

In at the Deep End

MSc student projects in community
operational research

**Edited by
Ken Bowen**

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Local Community Groups Combating Poverty : a focus on collaboration

SIV VANGEN

The author was involved in a Community Operational Research project conducted within the Strathclyde Region, over a twelve week period. The project was initiated by Damien Killeen at the Strathclyde Poverty Alliance (SPA), Glasgow. The main aim from the client's (SPA) perspective was to learn about collaboration and networking, from the experiences of local community groups active in the field of combating poverty. The main research tool applied was cognitive mapping in conjunction with the Graphics Cope software. This paper reflects on the methodology applied, addresses the suitability of the cognitive mapping technique in relation to Community Operational Research, and reflects on the key issues emerging from the study. Thus, this paper is an example of the contribution Operational Research (OR) can make to helping clients in the community.

Keywords: cognitive mapping; collaboration; community OR.

INTRODUCTION

The research on which this paper is based was initiated by Damien Killeen, Director of the Strathclyde Poverty Alliance (SPA), Glasgow. SPA was established to organise co-operation among, and provide assistance to, the voluntary, statutory and private sectors engaged in the relief of poverty in the Strathclyde Region. It is likely that active support and participation from all sectors of the community is required in order to combat poverty effectively. SPA is therefore currently focusing on the development of effective networks and collaboration processes with its members and with other involved in the relief of poverty. The Alliance is funded by the Strathclyde Regional Council (SRC), and the promotion of local anti-poverty strategies, and networks to develop and implement them, is of concern to both SPA and the SRC's Chief Executive Department. They are therefore currently aiming to produce a joint publication on the issue of initiating and developing local anti poverty strategies. SPA and SRC believed that an audit of the current experiences of local groups active in poverty, was required. The project set up was entitled: **An investigation of local community groups established with the aim of developing and**

implementing a strategy to alleviate and combat poverty. Strathclyde University agreed to undertake a series of case studies, investigating a total of five such local community groups. This paper reports on the findings of the first two case studies in this series. Catherine Barr, a PhD student at the university, is currently carrying out the remaining case studies.

The primary objective of the case studies was to gain an insight into the structural and organisation aspect of community groups engaged in the relief of poverty. From the lessons learned, SPA aims to draw a set of guidelines which should be useful in supporting such groups in the future. In particular, SPA expressed a keen interest in the **collaboration** aspects and the **internal dynamics** of these groups. A secondary aim, perhaps only from the author's point of view, was that the participating groups should be able to benefit from the process of collecting and structuring the data. Such a benefit would for example be to identify ways in which the group could work more efficiently and effectively, as seen by members of the group.

THE CLIENT - CONSULTANT RELATIONSHIP

The problem of establishing a relationship and introducing an Operational Research type of analysis to support voluntary and community organisations has been addressed by several OR practitioners (eg Jones and Eden⁸, Ritchie¹⁰). In particular, the label "Operational Research" is unlikely to have any meaning to the community client, and therefore getting the opportunity to practise OR with a community client may depend on the OR practitioners's ability to prove that his/her contribution may be useful to the client. For this particular project, "entrance" was made easier since Dr. Chris Huxham of Strathclyde University had previously carried out work for SPA. As such, a relationship between the university and SPA had been established, and the client had some idea of which could be expected from the current project. Further, since the project did not entail any costs to the client, demonstration of "value for money" was not required. However, early guidelines were established to reassure the clients that their time invested in the project would be worthwhile. Essentially these were: a total of five case studies would be completed by students from the university within a stated time-period; information pertaining to the issues of collaboration and internal dynamics of community groups would be collected; the students would approach the participating groups sensibly in order not to "mess

about" with the members of the groups; and finally, a report would be produced enabling SPA to produce guidelines based on the findings of the project.

THE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PARTICIPATING GROUPS

The local community groups included in this study typically comprise members from various agencies such as the Social Work Department, the Citizens Advice Bureaux and the Housing Department, as well as a number of local community representatives. Typical characteristics of such multi-organisational community groups have been previously documented (eg. Huxham⁵, Jackson⁷, Thunhurst et al.,¹² Rosenhead¹³). Relevant to our interest, we note that, typically, these groups possess few tangible resources, few of the members have much time available to devote to the group, people are often judged according to their personalities as opposed to their skills and experiences, and the problems faced are often of a strategic rather than a tactical nature. Additionally, many of the issues relating to poverty are of a highly sensitive nature. These characteristics dictated the approach to, and the techniques suitable for, the study.

THE PARTICIPATING GROUPS - CONSULTANT RELATIONSHIP

The initial contact with the participating groups, was made by SPA. A letter was circulated to the different groups, explaining the merits of the study, and requesting the groups' participation. A positive response from a group was followed by a meeting with the purpose of explaining the aims of the study, how the group itself and others could benefit from the study, and finally the participation required from the group.

In relation to such meetings, a deliberate attempt was made to approach the groups sensitively, bearing in mind several factors. Firstly, building a good relationship from the outset may be crucial to the successful engagement with community clients, as documented by Ritchie¹⁰. Secondly, there are organisations which culturally are very suspicious of science and scientists, including OR practitioners (Taket¹¹), and one may therefore want to practice "undercover" OR in order to gain participation.

notes

compliance with ethical and professional standards of practice - important

still at the production stage, learning design done but detailed content is in progress



we are limited in terms of the level of detail we can provide at this stage

percentage coverage of each CBOK??

assessment??

the important topic of 'alternative investments'?? - appears at all three levels
equity analysis and valuation L1/ SS14 -double-check?? - fundamental and TA?? - industry and co analysis

non-covered materials

CBOKs

most of CBOK III on Economics

Equity valuation (under CBOK VI)??

CBOK IX on Alt Investments

SSs

L1
CBOK IV SS6

L2

SS12/R37 - on private co
valuation - related to CBOK VI

L3

SS4, R11 to R14 on taxes and
private wealth mgmt in global
context

Finally, people may be apprehensive about students carrying out research. Students may be seen as a threat or simply as being inadequate, because they do not have enough knowledge in the area being researched. The possibility of being used as guinea pigs may make people reluctant to participate. Initially, for example, one of the groups hesitated, as they felt that the researcher ought to be very well informed about issues related to anti-poverty strategies and community work. Fortunately, however, the group accepted the explanation that this was not crucial, since the study was concerned with the organisational aspects of the group. Considerable persuasion was required in order to gain participation from one of the other groups contacted. Students from another college had previously carried out a study on the group, on a different topic. These students had handled the group insensitively and had been highly critical of the group. As a consequence of that study, we felt that this group was "on the defensive", and therefore initially did not want to participate in our study.

To take account of these factors, the author decided to present herself as a student carrying out the study on behalf of SPA. Based on the understanding that SPA has established a good relationship with these groups, the fact that a student was engaged by SPA, could lend some credibility to the student's work. Furthermore, we decided to emphasise that the study should highlight the general experiences of a number of people in a number of groups. In order to deal with the sensitivity of certain topics, it was emphasised that specific information given by each individual respondent would be kept confidential.

The primary aim of the study was to gather information which could be used to provide assistance to similar community groups in other areas. The potential value to the group itself, gained from structuring and analysing the information, was mentioned but not emphasised. This may in fact have been an important contributor to the good response from the members of the groups involved. For example, it has been argued (Jones and Eden⁸) that community work and community action groups are dominated by middle class intellectuals to whom the idea of receiving help from others who are not directly involved as equals is an affront to their competence and intelligence. It is possible that the active participation gained was due to the members willingness to help others rather than being helped themselves.

In order to give the group an incentive to participate, it was explained that two feedback sessions would be organised for the group. One after the initial study had been finalised, and the second after the series of studies had

been finalised by Catherine Barr, informing the groups about the general findings of the overall study.

GATHERING QUALITATIVE DATA - In-depth interviews

A considerable amount of effort was directed towards designing a study which would yield all the relevant information required. Many issues relating to anti-poverty work are sensitive, and this posed a challenge as the client had requested information of a rich nature, including peoples' perceptions and beliefs about collaborative relationships and problems surrounding them in reality, as opposed to only documented factual information. This problem was tackled using individual in-depth interviews, where the initial questions raised were of a very general nature. This provided an opportunity to create questions, to probe those responses which appeared relevant, and generally to develop the best set of data in any way practical, whilst undertaking the interview. A pre-designed set of questions was then used as a check list, after which specific questions were asked on topics which had not already been covered. This procedure accounted for the fact that important issues are easily left out, when following a pre-specified set of questions. In addition, the respondents were allowed to speak freely on topics which were important to them. Two meetings per respondent were conducted, which allowed the respondent not only to confirm that the information would be reported accurately, but also to add further information when necessary. As a result, rich information was gathered from each individual member of the groups.

ANALYSING QUALITATIVE DATA - Cognitive mapping

The difficulty of structuring and analysing qualitative data may be overcome by using the cognitive mapping technique in conjunction with the Graphics Cope software. This technique has been described in detail by Eden¹.

Briefly, a cognitive map may be described as a giant notepad on which a collection of concepts are formed into a network. The concepts are essentially an individual's own arguments used to explain an issue or a problem. An attempt is made to keep the language used by the individual

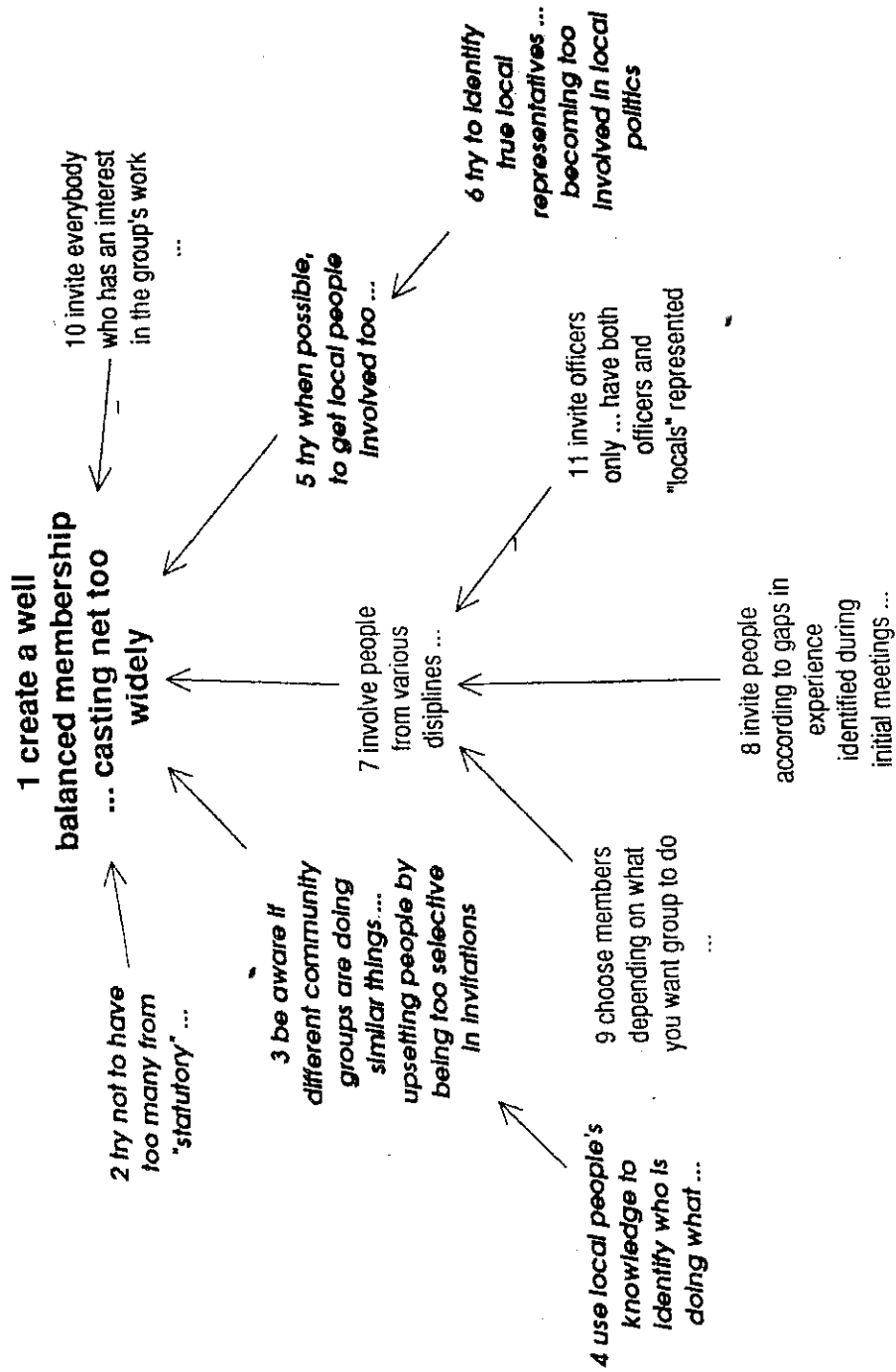
to ensure that the individual recognises his/her statements, thus maintaining the individual's "ownership" of the model. However, the arguments or phrases may be altered slightly, to obtain an action mode for each phrase. Figure 1 is a section of a participant's cognitive map, and as can be seen, each concept starts with a verb. When statements are reported in an action mode they serve as options leading to various outcomes. The relationships between concepts are shown by arrows; an arrow out of a concept shows a consequence and an arrow into a concept shows an explanation.

One may also attempt to clarify a particular argument by identifying the contrasting argument. The contrast is separated by "... which reads "rather than". For example, the meaning of the statement: "Try to identify true local representatives" becomes clearer by identifying the psychological opposite, in this instance "(rather than) becoming too involved in local politics". When a negative sign is placed next to an arrow, the first pole of the explanatory concept implies the second pole of the consequential concept. For example, "invite everybody who has an interest in the group's work" implies that the group is "casting the net too widely". The direction of the arrows is such that more important outcomes are placed hierarchically above others. Thus, the concept "create a well balanced membership" is seen by this participant as being superordinate to all the other concepts.

Rationale

Successful participation from community clients requires the application of appropriate methods, as explained by Ritchie¹⁰. The cognitive mapping technique was found suitable for several reasons. Since there was a wide cross-section of members from different backgrounds in these groups, a versatile technique of investigation was necessary to capture their enthusiasm, confidence and cooperation. The cognitive mapping technique is one of the tools commonly referred to as "soft OR tools" which have previously been found suitable for working with community clients (Rosenhead¹³). Such methods are more appropriate as they accommodate the multi-nodal, heterogeneous organisational characteristics of the community client. It has been argued also (Jones and Eden⁸), that the community OR client will get a sense of ownership of such a model. This ownership is important in order to gain and sustain the client's keen involvement. More specifically, since a cognitive map is an explicit model of a person's or a group of peoples' subjective, qualitative beliefs and values about a problem situation, the technique served to meet that aim of

FIGURE 1: A specimen section of an individual's cognitive map.



capturing rich information, as mentioned in the previous section. Finally, many advantages may be gained from using cognitive mapping to record interviews. Apart from providing an effective means of capturing and structuring a vast amount of qualitative data, it also serves as a feed-back to the respondent, allowing the respondent to explore the implications of the model and check possible misunderstandings. This in turn may enhance further elaboration on important topics.

Approach

Ideally, cognitive maps should be drawn during the interview itself. However, since the author's personal experience with the technique was limited, the first interview was recorded by taking notes. As soon as possible after the interview had been completed, the information was mapped and analyzed using the Graphics Cope software. During the second meeting with the respondent, the map formed the basis for discussion, and the mapping technique was applied directly.

The process of tidying up the notes, reviewing linkages between concepts, changing arguments into an action mode, deciding which concepts were outcomes and which were options, and finally structuring all the data in an effective way, was difficult and time-consuming, because the volume of information collected was considerable. By going through this process however, one is forced to be clear about the interviewee's understanding of the issue or problem under consideration.

Analysis

A cluster analysis was performed on each individual map. This analysis is useful as it breaks the model into smaller sections, which helps in identifying key issues, themes and goals.

The approach resulted in a map representing the interviewee's perceptions on different topics. In the map, different typefaces were used to distinguish between the various types of concepts, roughly divided into four categories. These categories are: the group's goals; issues which are very important in reaching the goals; ideas relating to issues which the group may wish to address in the future; and standard concepts which reveal current practices and the history of the group.

Finally, all the individual maps were merged together to form a single map representing the whole group. The merged map accounted for the detailed subtleties and richness of the way in which each team member had seen the problems/issues. The cluster analysis performed on each individual map was again useful in recognising similar topics and issues identified by

different members of the group. Similar arguments were merged into one, and arguments leading to the same theme or goal were connected. Finally a cluster analysis was performed on the merged map. The issues/themes and goals resulting from this analysis, then formed the basis for the report written to each participating group. A section of one of the merged maps is shown in Figure 2. In this map one can see how a number of standard concepts leads to an important issue (large bold font) and that this issue is one of several issues which is important in reaching one of the group's goals (large bold and underlined).

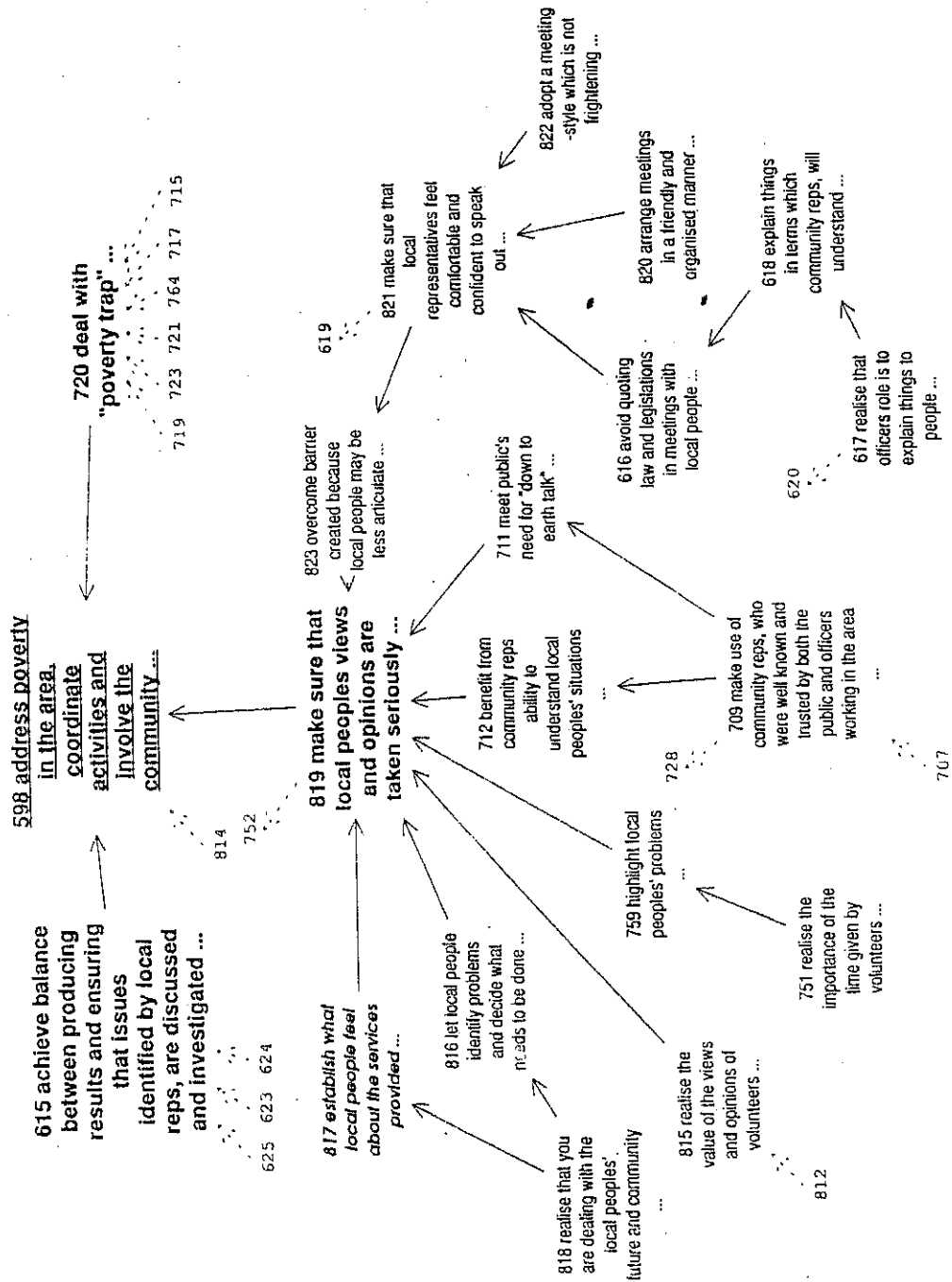
Reactions to the cognitive mapping technique

The respondents' reactions to the cognitive maps, ranged from making a deliberate attempt to understand the maps, to ignoring them completely. However, when the respondent ignored the map, an attempt was made to pull his or her attention back to the map, as the interview proceeded. This was done by pointing at the map whilst, for example saying: "in our last meeting we talked about ..., could you please explain this further, for example what is the consequence of this?" The respondent's comments were then written directly onto the map, to show the respondent how the technique works. The result of this approach was that, in the final feedback session, all the respondents knew how to relate to the maps. This ensured that all the respondents were able to participate in the discussion centred around the maps. Although most of the members were sceptical of the technique in the beginning, it seemed that they did become aware of its usefulness. In particular, one member's statement may back up this observation: "this helps us see whether people are dissatisfied for different reasons, and it is possible to see causes of things and whether there is agreement on the causes". Furthermore, it appeared as if the members liked to see how their own arguments fitted in with those of others.

REFLECTION ON THE FINDINGS

It would not be proper to extend the findings to offer sound advice to similar groups, based on conclusions derived from this limited study of two groups. However, some underlying factors, relating to collaboration and anti-poverty work, have already emerged, and their value should not be overlooked. Thus, an attempt has been made to highlight issues which have occurred as a result of the groups' development, and to provide conclusions in relation to those themes which were discussed during the study.

FIGURE 2: A specimen section of a merged cognitive map representing a group's views



Conclusions on themes discussed in the study

i) Group membership

The experiences of both groups suggest that officers from a variety of agencies addressing poverty related issues, as well as community representatives, should be included as members of an anti-poverty group. Further, a well balanced membership was reported as being of importance in achieving a successful working relationship.

ii) The role of the group members

Identifying appropriate roles for the group members suggests that one should take account of both the community representatives' and the officers' strengths and weaknesses. The two groups investigated in this study had initially taken a very different approach from one another. Group 1 had identified the role of the officers as that of writing an anti-poverty strategy, including identifying issues to be addressed and actions to be taken. This decision was based on the belief that officers are more able to understand the intricacy of various problems and to test the feasibility of new ideas. The idea was to bring in local people at a later stage, once this preliminary work had been carried out. The study revealed however, that bringing in local people at a later stage may be difficult. If local people do not partake in identifying the issues and actions to be taken, then there is a possibility that the problems they perceive as most pressing, have not be addressed. They are presented with a "ready made package" which they are unlikely to accept, and therefore they may not be willing to get involved at the implementation stage. Thus the approach taken by Group 1 may be slightly ineffective.

Group 2 adopted an approach whereby the issues to be addressed are largely identified by community representatives, believing that they are in a better position to identify local peoples' problems. The officers' roles include that of carrying out more technical tasks, such as dealing with legislation and investigating what can be done in relation to the issues identified. Group 2 reported that the key to their success was the efficient division of labour between community representatives and officers.

The findings therefore suggest that, while the community representatives should play a major part in identifying the issues to be addressed, one should not necessarily expect them to carry out technical tasks. As mentioned by Group 2, the community representatives should play a management role rather than a delivery role. The officers on the other hand, should play the role of assisting community representatives in dealing with the identified issues.

iii) Communication

The process of communication may be difficult between people with very different backgrounds. The study revealed for example, that the officers in Group 1 had come to the conclusion that local people have a too simplistic view of poverty issues, and find it difficult to understand what an anti-poverty strategy is, and how it may be useful to them. Apparently, no real attempt had been made by the officers, to explain the issues involved, and as a consequence, communication ceased. On the other hand, the officers working in Group 2 had taken on the role of being a liaison between the public and various agencies, and stated that their duty was to explain issues in terms which the community representatives understand. This included avoiding use of the jargon of law and legislation in their meetings. A friendly tone had been adopted in their meetings, which in turn encouraged community representatives to ask when they did not understand. Group 2 also made use of their community representatives to meet the public's need for "down to earth" talk. Finally, the community representatives have agreed that they must try to accept the officers' explanations of why it is sometimes not possible or feasible to carry out specific actions. Thus both the officers and the community representatives have realised that it takes time to create a relationship which encourages communication and trust. By adopting these rules, Group 2 has managed to build a framework within which they can communicate in an informal fashion.

Additionally, as both groups are part of larger "umbrella" groups, they both reported that there is a need to establish formal communication links between the anti-poverty group and the rest of the umbrella group. Such links will not only encourage appropriate feedback, but also ensure that money spent has been accounted for.

Thus the study suggests that there is a need to establish both formal and informal communication links, and that conscious effort is required, by all group members, in order to stimulate conducive communication.

iv) Collaboration

The experiences of the two groups investigated in this study suggest that there are many advantages to be gained from multisector collaboration at community level. The most obvious advantage perhaps is the opportunity to make use of each individual member's access to information networks within his or her own organisation. The increased amount of available information enhances the quality and usefulness of the group members'

discussions. This increased information coupled with the ability to identify and discuss common problems, provides the members of the groups with a professional view on what it is possible to achieve at local level. Having a group of people representing different departments and agencies enables the members to identify areas where outside agencies and people working locally can work together effectively. Furthermore, it increases the ability to learn how problems have been tackled in other areas, enabling the group to examine whether a similar approach may be applied in their own area. Finally, it was reported that collaboration creates an opportunity to avoid contradictions and duplication of work, thus ensuring more effective use of resources. The findings of this study seem to suggest that, when members from the public and various agencies are included in both the definition and the solution of community concerns, broader expertise and understanding of social and economic problems may be gained. As addressed by Himmelman³, this is indeed one good reason to engage in multisector collaboration at community level.

Group 2 identified potential disadvantages of having a partnership between various groups and organisations. Essentially, the group reported that such a relationship is potentially resource and time-consuming, and that it may be a source of frustration, in particular if people don't turn up to the meetings. Such potential pitfalls in developing collaboration has been addressed by Huxham⁴ and by Huxham and Macdonald⁶. In order to deal with such potential pitfalls, Group 2 has established a need to review their partnership to establish whether the benefits outweigh the disadvantages of collaboration.

Certain conditions are believed to be a prerequisite for successful collaboration, and this topic has been addressed by several researchers (eg. Gray², Himmelman³, Huxham⁴). In particular, Mattessich and Monsey⁹ have summarised, from current research, 19 factors seen as influencing the success of collaboration. A number of these are supported by the findings of this study. For example, one of the most important factors is seen as that of having an appropriate cross section of members. This was indeed identified by both groups as being of importance. Equally important is having mutual respect, understanding and trust between the members. It is evident that the success of Group 2 is largely due to the relationship between the group members. Furthermore, the experiences of Group 1 implies that lack of such was contributing to the conflict between officers and community people in the area. Another important factor is to have open and frequent communication. It is evident that within Group 2,

communication works, whereas Group 1 has identified communication as one of the factors they should improve. Supported by both groups was also the fact that **members see collaboration as in their self-interest**. Another important factor is that **members share a stake in both process and outcome**. This has been adopted as a rule by Group 2, and was identified as being of importance in Group 1. Contributing to the success of Group 2 are the group's being seen as having a **significant influence in the community, and a favourable political climate**. The opposite is probably not far from the truth with regard to Group 1, in particular, the group reported that there is a lack of political support in the area. The factor of having **concrete, attainable goals and objectives**, has been identified as one of the things Group 2 wants to clarify at the moment. Group 1 has incorporated this in their systematic and organised fashion of working. **Flexibility** is also seen to be important. Group 2 reports that it established a flexible concept with the purpose of the group fixed and everything entirely open to discussion. For example, Group 2 is prepared to change the way it works, if and when required, and to take on board new members and "release" old ones according to specific tasks which need to be carried out. Its purpose of addressing poverty in the area however, is fixed. The results from Group 2 also indicate that the members of the group have a **ability to compromise**, as they have stated that it is a "give and take" situation.

Other important factors, as summarised by Mattessich and Monsey are multiple layers of decision making, development of clear roles and policy guidelines, adaptability, shared vision, unique purpose, sufficient funds and a skilled convener. The present study did not, however, offer enough information to comment any further on these factors. The findings of the study suggest, however, that a number of the factors seen as important in influencing the success of collaboration have been identified and addressed by these two groups.

v) **Measuring Success**

Both groups reported that it is difficult to measure exactly what has been achieved due to the nature of anti-poverty work. Group 1 agreed that a methodology for measuring the groups success should be developed, and that knowledge of such measurements would encourage people to do something. Group 2, on the other hand, did not see it as crucial that success should be measured, although some ideas to meet that end were generated. Perhaps this is due to the fact that the achievement of the group is visible to the community. For example, the group managed to obtain funding to buy

a large building which is now the community's property. This building comprises a theatre and a cafeteria as well as a number of offices providing poverty related services, such as money advice. However, Group 2 believed that its success was partly due to a deliberate effort to create massive publicity around the group's work.

vi) Improvements

Both groups benefited from the study by identifying a number of ideas on how they could improve the way the group works. Group 1 generated ideas ranging from avoiding too much concentration on detail, to creating smaller sub-groups for specific purposes.

Group 2 generated a large number of ideas related to four main issues, having a clearer definition about where it is going, identifying how it can do more about poverty as opposed to only having poverty on the agenda, challenging MP's on the issue of non-delivery, and striving for more modest progress on some issues.

THE REACTIONS OF THE CLIENT ORGANISATION (SPA)

A meeting was arranged with SPA in order to discuss how the findings could be reported to them in a meaningful and efficient fashion. Only a few modifications were made to the reports written for the groups, and these were then discussed with the client. A workshop on the cognitive mapping technique had previously been arranged with SPA by Strathclyde University, and therefore they were already familiar with the technique. It was agreed that a summary should be given by Catherine Barr, once the series of case studies have been completed. In general, the client organisation seemed to be very pleased with the research. Furthermore, they indicated that, due to the large amount of data captured, they will probably be using the findings for other purposes, at a future date.

THE PARTICIPATING GROUPS' REACTIONS TO THE FINDINGS

Throughout the study, several of the respondents commented on the large amount of data which had been captured from the first interview. Although

the study was primarily a data collection exercise, the benefits to the groups appeared to expand beyond that. The feedback of the results, coupled with the cognitive maps, generated a considerable amount of discussion amongst the group members. Personally, the author saw that discussion as a first sign of success, (towards achieving the secondary aim of the study). Talking about differences and problems brings the group one step further towards solving them.

More specifically, one of the groups seemed to be a bit surprised by the findings of the study. However, the study helped the group to realise that they need to discuss certain matters further, and that discussion may result in a change for the better. The collection and structuring of the data resulted in a number of ideas relating to how the groups could become more efficient. These were also commented favourably upon by both groups. One of the groups decided to arrange a meeting purely for the purpose of discussing the result of the study. In that meeting, the group will address the issues discussed in the report. In particular, the group hopes to define what issues it should be addressing at present, and what its aims should be for the future. In conclusion, both groups seem to have benefited from the study, and some positive changes may be made as a result of this project.

The importance of developing the relationship with the clients gradually, and letting them appreciate what assistance is possible, has been addressed by Ritchie¹⁰. Perhaps projects similar to this one could be a possible way of starting an OR relationship with community groups. Such a relationship could, for example, develop to make full use of the Strategic Options Development and Analysis (SODA) method. The SODA approach is a method which is useful when dealing with problems of a complex nature. As explained by Eden¹, this approach helps, firstly, in facilitating the *processes* involved in getting a team to work together efficiently and effectively. Secondly, by constructing a model, it helps to analyze *content* which each member of the team wishes to address. Thus the SODA approach could be useful in helping a local group in the task of alleviating and combating poverty at local level.

CONCLUSION

This project successfully addressed both the research objectives of the client and the educational requirements of the student.

On behalf of the client, the collaborative aspects of local community groups combating poverty were investigated. The use of collaboration proved beneficial to the two groups investigated in this study. Initial guidelines arising from the themes discussed in each of these two groups were as follows; community representatives as well as officers from a range of agencies should be included as members of local anti-poverty groups; issues to be addressed should primarily be identified by community representatives; the implementation of actions should primarily be the officers' responsibility and is dependent on successfully securing resources from a number of organisations and agencies; successful collaboration requires both informal and formal communication links in addition to enthusiastic participation of all concerned; the feasibility and benefits of collaboration is evident in addressing poverty; and finally, the precise measurement of the success of each group is difficult, due to the nature of their work.

The key issue which emerged from this study was the importance of including local representatives as members of local anti-poverty groups. In order to include these representatives successfully, social differences, communication difficulties and differences in opinions have to be resolved.

Additionally, the author's personal aim was that the participating groups should benefit from the study. The two groups in this study have already gained by identifying a number of new issues to be addressed, and by generating ideas in relation to how they can work more efficiently and effectively. A final feedback, when the entire study is completed, would prove invaluable to all the participating groups.

The in-depth interviewing, the cognitive mapping techniques and the use of the Graphics Cope software not only served as powerful tools in the study, but also provided invaluable educational experience.

Finally, designing and conducting a community OR project, provided a wealth of experience, an exposure to the harsh realities and frustrations of dealing with poverty, and an insight to the livelihood of under-privileged people. The experiences gained from this project added significantly to the overall experiences acquired by the author from studying and residing in a foreign country.

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