local business people
1) 2) 3) Local industry
1) 2) 3) Local media (newspapers, radio, television)
Clinical Psychology and Related Disciplines

1) ___ 2) ___ 3) ___ APA accreditation committee
1) ___ 2) ___ 3) ___ National and regional conventions, conferences, etc.
1) ___ 2) ___ 3) ___ Professional journals, publishers, etc.
1) ___ 2) ___ 3) ___ Professionals in clinical psychology
1) ___ 2) ___ 3) ___ Faculty and students in other clinical training programs
1) ___ 2) ___ 3) ___ Members of other human service disciplines
1) ___ 2) ___ 3) ___ Others?

Miscellaneous Individuals and Groups

1) ___ 2) ___ 3) ___ PSC presentation guests
1) ___ 2) ___ 3) ___ Insurance—Hoggatt-Dawson Agency, Champagne, Ill.
1) ___ 2) ___ 3) ___ Pharmacological consultants (e.g., D. Kraft, University Health Services)
1) ___ 2) ___ 3) ___ Legal assistance—Sid Myers, UMass and Oliver Foulkes, Hampshire College
1) ___ 2) ___ 3) ___ Programs affiliated with PSC—L.I.F.T. and Olley Pre-School Intervention Project
1) ___ 2) ___ 3) ___ Others?
APPENDIX D
MEMORANDUM

TO: Clinic staff and students

FROM: Joe Gabbert

RE: Proposed research in the PSC

April 26, 1976

As some of you may know already, I'm planning to do my masters thesis in the PSC this spring. My study, "Natural Feedback Systems and Organizational Self-Evaluation," is intended to kill two birds with one stone--get a masters degree for me and provide some information that might be helpful for examining and improving how we in the PSC operate as an organization. More specifically, I'm going to be studying how we get feedback from others outside the PSC (e.g., clients, funding sources, other human service organizations in the area, etc.) and use that information to evaluate and improve what we do. Even though we have no formal evaluation mechanism in operation right now, I'm convinced that we continually evaluate ourselves informally using information like this. Hopefully, with the help of my study, we can discover the strengths and weaknesses of our current "feedback system" and use this knowledge to improve our methods of answering important questions about our work.

Right now I'm intending to collect the data for my study over the course of the next month and a half, organize the results and write the formal thesis over the summer, and make everything available to the PSC for internal use early next fall (perhaps in the form of a PSC meeting). While I realize that this is a hectic time of the year for everyone, I'm going to need some of your immediate help to carry this off. I'm working very hard to keep your involvement to a minimum and hopefully will not be too much of a nuisance while soliciting your cooperation.

My study consists of two major stages, one purely exploratory and the other more formal. During the first stage I'll be looking through PSC records and asking some of you information about our internal organization and external environment (i.e., those individuals, groups, and other organizations that we have contact with and are important to our functioning). This should demand very little of your time. During the second stage, however, I'll be asking ten people from a cross-section of the PSC to participate in one long or two short intensive interviews taking a total of 2-3 hours to complete. During them, I'll be asking those of you who participate to think about your involvement with the PSC this year and to give me your perceptions of the total feedback system we use. In many ways, these interviews should be a useful way of helping you collect and organize your thoughts at the end of a hectic year. Of course, the more personal information conveyed in these interviews will be kept confidential, and only general trends will be included in my thesis and report to the PSC.
All in all, I'm hoping that my thesis will be of interest and benefit to us all in the PSC, and that your help and cooperation will pay off in both the short and long run. Because of the shortness of this memo, you may have some unanswered questions about the nature of my study and possible demands of you. Some of these may be cleared up by looking at a copy of my thesis proposal that I'll leave with both Toni and Hal. Feel free to discuss any aspects of the project with me at any time, however. I want to be as open as possible to your comments and suggestions as well as answering any questions you might have.

Thanks for your cooperation--I'm looking forward to working with you.

MEMORANDUM

TO: PSC Faculty, Students and Staff
FROM: Joe Gabbert
RE: My "natural feedback system" project

A couple of weeks ago, I distributed a memo which informed you of my research on the PSC's "natural feedback system" and asked for your help with my efforts. So far, everyone has been very helpful, and I'd like to take this time to thank you for your cooperation.

As I move into the next phase of my project, I'm going to need a little more of your help. To get at the information I need, I've put together a brief questionnaire that I'd like you to fill out and return to Toni or me as soon as possible. As you're filling it out, feel free to include any comments, explanations, or qualifications that come to mind. These will probably be as helpful as your formal responses, and certainly will provide me with feedback on this aspect of my study. In addition, feel free to approach me to discuss any questions or problems you have with the questionnaire.

Thanks, and please, fill it out and return it as soon as possible.
This past summer, I carried out a study (M.S. Thesis) of the formal and informal ways the PSC is evaluated as an organization. More specifically, I looked at how we get and use feedback which comes from external sources such as our clients, referral agencies, and the psychology department. Next Monday, I intend to give my perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of our feedback system, and offer a few concrete suggestions on how we might improve what we have.

I think you'll be interested in what I've pulled together from my observations and the responses of those I interviewed. Try to make it.

Joe Gabbert
APPENDIX E
Enhancement of Organizational Feedback Systems
during Program Evaluation Consultation

Joseph P. Gabbert and Joan L. Sweeney
University of Massachusetts/Amherst

Enhancement of Organizational Feedback Systems
during Program Evaluation Consultation
Joseph P. Gabbert and Joan L. Sweeney
University of Massachusetts/Amherst

Whether formalized or not, all human service organizations are engaged in a process of self-evaluation. From all of the talk and much of the professional literature, one might believe that programs would never be evaluated unless some external pressure was applied and an outside expert was brought in.

When ongoing human service organizations are viewed from an "open-systems" perspective (for an overview see Katz and Kahn, 1966; and Baker, 1973), however, the self evaluation process in which they are engaged is more readily observable. This takes place both formally and informally, and with or without the help of an evaluation "expert." All such organizations are engaged in the process of receiving and using feedback which comes from both the organizational members themselves and elements of their external environment (e.g., clients, funding sources and other local human services). They must be open to and in some way use these reactions to their operations if they're to have any chance of surviving in the long run. This "natural feedback system" which develops with both inherent strengths and weaknesses can be conceptualized as a mechanism for self-evaluation of the organization.

In this paper we'd like to present an approach to program evaluation consultation which stresses using and building upon the strength in these "natural feedback systems." This approach relies on learning as
much as possible about the indigenous, subjective processes at work in the organization. In this regard it is similar to what Roman and Trice have recently called the "native model" (Roman & Trice, in press). Its intent is to strengthen and supplement existing methods rather than impose designs or models to replace them.

Evaluation always involves a subjective judgment regarding the worth of a series of decisions or choices that comprise a program. A particular strength of this model is that it does not deny or seek to eliminate the subjective judgments at work in an organization. Rather, it tries to make these as explicit as possible so that their functional and political utility can be examined. This is in contrast to the conceptualization and modeling of evaluation research after the classical research paradigm where the associated claims to objectivity are tenuous at best and most often serve to obscure political realities.

In sum, we are advocating the adoption of a strategy that allows the evaluation consultant to work with agency personnel in a process of building on the strengths of their natural feedback system. This natural system of both formal and informal processes is thus refined rather than replaced. By working in such a manner, within the context of the specific organization in question, we believe that resistance to evaluation research can be lessened and program personnel will increasingly be open to using such data in their decision making.

In the remainder of this paper we would like to outline a model of this approach which we are currently developing. Our work thus far has evolved from projects conducted this year in two organizationally and programmatically dissimilar human service agencies at the University of
Massachusetts/Amherst. From these projects we have been able to identify several issues relevant to this type of consultation and develop a five-stage model which we feel will be a useful beginning for those interested in this approach. The five stages are: (1) Negotiation of Consultant's Entry, (2) Articulation of the Natural Feedback System, (3) Determination of Strengths and Weaknesses in Natural System, (4) Collaboration with Program Personnel in Refining the Natural System, and (5) Implementation of Refinements and Assessment of Consultation. At this time, we would like to briefly discuss each of these stages, highlighting only those points which seem central to our model.

**Stage I--Negotiation of Consultant's Entry**

An important difference between this model and others rests in the attitudes held and conveyed by the consultants throughout the consultation. These are particularly critical in the beginning. Prior to their entry, we feel the consultants should have or develop an attitude of respect for the efforts of the organization's programs and personnel. There is a central assumption here that the work and feelings of program personnel are worthy of respect and that there are strengths to be found in their efforts. Given this, consultants using this model work to establish a relationship from a stance of "self as resource," rather than "self as expert." This differentiation is significant as it contrasts with what is often an arrogance of expertise that leads to condescending attitudes and behavior toward staff. We believe that a shift to this attitude can, among other things, be instrumental in lessening the resistance to evaluation so often present these days.
Stage 2—Articulation of Natural Feedback System

Following a successful entry negotiation, the consultant begins to work with organizational personnel to identify the existing evaluation mechanisms in the organization. At a very basic level, these include any evaluation activity that takes place—from the highly structured, computerized surveys of an administrative assistant to the routine subjective judgments and gossip circles of staff.

As we said previously, organizational self-evaluation can be conceptualized in terms of a feedback system. These natural feedback systems, while operating differently for different organizations, do have some important characteristics in common which can help guide the consultants' investigation. For example, all organizations need feedback about both their goal-directed activity (e.g., work with clients) and their maintenance activity (e.g., keeping program morale high and relationships with key community groups in order). Consultants should examine how the organization deals with both of these important functions. In addition, organizations need to monitor their activities themselves (as in a formalized management information system) and to get the reactions of outsiders in the environment—the consultants should be looking for both the formal and informal ways that the organization checks itself using these internal and external sources of feedback. As a final note, the natural feedback system can be looked at most conveniently as a communication system where feedback is collected, communicated, and used in decision-making. The field of managerial cybernetics suggests a variety of ways these oftentimes complex communication processes can be examined (see Beer, 1959; Cadivaller, 1969; Churchman et al., 1969; Haber-


Stage 3--Determination of Strengths and Weaknesses in Natural System

During this stage, the consultants are concerned with refining their impressions of the natural feedback system and developing a diagnostic profile of its strengths and weaknesses. We believe this diagnosis should include the perceptions and judgments of members of both the organization and its environment, as well as those of the consultants themselves. All are needed to develop a clear sense of how the feedback system operates, both functionally and politically for the organization.

We have found two convenient methods for helping with this diagnosis. First, staff and outsiders can be interviewed for their perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the natural feedback system and their impressions of why it operates the way it does. In addition to this, we have found it useful to explore in depth a variety of situations where feedback can be "tracked" through the system. These situations can then be examined to see how certain feedback is being collected, communicated (or stored) and used. For example, it may be found that the organization has access to important feedback from a variety of sources, but that various breakdowns in communication prevent it from getting used in decision making. Further analysis may point out, however, that breakdowns of this nature occur for important reasons. The organization may not have clear systems for dealing with the information or it may simply not want to have to deal with it--especially if it is negative or politically volatile.
Stage 4--Collaboration with Program Personnel in Refining the Natural System

Once these diagnostic impressions have been collected and organized in some way, the consultants are ready to initiate refinements in the natural feedback system. We advocate a "data feedback" approach for this (Mann, 1957) where the organizational members are included in the problem solving and generation of refinement options. We believe that the increased input of ideas and high level of staff enthusiasm which often results from this approach makes it an extremely valuable vehicle for change. Additionally, this process can be used effectively to communicate to staff that evaluation research is not necessarily foreign or threatening and that more systematic procedures can be worked into their daily routines in a useful and convenient way.

A number of refinements building upon the strengths in the natural system are possible here. For example, an organization may have access to important feedback from neighboring human services through informal connections of staff, but makes use of it only infrequently or in times of crisis. If it appears to be to the organization's advantage to get more regular and detailed feedback from these sources, then procedures can be set up to tap into these informal connections on a more regular basis or supplement the information collected informally with more formal questionnaire responses. Furthermore, communication networks within the organization may be adjusted so that the feedback is more readily accessible to decision makers.
Stage 5--Implementation of Refinements and Assessment of Consultation

Hopefully, during the final stage of the consultation, the refinements decided upon are incorporated into the program's operations. Any problems which occur could point to further changes which may need to be made. Even if things proceed smoothly, however, organizational personnel should be left with the knowledge of how they can periodically monitor and update their feedback system themselves. As their programs and environment inevitably change over time, so will their feedback needs. Their feedback system must be able to adjust accordingly.

This is also an excellent time for the consultants to evaluate their own work. This may come indirectly from their observations of how successful the final program changes have been or may be more direct if they can solicit them from the organizational personnel. Time can be allowed here for a mutual feedback sharing session where all involved can process the consultation.

In conclusion, we have tried to present the basics of an approach to program evaluation consultation that stresses working with agency personnel in a process of building on the strengths of their current feedback system. While we realize that what has been sketched is brief, we feel it is a useful beginning.

This approach appeals to us because it seems well grounded in current organizational theory (the open systems approach) and it supports a belief that professional consultants should serve as resources rather than experts. Furthermore, and most importantly, we feel that this approach will lessen the friction between evaluation consultants and program personnel, and in the process, increase the likelihood that those
in human services will incorporate an "evaluation spirit" into their work.

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Natural Feedback Systems and the Evaluation of Psychology Department Clinics: A Case Study

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The evaluation of a psychology department-based psychological clinic, as with any program or organization, makes the most sense in the context of a fairly full description of that clinic, its purposes and the larger environment in which it exists. I will take the first part of this presentation to provide you with these background details. Following this, my co-presenter, Joe Gabbert, will tell you about a formal evaluation of the clinic he undertook last year which attempted to take these factors into consideration. I will then try to describe how that evaluation affected me and the center.

The Psychological Services Center at the University of Massachusetts began as a small community-oriented child guidance clinic, set up to supplement non-university based clinical practicum opportunities for graduate students in our clinical psychology training program. Its original purpose was defined solely in terms of offering training in clinical practice with child and adolescent-focused problems. After 13-1/2 years it has evolved into the primary practicum setting for our students and its objectives have changed significantly. The center now provides

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direct and indirect psychological services to individuals, couples, families, social networks, institutions and communities. The kinds and severity of clinical problems we see run the whole gamut of psychological disturbances and include people of all ages. The theoretical range of our intervention includes behavior modification, psychodynamic, interpersonal, family systems, and community. We have accommodated about 25 to 30 graduate students and 7 to 10 of our approximately 16 clinical faculty have been involved in teaching in the center last year.

The primary organizational structure within the center is the 6 to 10 member training-service team. Every faculty member who teaches in the center leads a team which reflects the leader's disposition and interest regarding clinical and/or community work. Teams are generally organized to include students with varied levels of clinical experience and to permit increasing responsibility as trainees develop their competencies. Each team also has an advanced trainee who functions as a clinical assistant, supervising less experienced students, acting as liaison with a centralized intake process, and in general helping with administrative tasks. In addition to our shared intake process, a degree of cohesiveness is affected among the diverse concerns and methods of individual teams by:

1) a common set of policies and guidelines that encourage high levels of professional responsibility (e.g., confidentiality, record-keeping, etc.)

2) a clearly-delineated and well-equipped space within the Psychology Department that includes offices for some of the staff and faculty that are most involved there,

3) weekly general meetings that are open to the department where clinically relevant presentations and discussions
led by insiders and outsiders are held,

4) the director who tries to remain supportive of the very diverse approaches represented in the center.

The relationship between the center and its environment is quite complex and, in some respects, vaguely defined. As director of the center I am a full-time, tenured member of the psychology department and clinical training program faculty. In a formal sense, I am accountable to the clinical training committee, the director of clinical training, the department's executive committee, and the department chairperson. Whereas the organizational structure of the Psychology Department has tended to maximize checks and balances and minimize hierarchical decision-making, the precise realm of authority of each individual and decision-making group is often not clearly defined. Consequently, there is considerable room for the influences of the informal power structure. Personal relationships and influences, coalitions, and the exigencies of the moment often combine to shape important decisions. In general, however, the academic segments of the environment tend to reflect the value and reward structure of the university. Research, scholarly activity, teaching and learning defined with varying degrees of flexibility are the bases for evaluation here.

The other major segment of the environment to which I, as director, and the center, as a whole, are responsible, is the community outside the university from which our clients are referred and from whom we have received a portion of our financial support. We need clients and requests for community interventions to provide training. In that sense, we must be prepared to answer to agencies, other professions and our
clients themselves in terms of the availability and quality of the services we offer.

As anyone who works in a university-based psychological center must know, the needs and expectations of this outside community segment of the environment often seem to be in conflict with those of the university. Quality and quantity of service are the community's concerns while research and training are viewed with a jaundiced eye.

How the tensions created by the conflicting needs and expectations of these two segments of the Psychological Service Center's environment are dealt with and balanced are, in my view, the standard against which it makes sense to evaluate any university-based psychological clinic.

The way in which the center supports the efforts of individual faculty and students cope with this basic tension is, then, what has emerged as the purpose of our center. Can these conflicting expectations inform one another and be integrated for participants in such a program or must they be dichotomous, unduly straining and disintegrative? Our center's purpose has become that of a setting where the integrative work of the clinical psychologist is facilitated. The experiences of successfully serving our clients must interact constructively with our efforts to contribute to the knowledge upon which such helping efforts are based. As director of such a setting, I have used a variety of general, relatively unsystematically-developed impressions to guide me in determining how well we are meeting our objectives. Last summer, Joe Gabbert, a student in our program, began to take a more systematic look at the activities in the center. What follows is how he went about it and some of what he found.
When I first became interested in conducting an evaluation of our center, I realized that it would be difficult because of the organizational complexities that Hal has just described. Before beginning, I felt that I needed an orientation that would take this complexity into consideration. After some searching, I chose the open-systems perspective as discussed by Baker, Schulberg, and Etzioni (see references). Within this framework, the human service organization is viewed as a system of interconnected and interdependent parts engaged in a dynamic process of transactions with its environment. The organizations' environment which includes such individuals and groups as its clients, funding sources, university affiliates, and neighboring human service agencies is seen to play a crucial role in the development and survival of the organization. Evaluation research from this perspective attempts to look directly at how the organization contends with the complex set of forces and demands of these outside groups.

Looking a little further into open-systems theory, I came upon a fascinating notion. All ongoing organizations develop their own natural methods for evaluating their performance with respect to their environment. They must be open to using the evaluations of outsiders if they are to insure their survival and growth. In open-systems theory these reactions are referred to as organizational feedback; descriptive and/or evaluative information about the activities of the organization that can be used by decision-makers to monitor and improve their operations. The mechanism developed to collect, communicate and use this incoming information might be called the organization's "natural feedback system."
Because of the difficulty in evaluating our center, it occurred to me that it might be advantageous to begin with an examination of the strengths and weaknesses of the already existing natural feedback system. Hopefully, then, a more refined evaluation process could be developed which would be better able to take the complexities of the organization into consideration. In addition, the staff might be more amenable to the introduction of evaluation research if they felt it extended what they were already doing. My feeling here was that many programs resist the imposition of formal evaluation procedures and would be more open to methods that fit in with their everyday work and incorporate their own ideas.

Last summer I conducted such a study at the University of Massachusetts' Psychological Services Center and acted informally as a consultant, trying to help the staff develop a more refined evaluation system. Most of the data for my analysis were collected during open-ended interviews with a cross-section of the staff. The interviewees discussed their personal experiences with feedback collection and offered their perceptions of the strengths and weaknesses of the center's evaluation processes. I would like to present you now with some of the more interesting aspects of my experience.

From the results of the study, it appears that members of the center have looked for feedback primarily from four areas of the environment: 1) the clinical area of the psychology department, 2) the rest of the department itself, 3) clients and consultees, and 4) local human service agencies. As Hal implied earlier, information from the first two (clinical area and psychology department) has been needed for the
more academic-training aspects of the clinic, while information from the other two (clients and human services) has been important for our service-oriented functions. Most felt that it was generally important to just keep information updated from people within these different groups, to see how they perceived what was happening in the center and how satisfied or dissatisfied they were with what they saw. More specific feedback was needed only when clear problems had arisen or important questions needed to be answered.

Unfortunately, it has been difficult for the clinic to develop a truly effective system for meeting these evaluation needs. First of all, there have been no formal mechanisms for collecting feedback of the type typically found in standard evaluation research. The staff has collected some useful information informally within the context of their everyday activities, but it has never been organized in any systematic way. Furthermore, most of those interviewed felt that there were real communication problems in our center. At the time of the study, there were no regular staff meetings where issues of this nature could be discussed, and most felt isolated enough that they were reluctant to pass on information to others unless the situation seemed extremely important.

In spite of the clear weaknesses in our clinic's natural feedback system, there were some important strengths. The clearest indication of this has been the center's uncanny ability to adapt to a number of internal and external changes over the last thirteen years. During that time, the center has survived and grown into a complex organization with a transitory staff representing a wide variety of orientations.
In my eyes, the most important strength has involved the informal efforts of the director, Hal, and a few interested faculty. Over the years they have formed close, informal relationships with key individuals in the center's environment, and have been able to use these to get evaluative information during crucial times. For example, when it appeared that our referrals from the schools were down, Hal was able to approach his friend from the school who lives on his block. Because of their informal relationship, he was able to get candid, first-hand information concerning the school's perception of the clinic and satisfaction with our services. Although this kind of feedback has tended to be used only during times of crisis or pushes for growth, there was every indication that it could be used much more often and efficiently. Nearly everyone that was interviewed felt that they had established at least a few close relationships with outsiders that could be used regularly for feedback collection. All they needed was some motivation to use these connections, and a place to channel what they had heard.

Another strength has involved groups within the center that have what might be called an "insider-outsider" status. For example, every year there are a number of students working in the center that have recently returned from a year at another practicum facility or internship placement. They have all been in a unique position to work as a psychology trainee both inside and outside of the center. Because of this experience, they have been able to offer particularly insightful feedback about the quality of our training and services.

Our community outreach practicum teams are another good example of a group with this insider-outsider status. One of these, the LIFT team,
which does outreach therapy with multi-problem families has been a particularly valuable feedback source. Because of the nature of their clients, LIFT works very closely with other agencies and professionals in the community, and holds bi-monthly "network meetings" where agency personnel get together to discuss their mutual problems with casework and local human service systems. Through these meetings the LIFT staff has often heard other agencies' perceptions and evaluations of our services.

I also found that the clinic's staff has developed a number of excellent criteria for evaluating their efforts that could be used more systematically in the future. For example, many of the participants informally monitored the number of faculty and students who chose to work in the center each year, and have used any trends they have noticed as an indicator of the clinical area's satisfaction with the center. In the future, these numbers could be recorded more systematically and faculty and students could be asked to discuss on a questionnaire why or why not they chose to work in the center. Using the staff's informal criteria in this way to develop more formal measures seemed to be an excellent way to extend their present evaluation efforts and increase their interest in the use of systematic evaluation methods.

In sum, my results showed that our center has needed evaluative feedback from a number of areas of the environment, both academically and service oriented. Unfortunately, there has not been a truly effective system for meeting these feedback needs. There have been some important strengths, though, that have made it possible for the organization to operate at a basic survival level, responding to major challenges and threats. These have included: 1) a number of close, infor-
mal relationships with outsiders that have made feedback collection easy, 2) groups like the LIFT team that have had unique access to feedback because of their insider-outsider status, and 3) a variety of evaluation criteria used informally by the staff to judge outsiders' satisfaction with our services. It seems clear that these strengths could be built upon so that outside feedback could be collected, communicated, and used more on a regular basis.

There have been many reasons for why our natural feedback system has not been more effective. At one level, the problem has been related to internal organizational dynamics. Individuals and teams have been given no clear responsibility for collecting or communicating feedback by the center's administration. In addition, the staff has not felt enough of a personal commitment to the center to assume that responsibility on their own.

At a deeper level, the problem has been a function of the center's relationship with the clinical area of the psychology department. For many good reasons we have been a sub-unit of the clinical area and have maintained close academic ties. This has given both faculty and students an excellent opportunity to integrate their academic and applied interests in the true spirit of the Boulder model. Unfortunately, the affiliation has been so close that it has been difficult for the center to develop any sense of identity. It has been seen merely as an extension of the clinical area where the staff's own individual academic autonomy has prevailed. Thus it has been difficult for them to feel committed to the center as an organization in and of itself, and even more difficult for them to put effort into evaluation activity there.
In addition to lowering the staff's feelings of commitment and responsibility, the ambiguous status of the clinic has made internal lines of authority and accountability very confusing. For example, it has been unclear whether the director has had the authority to make decisions on his own and tell other faculty members what to do. In the center it appears as though he is the director in charge; in the clinical area he is seen as just another faculty member with one vote. A close look reveals that he has been given very few clear powers as director, but much responsibility. Because of this confusion over who has the power to make decisions, the decision-making process has often been convoluted and frustrating for those involved. Because of this, the staff has largely resigned themselves to a position of "not rocking the boat" and have chosen not to report any feedback that might do so. In addition, I think it has been difficult for Hal to push faculty team leaders into taking responsibilities in the area of evaluation research since, if tenured, they can really do whatever they please.

Of course, there have been other reasons for the limitations in our natural feedback system. The complex nature of the center's goals, and the diverse and sometimes competing interests in its environment have made it difficult to respond to feedback. For example, an outside funding source may be unhappy that more clients are not being seen in the center. However, responding to this and increasing the number of clients may put a severe strain on the quality of training and be resisted by those responsible for training. Since feedback of this nature raises such issues of internal balance that are difficult to communicate about to outsiders that only see their side of the issues, most staff
have chosen to not collect much feedback from people outside the center. In addition, our staff like most in the human services are generally overcommitted, and do not feel that they have the time for evaluation research. As long as they see the organization surviving fairly well as ours has, they spend time on more immediately pressing concerns.

With this analysis in hand, I approached the center as an informal evaluation consultant. Again, my primary objective was to help the staff develop a more refined evaluation system based on the strengths in their current natural feedback system. I hoped that my efforts would also get them more interested in using evaluation research by showing them how easily they could extend what they were already doing.

My first recommendation was that the center should make better use of the evaluation strengths that it already had. Many individuals and a few teams had formed unique connections with outsiders that could be used for feedback collection if communication channels were more open. I suggested that regular staff meetings be held, and that some of these be devoted to the discussion of evaluation issues. Internship students and the LIFT family therapy team might be given meetings of their own because of their unique access to important information. I hoped that these discussions would stimulate the staff to think more consciously about feedback collection so that eventually they would initiate more systematic evaluation procedures. I also suggested that more systematic procedures be established immediately using criteria already developed and put to use informally by the staff. For example, as I stated earlier, the number of faculty and students choosing to work in the center each year could be recorded along with everyone's reasons for making
their particular decision. In this way the center might be able to develop a more systematic view of the clinical area's satisfaction and dissatisfaction with it as a training site.

My final recommendation involved my perception of the clinic being too closely related to the clinical area of the psychology department. As I stated earlier, this close and often ambiguous arrangement has made it difficult for people to feel a commitment to the organization, and has made decision-making confusing and frustrating. As a result, most of the staff have not been interested in evaluation activity and it has been difficult for Hal to clearly impose it. With this in mind, I recommended that lines of authority within the center, and between the center and the clinical area be made as clear as possible so that the specific powers and responsibilities of the director and other faculty members could be more explicit and understandable.

Reactions to my study and recommendations were varied. Some of my findings and ideas were picked up readily and put into action. Others were resisted openly or silently ignored. In fact, Hal and I have had a few friendly arguments of our own over the study. Perhaps at this point, it would be best for you to hear once again from him.

Before Joe approached me with his evaluation plan, I had my own impressions of our center's successes and failures. They were based on sources of feedback that had become convenient and familiar because of years of contact, on information derived from the way in which occasional crises were handled and on periodic, spontaneous efforts on the part of others to get back to me about experiences with the center. The cli-
ent who attached a note to his/her final payment thanking their therapist for the help they received, or who wanted to speak to me about their perception that they had been mistreated by a trainee, or the friendly psychologist in a nearby school district who went out of her way to let me know how the center is viewed by the high school guidance staff. Aside from the culling of data for an annual report or memo to an administrator, there has been relatively little in the way of systematic data on which to base my impressions.

It is not surprising that the impressions I had were intended for the most part to support my policies and the direction in which I saw the center moving over the years. Consequently, when Joe approached me to undertake an evaluation I reacted with considerable ambivalence. The possibility that I might learn some things that would be useful to me as the center's administrator were balanced by my fears that such an evaluation would, as he put it, "rock the boat," confront me with shortcomings and problems I preferred not to see, and place unreasonable demands on me. I rationalized that as a student, Joe would not be able to fully grasp the demands of so complex an organization, that his study would omit important bits of information, etc. But in the end, I accepted his proposal and agreed to participate in it. It was, after all, a meaningful way for him to meet some academic requirements and it was clearly in line with the center's objectives to facilitate the research endeavors of our students. Besides I had experienced frustrations with the center, especially our chronic failure to have training program participants fully share their experiences as part of an organization larger than a team and thus optimize their learning experiences.
As it developed, the evaluation provided a useful opportunity for me to clarify and articulate my experiences as director of the center and to hear what Joe had learned from others. Despite what frequently seemed their limited concern with their experiences on teams, I was somewhat surprised to find that students and faculty had strong investments in the success of the center as a whole and expressed a willingness to become more active in sharing responsibility for it. This became even more evident when Joe asked for a meeting of center participants to present some of the findings of his study to them. They came in large numbers and participated actively in the discussion.

This discussion provided the impetus for some structural rearrangements including regular staff meetings and the formation of several administrative committees. The latter included one on public relations, another on the screening of research and training applicants from outside the program, and a weekly program committee. All of these responsibilities had previously fallen primarily on me with the occasional ad hoc help of an individual or committee. It is important to mention that each of these subcommittee's responsibilities included an element of continuing feedback.

I also came to see more clearly an important function of the LIFT program mentioned by Joe. As a boundary spanning service it was in an excellent position to receive feedback from the community. It deserved more of my attention and involvement.

There was also some problematic feedback derived from Joe's study. In particular, he had raised some important questions about the relationship of the center to the training program and psychology department. As
a function of the data he collected, he felt that the lines of accountability needed to be drawn more clearly. As administrator of a program that tenuously balances academic and service objectives that are somewhat alien to the academic community, I had feared that drawing stricter lines of accountability within the academic context would tip the scales. Furthermore, I wished to maintain the freedom to deal with my responsibilities enjoyed by my academic colleagues.

In closing, I feel that it is important to mention that the primarily positive changes initiated in part by Joe's evaluation have their limitations. In recent months the attrition of resources within the university and psychology department have had a negative effect on some of the changes we have implemented. For example, it is awkward for our public relations committee to reach out and engage the community at large at a moment when we anticipate that the services that we provide will face significant cutbacks in the coming year. I think that this latest experience validates my impression that even with substantial feedback, centers such as ours will have to struggle continually to maintain themselves in a highly conflicted environment.

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