'The Changing Face of Non-Traditional NGO Governance: The Case of the Chinmaya Rural Primary Health Care and Training Centre (CRTC), India.'

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ABSTRACT[1]

Nonprofit literature suggests that non-governmental organizations (NGOs), even those that intentionally want to maintain a collectivist structure, tend to adopt bureaucratic governance features when subject to growth and accountability from funders (Handy, Kassam and Ranade, 2000). The 'The Chinmaya Rural Primary Health Care and Training Centre' (CRTC), in India, is an exception as it chooses to maintain its collectivist structure despite its rapid growth, and its reliance on international funding. As a collectivist structure, it has developed a space that allows for its staff and constituents to take a more active role in its governance, departing from traditional governance that relies on trustees or boards (Smillie and Hailey, 2001). Garreth Morgan's principles of holographic design (1986) is used to explain CRTC's overall organizational structure that allows for inclusive governance mechanisms.

By critically examining governance at CRTC for generalizations that can apply to other rural-development NGOs, this paper argues that it is possible for rural-based NGOs to develop non-traditional forms of governance by deliberately maintaining a collectivist structure. This widens the traditional governance equation to include staff and constituents with direct implications on the traditional functions of the board. The paper concludes with the 'Dynamic Holographic Collectivist Governance Model.' The model is neither comprehensive nor inflexible and is designed for generic adaptability by practitioners to suit their particular environmental needs.

Section 1- Introduction

A large number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in the global south are actively involved in rural development projects. Most NGOs are funded by international donors, which make specific accountability/evaluation demands. The NGOs' employees, board, and constituents are also significant stakeholders. As an NGO grows in size and scope it faces the challenge of trying to balance its liabilities to its donors, and other stakeholders, as well as retain the organization's creativity and flexibility. It has been found that NGOs, even those that intentionally want to maintain a collectivist structure, tend to adopt bureaucratic governance features when subject to growth and accountability from funders (Handy, Kassam & Ranade, 2000). In the case of an organization that has made deliberate efforts to avoid hierarchy and implement a participatory and decentralized collectivist structure, the question of the traditional governance role of trustees may be challenged.

Gareth Morgan (1986) developed the principles of holographic design, which are used to explain non-traditional governance at the rural development organization 'Chinmaya Rural Primary Health Care and Training Center' (CRTC for the purposes of this paper); located in Sidhbari, India. Despite facing rapid growth, it intentionally functions as a collectivist. By critically examining governance at CRTC for generalizations that can apply to other rural development NGOs, the paper argues that rural-based NGOs that deliberately maintain a collectivist structure have the capacity to develop non-traditional features of governance. Using the principles of holographic design, and lessons learned from CRTC, a dynamic governance model for rural development NGOs is proposed. However, non-development NGOs could also draw insights from the model.

Section 2 - Literature

Governance generally refers to either a political context or departs from the political scenario to being closely associated with strategic decision-making in (Ott, 2001). NGO governance addresses the 'vision,' 'mission,' and 'strategy' of an NGO rather than operations/management focusing on policy framing and organizational identity Tandon (2002). The traditional approach to the study of NGO governance has focused on the structure of trusts/ boards (Carver 1990; Houle 1989), especially their role in reinforcing governance structures (Smillie & Hailey, 2001).

Bradshaw, Murray, and Wolpin (1992) have classified empirical studies on governance, i.e. those focusing on how boards should operate, on the basis of subjective versus objective performance measures. The literature also abounds with prescriptive advice on the ability of boards to effectively fulfill their responsibilities (Axelrod, 1994; Block, 1998; Callen and Falk, 1993; Houle, 1989; Ingram; 2003; Murray and Tassie, 1994; Price, 1963; Siciliano, 1990). Yet another angle frequently used to study governance is the analytical approach, particularly decision-making as a factor of governance when accounting for internal power dynamics and external environmental factors (Bradshaw, Murray, & Wolpin, 1992; Herman & Heimovics, 1990; Herman & Tulipana, 1985; Middleton, 1987; Pfeffer, 1973; Provan, 1980).

The study of nonprofit governance has focused primarily on the developed country context with very limited conceptual studies done on nonprofit governance in the developing country context. The literature lacks explaining contextual elements within nonprofits that have implications on governance structure and process (Ostrower & Stone, 2001). This paper attempts to address the gap in the literature in terms of providing an

understanding about the workings of non-traditional governance features within a particular nonprofit structure i.e. a collectivist, working in a developing nation context. Lessons learned from governance given these contingent factors are applied to create a dynamic governance model to add to some of the existing literature on governance models.

Governance models stem from using the tripartite system (board, executive, and staff) to frame board structure, and the overall governance process. Models are useful as they help us unravel the contextual elements of governance especially as they relate to a given organizational structure. Charles Handy (1976) pointed to the effectiveness of an organizational structure dependent on the interplay between multiple systems, and this idea can be extended to the structure of boards and the overall governance process. Models on nonprofit governance have evolved over time, but the seminal models reflect governance as it is traditionally perceived and practiced.

Carver's policy governance model (1990) was the pioneer model used to explain nonprofit governance. It views the board as representing a microcosm of the larger organizational ownership. The model depicts policy framing as the fundamental function of a board. It explores the types of policies that boards are preoccupied with framing, such as outlining outcomes and the means to achieving those outcomes, setting the parameters between the board and the staff, and framing accountability standards for the executive or determining board accountability. Herman (1989) has suggested that the principles suggested in Carver's model are not only demanding, but also realistically difficult for board members to achieve or implement on their own.

The alternative model presented by Herman & Heimovics (1991) focused on the chief executive as the key driver of growth within established NGOs; i.e. the link between

board members, staff, and constituents with the exception of entirely volunteer-run organizations. The model shares the same moral assumptions traditionally followed by non-profits, which holds the board responsible for acting as the steward that oversees the mission, mandate, and values of the organization. However, in the alternative model, policy decisions are not taken solely by the board but are based on the collaborative efforts of the chief executive working in conjunction with staff and board members. The two seminal models have been primarily used to explain governance mechanisms, but as NGOs became more varied their governance features also began to take on patterns.

Bradshaw et al. (1998) developed a classification of governance models to explain the complexity that characterizes the direction of the governance approach within the tripartite system. They surveyed the literature on non-profit board governance and have found that there is no consensus among researchers or practitioners about an ideal governance model. They identified two sets of dimensions that generally encompass the governance spectrum within nonprofit organizations. The first dimension is 'established' versus 'innovative.' The former refers to organizations that focus on sustainability and static methods of operation while the latter refers to those dynamic organizations that are operationally flexible and creative. The second dimension, 'unitary' versus 'pluralistic,' refers to the application of a given model to either a single or a group of related organizations (p.13). Thus, when the dimensions are placed perpendicular to each other, they give rise to four quadrants or four types of governance structures. Along these lines of dimensions, organizations may either be single entities or represent multiple entities that place emphasis on minimum change by adhering to predefined policies or on continuous change through innovation in policy and corresponding activities.

By using lessons learned from their classification, Bradshaw at al. (1998) went a step further and created a hybrid model: The 'Adaptive Equilibrium Model'. It relies on the same dual sets of dimension used in their original classification, but uses features from all four scenarios to indicate how a given organization responds to stimuli from environmental factors. For instance, an organization may be drawn to the features of one governance approach, such as a focus on innovation, but it may simultaneously retain or adopt characteristics along the other dimensions that emphasize other interests including framing policy, and the needs of multiple stakeholders. The model aims to foster leadership through learning and adaptability by using a multiple-stakeholder approach to mission framing, and board diversity.

The key functions of the board are clustered under 'outreach, stewardship, operations, self-reflection and assessment, and establishing legitimacy' (p.29). The descriptors of the model are in keeping with present day researcher/practitioner emphasis to have more inclusive, diverse, multi-stakeholder approaches to governance. Besides providing descriptors of such progressive governance features, how does one go about creating a space and culture within the organization that would allow for inclusive governance features? The actual mechanics of achieving progressive governance lies inherently in the very structure of the organization, which allows for a space to develop innovative approaches in the governance process.

Organization structures generally fall between collectivists and bureaucracies. As organizations scale-up in operations, they move towards bureaucratic structures that rely on traditional systems of governance (Kassam et al. 2000, 2002). Middleton (1997) cautions that organizational governance cannot be understood without recognizing the complex

environments that they function within, and the levels of permeability between boundaries

of those environments. For example, as NGOs generally have to apply for recurrent

funding they are subject to accountability standards as prescribed by funders, while funders

are subject to environmental factors that could affect their mandates and their decision to

grant recurrent funding to the NGOs.

One type of approach to framing organizational structures is the use of a 'metaphor'

to depict structures. This approach is relevant to the context of this paper for it can be used

to explain the working of the collectivist structure found at CRTC, which consequently

gives rise to non-traditional governance features. Garreth Morgan (1986, 1989) has

explored the concept of a holograph as an organizational metaphor; the critical dimension

being each element (person, project, etc.) has a sense of the whole (organization or

structure). Furthermore, the concept of the holograph depicts organizations rooted in non-

bureaucratic principles. Morgan's created the principles of holographic design (1986) by

first drawing on work of Bentov (1977), Bohm (1978, 1980a, 1980b), and Wilber (1982),

whom had explored the holograph, and holography. To their founding work on the concept

of the holograph, he creatively used Emery's (1967) principle of redundancy of

parts/functions, Ashby's (1952,1960) principle of requisite variety, Bateson's (1972)

concepts on learning to learn to learn, and Herbst's (1974), work on minimum critical

specification, respectively. Figure 1 depicts the Principles of holographic design for

organizations revealing four interrelated principles working together within an organization

to create smaller forms or systems that replicate the organization as a whole.

Figure 1: Principles of Holographic Design
Source: Morgan (1986, p.99 & 1989, p.53)

Learning to learn

Redundancy
of Functions

Holographic
Organization

Requisite
Variety

Minimum Critical
Specification
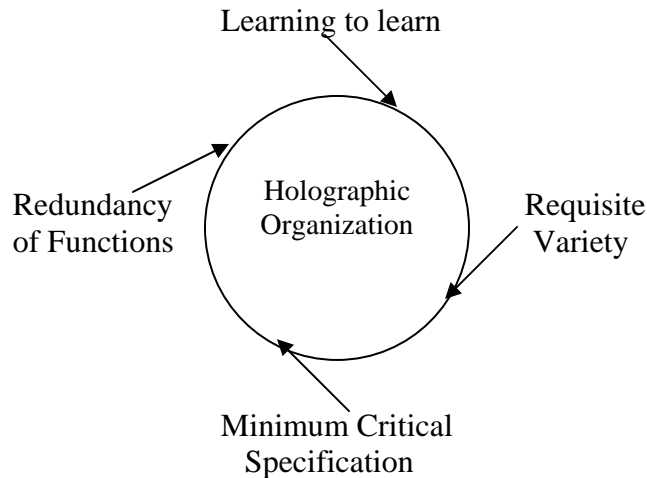
The characteristics of each principle and how they interrelate are as follows.

1) *Redundancy* – The emphasis on multiplicity of tasks by all members within an

organization to create a degree of specialization, while simultaneously allowing for overall

generalization. It is not the type of redundancy that simply gives rise to 'spare parts'. But

rather, it creates a degree of specialization within the system and simultaneously allows for

overall generalization. To balance the level of redundancy, the second principle of

requisite variety comes into play.

2) *Requisite variety* – The second principle creates a level of functional redundancy so that

smaller organizational forms can develop by being in tune with their environmental factors.

Members of each smaller team or organization within the NGO learn to multi-task and

adapt to environmental factors and gain broad management and decision-making functions.

Functional redundancy is needed, as no one person can cope with all the factors within a

given environment. By creating redundancy within the boundaries of requisite variety,

"organizations can develop in a cellular manner around self-organizing groups that have

the requisite skills and abilities to deal with the environment in a holistic and integrated

way" (Morgan, 1989, p.56). The drawback to having too much flexibility is that it could

distract from goals or replicate unneeded structures. The feature of 'minimum critical

specification' addresses these drawbacks.

3) *Minimum Critical Specification* –The principle introduces just enough control needed to

ensure that groups or systems can carry out their tasks. Leadership and facilitating skills

are used to keep members informed about the process. This feature is borrowed from a

bureaucratic system, but it need not be bureaucratic in function. By not assigning

designated positions and by providing a space for all members to take turns leading and

guiding (a session, an activity, a project, and ultimately a system), participants have an

opportunity to bring a diversity of styles and opinion to the group. The process generates

new ideas and calls for continuous reflection, but it keeps differentiation to a minimum,

whereby members of a group can learn to focus on tasks or goals without replicating

unneeded structures.

4) *Learning to Learn* – To minimize chaos in the process, Morgan introduces the fourth

principle: 'learning to learn.' As the organization refrains from predetermined rules, it falls

on the participants to monitor their learning capacities, growth, outcomes and general

direction of the processes that they engage in. The system relies on a looping system of

inquiry going from single to double looping. At the first level i.e. single loop level, objects

are analyzed as is without framing the context while the double loop level reframes the

problem in context and allows for the incorporation of more variables into the

environmental mix (Argyris & Schon 1979; Bach 1992). In a holographic organization, it

is necessary to create a culture of learning and self-regulation to gain optimal advantage of the combined work between the four inter-related principles.

The literature on the evolution of governance models and nonprofit governance, alongside Morgan's use of the principles of holographic design formed the platform to critically study the case of CRTC, India with the intention of seeking lessons that can be shared with practitioners, and academics at large.

Section 3 - Methodology

There are many NGOs that function as collectivist organizations, however, CRTC was explored as it was not only a rapidly growing organization, but successful as a collectivist in meeting its goals without having to adopt bureaucratic practices. In order to establish that CRTC did meet its goals, an investigation of its archival records especially its Results Based Management records given to funders were analyzed. This first step of analysis revealed that the NGO effectively conducted administration, management, and governance processes, meeting both its own evaluation standards and those of its donors. CRTC is considered as a model NGO for the National Agriculture Bank for Rural Development (NABARD), India, which has assigned CRTC the task of helping other NGOs build capacity.

The guiding methodology approach used in this study was qualitative, specifically - ethnography. The archival records also helped frame relevant questions. To gain a critical understanding of governance, it was imperative to explore the following: the overall working of the collectivist structure; the non-traditional governance features; inclusive decision-making by different stakeholders; and employee/board/executive accountability. The other strategies used in the investigation were on-site interviews, focus groups, and

field observation to gain valuable feedback from staff, constituents, management, and board members. The entire organization works through small groups, thus, considerable time was spent observing inter- and intra-group communication with regards to how groups build trust, capacity, and consensus in addition to designing, and implementing their projects. The NGO has an intensive weekly and monthly evaluation meeting schedule, which revealed the working of the feedback system used to evaluate programs in lieu of the policies that support these programs. At these meetings, policy recommendations are made, policies are framed, and follow-up discussions on the efficacy of past and present policies are held.

Trustees and management were interviewed using a semi-structured format (Frey, Botan, Friedman, & Kreps, 1992) consisting of ten questions. Interviewees could elaborate on each area discussed. A shorter moderately structured questionnaire was used to interview fieldworkers. Each interview was preceded by a briefing about how governance is understood in the western context of a tripartite system, the similarities of this context to governance of nonprofits in India, and the normative roles/functions of the governance process. All those interviewed were asked three common questions i.e. to explain governance within CRTC as they understood it, their role in the governance process, and the role of the Executive Director in guiding the process.

Focus groups were conducted with management, and fieldworkers to explore self-governance of individual smaller groups, the governance processes emerging from group interaction, and bottom-up decision-making. At the analysis stage, the extensive on-site observations were combined with the contextual knowledge obtained from interviews, and focus groups, and the background archival information to develop a clear picture about the

structure of the organization, and its capacity to create and use opportunities to develop

non-traditional governance features.

Section 4 – Goal of the study

        The governance model proposed later in this paper is the outcome of adapting

Morgan's ideas on the holograph as a metaphor for organizational structures to the lessons

on governance learned from the case of CRTC, India. It is designed specifically for NGOs

that choose to be collectivist in structure despite scaling-up operations. It is best suited for

those NGOs that have a high integration of programs, and adhere to a bottom-up approach

to the framing vision, mission, and values. Moreover, it is a model whose key feature is

consensus building based on establishing relations of trust between its members. It is not

feasible in an organizational culture devoid of trust or a shared values system. The model

sought its inspiration from a successful rural development nonprofit. It is not designed for

NGOs that have a prescribed top-down approach to addressing their mandate or those that

are bureaucratic in nature. The model is neither ideal nor comprehensive, but it is a

conceptual, contingent framework that encourages NGO management, and boards to adapt

the proposed features to meet organizational needs. It is hoped that the model will give rise

to further innovations on more inclusive, diverse, and dynamic governance features.

Section 5 – CRTC's collectivist structure and its non-traditional governance processes

        Swami Chinmayananda, the founder of the Vedanta movement known as Chinmaya

Mission created a social service arm of the organization to meet rural health care needs in

the village of Sidhbari, Himachal Pradesh, in the late 1970s. Dr. Kshama Metre, joined the

informal rural health care service and became the founding director of the newly registered

CRTC in 1984. Her vision to help villagers reclaim development evolved into a collectivist

structure that addresses numerous development and health related needs of approximately

30,000 residents in the Kangra District of Himachal Pradesh. Dr. Metre was determined to

let the constituents dictate development; she decided to recruit and train fieldworkers from

the constituents' villages. These fieldworkers then frame the organization's overall vision

and policies by directly representing their communities, and by adhering to a collective

democratic process to meet their objectives.

CRTC's structure reveals its ability to ensure it's functioning as a successful

collectivist adopting a transparent and participatory approach to development. In addition

to its tripartite governance system, including trustees, executive and staff, the NGO has

small, integrated working groups. The principles of holographic design frame the

guidelines for the working of the individual cells and the organization as a whole. The

NGO wanted to optimally use all available resources given the large number of rural

constituents in need of its services. Thus, when creating its initial infrastructure, the

fieldworkers realized that Mahila Mandals or women's association and the Panchayati Raj

Institutions (local governance organizations), instituted by the government of India but not

effectively used or managed by the villagers could act as the ideal platform to voice the

development concerns of the villagers.

Fieldworkers were faced with the challenging task of mobilizing the women and

men through the Mahila Mandals and the Panchayati Raj system. As the fieldworkers

belonged to the constituent pool, they relied on established networks of social capital and

trust to gather people and bring them within the folds of development decisions affecting

their lives. Each village served by CRTC, also has a Mahila Mandal mobilized by the

NGO. Each of the Mahila Mandals gives rise to a self-contained working group that

includes the fieldworkers belonging to that village. The women voice their concerns at these meetings, informing fieldworkers about what kind of problems they have and what resources are available and/or needed to resolve these problems.

The staff follows scheduled daily and weekly meetings to discuss issues commonly affecting villagers. A new cell is formed to specifically tackle the issue. The emergent cell replicates the same structure of the other cells and consists of fieldworkers whose skills are best aligned with the objective of the new cell. In this manner, as objectives are met, cells fold and as new concerns arise, new cells emerge. There are a dozen permanent cells that facilitate the optimal usage of resources by addressing long-term goals. These groups primarily deal with education, disability and gender issues, sustainable income generation, legal issues, youth, health, and natural resource management. Fieldworkers are regularly moved between groups to expose them to different skill sets, and challenges. All long-term and emergent cells, the board, and ultimately, the organization as a whole, have the same working structure and replicate identical processes to frame policy, and objectives, and evaluate outcomes. Each cell has a sense of the organization as a whole.

The application of the principles of holographic deign, to CRTC's structure (organization and governance) reveals insights into how these principles are achieved on a daily basis. Fieldworkers and management have their skills regularly upgraded and challenged for it is organizational practice to rotate all staff through the long-term cells to develop task competency. They are encouraged to explore creative ways to deal with utilizing resources, and in dealing with rural women are faced with cultural constraints such as, caste system. They learn to make informed and democratic decisions, and are given numerous opportunities to develop leadership and management skills. These factors

all contribute to achieving functional redundancy. Most importantly, staff members have strong support systems to help them learn and engage with each other. Fieldworkers are constantly interacting with each other through their meetings to basis to brainstorm on ideas, share resources, and analyze their efforts.

Center Day brings together all of the NGO's employees once a month. At this meeting, all projects are reviewed, and accountability is deliberately kept transparent. Individuals have a chance to seek advice on stumbling blocks within projects, to learn about the progress of other projects, to make collective decisions on new strategies and policies, to learn for mistakes, and to celebrate successes. This does not imply that decision-making is a simple process but rather the importance of democratic and collective decision-making takes precedence. This provides members with a space to learn new things, challenge things they have known, and be inhibited to do so. The open accountability system acts as an effective checks-and-balance method, for it ensures that the organization's goals are always placed above personal goals.

Management uses feedback from these meetings to prepare quarterly reports for funders. Additionally, the three key managers are collectively responsible for all the cells and are well informed of status of each project. Board members have access to all quarterly reports and are free to consult with management and staff. Trustees meet a few times a year, i.e. a minimum of four times to discuss the efficacy of all projects, and policies, and to perform fiduciary duties. Trustees facilitate development by helping the organization access external funding, and network for other resources, approaches, strategies etc that could be useful to the NGO. They safeguard vision, mission, and policies framed bottom-up within the organization and are called by law to ratify the same.

The second principle of minimum critical specification is directly tied to CRTC's history and its founding principles. From the outset, Swami Chinmayananda's philosophy on humanistic values created a set of unwritten ethics/values that to this day highly influence the organization's staff. However, it should be noted that the organization is non-religious, and non-discriminatory as evident from its secular mandate, its equitable hiring practices, its commitment to serve the impoverished regardless of religion, and given the Indian context, regardless of caste. CRTC has made tremendous efforts to educate the local people about the ills of the caste system. Employees are secure in the non-threatening and non-discriminatory space that the organization provides, particularly for women who are treated as equals regardless of their status in the outside society. There is a strong sense of trust and security among the employees, reinforced by the democratic nature of the organization.

In order to make informed decisions, directly reflects the importance of the third principle, i.e. the principle of requisite variety. As leadership and independence is strongly encouraged within the NGO, staff members are sensitive to all changes in the contexts of their work, specifically those changes observed in the field. They are careful to place organizational interests above their own; and are always prompt to report concerns/issues to their colleagues. This is also observed at the board and management level. To achieve flexibility, informed decision-making, and a sense of the organizations learned values, staff commit to continuous learning, specifically triple-loop learning (Bateson, 1972). This type of learning explores options and alternatives to the nth degree, and relies strongly on a holistic sense of learning. The benefits of continuous learning include optimal usage of all

resources, innovation, and a singular vision for the NGO. It also strengthens organizational social capital as members learn from each other all the time.

The Chinmaya Tapovan Trust (CTT) is the board that oversees CRTC. A majority of the trustees were on the founding board, and with the exception of two members, they are based outside Himachal Pradesh in India's urban cities. The trustees revealed that they were initially uncertain about the merits of adopting a participatory development approach, and a collectivist structure. However, they collectively had little faith in conventional top-down, bureaucratic approaches and decided to try the alternative processes suggested by Dr. Metre in 1985. A major outcome of following these processes were the implications they had on traditional governance functions. While this was not anticipated when the processes were first proposed, it has been the primary reason for the organization's growth and success. Staff/constituents truly believe they are being empowered as their ideas, their vision, their policies, and their programs drive the organization. The donors and trustees facilitate the efforts of the all the employers by conducting due diligence with regards to the vision and organizational policies, by scanning outside boundaries for potential threats and opportunities, and by raising external funding.

On three occasions, trustees made a voted on central decisions with management over issues that were not raised from the bottom-up. In the early 1990s, in order to secure additional funding they elected to spin-off a training program at CRTC into a separate training centre called Chinmaya Sewa Centre, providing local women with traditional skills. When funding for that project ended in 2004, the training centre was merged back to CRTC, whose financial stability and maturity can help sustain the training program. Also in 2004, trustees made a decision to create a separate trust to manage all rural development

organizations, including CRTC that were started by Chinmaya Mission in India. The old

trust was also responsible for the work of the Chinmaya Ashrams and the trustees felt it

best to separate the two to ensure all stakeholders about CRTC's secular stand. It should be

noted that CRTC and the ashram functioned independently of each other, with separate

budgets, management, and mandates.

The decision to form a new trust has been crucial given the global trend in the

donor community that wants clear boundaries between donations being used for religious

and non-religious purposes. Trustees also believe that the other rural development

organizations under Chinmaya related trusts would benefit from the lessons learned at

CRTC. The new trust will not have any impact on the structure and governance at CRTC as

the long-term vision and planning will continue to be framed by the staff/constituents.

However, it will impact the other NGOs under the new trust who are expected to adopt the

same participatory, holographic structure as CRTC.

The board-executive relationship at CRTC reveals very different power dynamics

because of Dr. Metre's role as a charismatic and influential leader. It was her idea to ask

the people about their vision for the local villages in Kangra; her belief in their ideas led

her to make a case to the board for a collectivist structure using a participatory

development approach. In the initial years she was the key link that helped

staff/constituents frame the organizational vision and helped the trustees understand the

vision. She strongly adheres to open accountability and keeps trustees and staff alike

informed of all reports. She has a congenial relationship with the board whose members

view her as a pioneer. She does depend on them for guidance, particularly with external

funding.

Tandon (1995) makes the point that when the founder of an NGO is also its executive for most of the NGO's existence, the autonomy of the board can be limited as the NGO takes on an identity closely associated with the founder. CRTC does not face this dilemma for its founding is associated with Swami Chinmayananda rather than Dr. Metre. Different experiences shape the viewpoints of the trustees and the executive on development, which has proven to be a source of thriving innovative responses to addressing development. Although, the board respects Dr. Metre's steadfast adherence to maintaining a bottom-up approach to governance, it has made efforts to revitalize the organization through its innovative suggestions on funding and most recently, through the proposal to create a separate trust.

Dr. Metre has never placed her own ambitions before that of the organization, for in advocating for a collectivist structure, she inherently has reduced powers to frame the future path of the organization. CRTC's successes have ensured that it has garnered much attention in India and abroad, and Dr. Metre has been increasingly called to speak publicly about the organization. She believes that it is to the detriment of the NGO if its identity is associated with just one person or leader, and has sought to groom a new generation of managers whom she asks to collectively represent the NGO. Perhaps the most important reason that CRTC is not faced with the dilemma that Tandon refers to in terms of NGO identity, is the important role played by employees and constituents in the governance of the organization. They own the policy framing and development design process, in addition to the evaluation and accountability processes.

CRTC's staff and constituents have only been exposed to an emergent cell structure, both democratic and innovative in nature, and perceive the non-traditional

governance features to be a norm. They are unaware that if CRTC followed traditional

tripartite governance, they would not have had a chance to frame their future vision and

policies, and design their own programs. They are well aware that CTT exists but associate

the trust with being the primary resource for funding rather than fulfilling fiduciary and

other governance functions. There has never been a need for them to know about board

functions and structures in detail as their primary and secondary goals were always

associated with running the organization bottom-up. A large number of the fieldworkers

were illiterate on joining the organization but have since acquired functional to

intermediate literacy skills. The next generation of fieldworkers consists of youth who have

benefited from CRTC's immense efforts to ensuring that local fieldworkers emphasized

schooling in their communities. They are more aware of governance functions and truly

appreciate the collectivist structure and the opportunities it has presented for non-traditional

governance features.

CRTC has witnessed rapid, organic growth that does not leave room for reflection

on the evolving nature of non-traditional governance at the organization. There is a slow

realization among majority of the staff and trustees about the merits of the governance

process in terms of being non-traditional, progressive, and inclusive. Management, the

executive and some staff are the only ones who realize the holistic achievement of their

holographic collectivist structure beyond just meeting organizational mandate but in terms

of really empowering every member of the organization. The focus groups revealed that

employees treasure the fact that their input is valued, and amounts to something concrete.

They are no longer afraid to speak up in their own communities, particularly to teach others

about gender equity issues, ills of the caste system, and the importance of local governance.
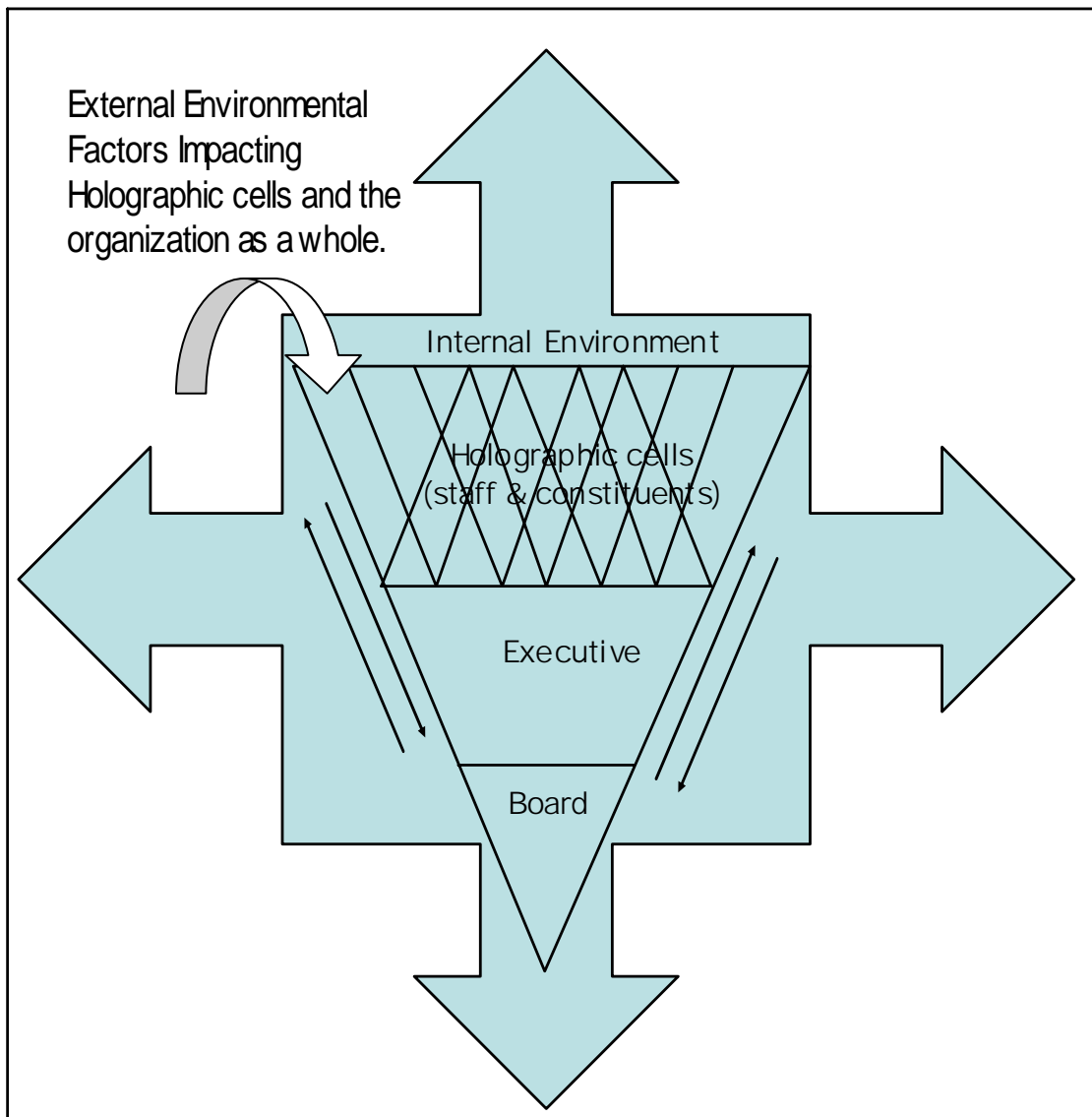
Section 5 - A Non-Traditional Governance Model for NGOs

This paper proposes a governance model based on the lessons learned from the holographic structure that facilitates the governance model at CRTC. The model is called the 'Dynamic Holographic Collectivist Model.' It can be summed up as a model with emergent, holographic structures that facilitates non-traditional, multi-stakeholder governance. The model is not designed for a bureaucratic structure but for a decentralized, collectivist structure whose features include democratic, and informal decision-making, diversity of members united by a shared ideology, and transparency in evaluation systems (Bordt, 1997). The model utilizes Morgan's (1986, 1989) 'holograph' metaphor for organizational form to create a non-traditional governance structure. The rationale behind using this form for a collectivist is that as members of the collectivist seek out new opportunities and build the capacity of existing systems, the NGO needs a common method of governing all core systems to limit chaos, and ensure accountability. It facilitates collaborative decision-making, and a democratic form of evaluation. Its biggest challenge is that it appears to be time consuming, but in reality it saves time as it minimizes poor decision-making.

When members of a collectivist organization get together to form a smaller structure, the initial groundwork is intensive as all members have to develop skills in multiple areas and take leadership initiatives vis-à-vis the group as a whole. When the organization is faced with making a decision, the evaluation process includes all concerned stakeholders, which slows down the reaction time. Once a decision is made, the holograph allows for quick action and great flexibility. The opportunity that the model presents is its capacity to enable participants to be proactive and anticipate environmental factors in

advance. Threats facing the model arise from its vulnerability to participants who are not inherently multi-functional and/or resist learning to learn.   The model as illustrated in Figure 2, depicts the internal aspects of holographic design within a collectivist NGO, and the external factors affecting the NGO.

Figure 2 – The Dynamic Holograph Collectivist Governance Model

External Environmental Factors Impacting Holographic cells and the organization as a whole.

Internal Environment

Holographic cells (staff & constituents)

Executive

Board

Staff and constituents form small emergent, holographic cells that are self-governing. The inverted triangle that houses the tripartite system alludes to the fact that the staff and constituents within the holographic cells are self-governing entities, driving the organization's policies, and vision. The cells reflect the organization as a whole, as each cell while functioning as a team has a leader to facilitate the working of the team. This leader takes on the function that the executive would take on within the organization acting as a liaison/guide for the team. The cell members participate in framing the overall vision, mission and policy for the cell while being held accountable to the organization as a whole, which is similar to the functions taken on by the board of the organization.

Members of the smaller holographic cells work alongside each other and with the executive team on all aspects of management and policy. As in the case of CRTC, member input is given to the board by the executive for ratification after conducting due diligence as required by statutory requirements. The board-executive discussions and their proposed decisions are relayed back to the holographic cells through the feedback system, which has the executive as the facilitator of the exchange. The model is based on having a singular, shared vision, one that requires an environment where all participants are committed to building, and maintaining trust and social capital. This model is so dependent on a culture of trust among all members that without it, the efficacy of implementing the model is dismal. At CRTC, the common humanistic ideology is responsible for creating a homogenous value base that has maintained and fostered trust at every level of the organization.

The following are a series of guidelines that sustain the model and are based on lessons directly learned from CRTC's governance process.

1) Evolving, Collaborative Board-Executive Leadership.

Diversity on the board should be encouraged in terms of background, interests, and experience, to stimulate and challenge the relationship between trustees and the executive director. Trustees at CRTC were very initially reluctant to embrace participatory development and governance approaches but overtime their views have evolved to reflect their acceptance of the approach. Board-executive leadership realistically evolves over time to reflect a joint, collaborative vision in conjunction with the rest of the organization. However, despite the individual diversity, trustees and the executive must be clear on the organization's mandate so that they have a common platform for co-operative decision-making. Furthermore, given the core principles of holographic design, trustees/executive should encourage and initiate periodic evaluation on the governance process as a whole, rather than focusing only on evaluating for statutory requirements. Finally, boundary scanning of environmental systems by the board as advocated by both Herman & Heimovics (1991) and Middleton (1997), is essential to help guide the members of the organization or help initiate actions (in conjunction with the ongoing collaborative processes). However, as part of the principle of learning to learn, in this model, the boundary scanning function is not limited to the board alone but to all members of the organization.

2) Governance Driven by Decentralized Bottom-up Strategic Planning.

In a collectivist NGO, the drive for change comes from the staff working closely with the constituents and then collaborating with the executive and the board. The

approach is decentralized as all emerging holographic cells address different issues and

work within specific contexts but they simultaneously integrate their efforts to use

resources optimally. Board members and the executive must be committed to fostering an

organizational culture that is conducive to bottom-up approach to setting strategy and

vision, and must emphasize the same throughout the governance process.

3) *Constant Collaboration with Outside Agencies to Streamline Governance Process*.

At CRTC, all members but primarily management, and the board work on

promoting the organization to establish credibility, and source funding. They have made

efforts to interact with private and non-profit organizations by trying to form relevant

alliances or to liaise with co-coordinating funding agencies or agencies with similar

interests. They realize that as a collectivist organization, they have divergent stakeholders,

from external funders, and co-ordinating agency partners to their constituent base.

Consequently, the NGO's commitment to good governance has been dependent on

reaching out to these stakeholders, and integrating their feedback into the organization.

4) *Ownership of the Governance Process.*

Members of emerging and established holographic cells own the governance

process. Ownership of the process places responsibility on members to be aware of how

their input and self-growth impacts the work of the organization. It teaches them to

challenge existing frameworks, and to be open to the inevitable evolution of their cells, and

the NGO as a whole. Boards and executives also own the governance process, and, like the

members of the cells, they act as stewards of the organization as a whole.

The model depends very highly on the organization's ability to foster a culture

where all participants acquire leadership and facilitation skills complemented by a sense of

solidarity. The holographic design relies on every member within each cell to be responsible for self-evaluation, in addition to evaluation of the individual cell activities and the NGO as a whole. These factors cannot be achieved if the organization does not make strenuous efforts to ensure consensus building, fostering a culture of mutual trust among all members. In keeping with fiduciary requirements, it allows for boards to assume final responsibility and accountability without reducing the shared responsibility throughout the collectivist structure.

Section 6 - Conclusion

CRTC's success as a collectivist rural development NGO that gives people an opportunity to reclaim development has also proved that inclusive organizational governance works to sustain and further develop an organization. Dr. Metre is not familiar with research on metaphors to explain organizational structures, and prior to this research had not heard about the principles of holographic design. Yet, the principles aptly explain how CRTC has retained its collectivist structure, and fosters non-traditional governance features. Drawing on CRTC's experiences and adapting the principles of holographic design to organizational governance, the paper proposes the dynamic holographic governance model within a tripartite system of governance.

 A holographic design for collectivist organizations aids non-traditional governance as it expands the tripartite governance equation, giving employees and constituents a chance to actively participate in core governance functions such as, framing policy/vision and ensuring transparent accountability. Recognizing that the laws of most countries, including developing nations where a large number of rural development NGOs operate, place emphasis on a tripartite system of governance, the model allows for boards to meet

their core fiduciary functions. By suggesting that staff and constituents are in a position to widen the governance equation, the model opens up spaces for these stakeholders to embrace continuous learning, to develop leadership and facilitation skills, and to have a strong sense of organizational ownership. Structural processes that foster the building of social capital, local capacity, and trust are essential to the effective working of the model. If all members of the organization make a sincere commitment to maintaining such a model, then the governance process will be an equitable, innovative process with limited one-sided power dynamics.

The inherent challenges of such a design are its dependency on labour, time, and the establishment of a strong sense of trust among all members. The multiplicity of roles and functions creates tremendous flexibility for the organization, but could lead to chaos if members do not learn the appropriate leadership and facilitation skills needed to handle a non-prescribed framework for operations. Moreover it is based on a culture of mutual trust and commitment to consensus and capacity building, without which the entire structure collapses or reverts to a bureaucracy. Not all organizations have the resources and time it would take to initiate such a system but once initiated, the results are long lasting and long-term.

The research opens up the possibility of investigating NGOs that switch from bureaucratic and traditional models of governance to the model suggested in this paper. It also has implications on the study of building social capital within an organization to facilitate the very structure and approaches of the organization. Rural NGOs in developing countries have specific challenges in terms of location and culture, while their urban counterparts face different challenges. It would be interesting to see if practitioners are

successful in adapting and expanding the model to an urban context. Additionally, rural development NGOs in developed nations operate under different social capital norms as compared to those in developing nations; a study in contrast would shed light on this area.

Traditional accountability mechanisms focusing on measurements/numbers are espoused by most international funders and donors at large. CRTC relies on facts and figures to write reports to its funders, but as its primary donor uses Results Based Management, there is considerable opportunity for CRTC to also highlight the intangibles. This is important as the real progress is not in the numbers alone but in the intangibles, such as self-empowerment, restructuring of traditional power dynamics within communities, indirect impacts on progressive policies i.e. gender, human rights, etc., and most evidently, the high morale among beneficiaries and staff. The merits of non-traditional governance are tied closely to intangibles and it would take a paradigm shift in traditional accountability methods prescribed by funding agencies to recognize these merits.

Dr. Metre realized that the NGO's constituents had immense untapped potential, and devised a format that would allow her to access their potential. Dr. Metre is not alone in choosing to seek direction from the very people she is trying to help but their efforts remain largely unknown. From the very outset of this research, it was hoped that this paper would address this shortcoming. The paper presents one type of governance model, in the hopes that the several positive features around organizational governance at CRTC, can be used further to expand concepts, structures, and methods facilitating non-traditional governance.

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