

Henderson

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EDITORIAL

vol. 2, a truly collaborative effort, has finally become a reality. Hopefully, these articles will continue to prompt introspection, stir debate and encourage and guide action.

Anyone involved with COBWS knows only too well how the day-to-day realities can capture one's attention completely. This Journal is an attempt to take a step back, to place our work in larger or different perspectives, on firmer groundings, in new lights. Rather than providing quick fixes to perceived problems, I believe all these articles have attempted to examine underlying concepts and ideas. It is upon such ideas that proposals and actions will be built.

Bob Couchman has articulated an essential and unique COBWS element in a manner that, hopefully, will allow instructors to place

part of their work in a clearer perspective. Suchy Suchman and I have attempted individually to provide some firm ground for assessing the organizational style of COBWS and the changes that are taking place.

Daniel Vokey's work on storytelling could be a seminal one in the development and understanding of community processes, an area long devoid of serious thought. In addition, his work has obvious application for staff and student trainings. Peter Morgan's article on metaphors in Outdoor Education will be of special interest to staff who tried to use Steven Bacon's "manual" over the last 2 summers.

Finally, Ken Victor has begun a tradition (?) of letters to the editor. The "Boards" article in Volume 1 was by far the recipient of the most comment and criticism. Vic's comments are most articulate.

I hope that this can continue to be a useful vehicle for discussion, debate and the exchange of ideas. If you find these articles of interest, send a letter, or, better yet, your own creative work. Or, better yet, bring it by Walker Lake with a case of beer. Let's try for another issue before the summer.

Peace.

Andy Orr
Walker Lake
Muskoka, Ontario

The Journal of COBWS Education is an occasional publication of the staff and friends of the Canadian Outward Bound Wilderness School, intended to spark debate, discussion and the exchange of ideas. The opinions expressed herein are not necessarily those of COBWS or anyone else official. Correspondence: The Editor, The Journal of COBWS Education, Canadian Outward Bound Wilderness School, P.O.Box 675, Station K, Toronto, Ontario, M4P 2H2.

The Journal of COBWS Education

INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL RHYTHMS:
THE CANADIAN WILDERNESS AS A LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

by Robert Couchman

It is with considerable appreciation that I take up my pen to respond to the kind invitation of the Editor of the Journal of COBWS Education to write a few cogent thoughts on the Outward Bound experience. As a volunteer who has never participated in leading a brigade nor done more than hover on the perimeter of the O.B. community, I do not have the practical experience or knowledge to write in any real depth about the skills, both physical and emotional, that go into running a good program or teaching a student some vital skill.

Given the fact, however, that I have been a respectful observer of the Canadian wilderness for many years, the appreciative recipient of the COBWS experience and a student of human behaviour and social change, perhaps I can offer a few personal thoughts on the unique experiential educational environment that has been developed at COBWS and why it so readily fosters growth and development in students and staff alike. In addressing this issue, which should be seen as the central issue of every major educational endeavor, I will place my attention on the adjective "unique". In most ways, COBWS is not unique as an Outward Bound school or as an experiential education program. We adhere to the basic tenets of Kurt Hahn and the North American evolution of same. We use the wilderness environment as a classroom and believe in the power of successfully achieved progressive

challenges. We even commonly accept the somewhat mystical concept of metaphor as a learning tool. In so many ways, COBWS is exactly the same as most other Outward Bound programs throughout North America.

The factors which make COBWS unique are its Canadian identity, its isolation within a vast wilderness area and its strong tradition of community. Since 1976, these special factors have effectively interacted to give COBWS a unique and powerful quality among Outward Bound programs.

In re-reading Roderick Nash's classic work, Wilderness and the American Mind, I am struck by the amazing distinctions between the American treatment of the wilderness and the Canadian attitude, as described by Margaret Atwood in Survival, an analysis of Canadian literature. Nash describes a heroic people spurred on by unquestioned belief in manifest destiny. Wilderness is something to be "pushed back" or "conquered". Frontier heroes climb to the summits of the barrier mountains of Appalachia and see the rich plains stretched out before them. They clear the land of both trees and native people and then push ever westward. While Nash's American wilderness is rugged, even dangerous at times, it is no match for the Daniel Boone's, Davie Crockett's and the Lewis and Clark's that confront the expanding borders of the new territories of the United States.

Despite its breadth and majesty, the American wilderness is also amazingly forgiving and, at times, downright friendly to its highly individualistic and determined inhabitants. In American folk tales and literature the wilderness can be confronted and beaten back. Not so in Canada. Margaret Atwood describes a wilderness which is vast, dark and forgiving. The Canadian hero, unlike his American counterpart, travels into the forests and tundra regions and survives only if he learns to understand the elements and move with them rather than against them. The Canadian hero has enormous respect for the hostility and rawness of an environment which is only too able to crush his frail ship or cause him to freeze to death. For every successful Frazer and Mackenzie in Canadian exploration there is a Franklin or a Hornby who was overcome by the power of the continent's northern wilderness.

In addition to respect for the wilderness, the characters of Canadian wilderness novels generally pull themselves together in tight little communities against the immense hostility of the land. In particular, early French Canadian novels describe the essential human communion that exists in tiny villages tucked up against the winter hills of the Laurentians. From the closely knit voyageur brigades of the North West Company to the rural communities described by Margaret Lawrence and Canada's Icelandic author, Valgardson, Canadians are portrayed as being highly interdependent people concerned, above all, for the welfare of the family and their communities. Rugged individualism, hallmark of the American hero, is a trait which

does not stand up well against the prolonged and isolated cold of the Canadian winter nor the black fly invested boreal forests of mid-spring.

In many ways, COBWS is a reflection of the classic village set on the edge of the immense Canadian wilderness. Through its short evolution, Homeplace has become a true community where respect for the welfare of its inhabitants, whether they be staff or students, has overshadowed the macho individualism which pits physical strengths and mind against the storms of the region's larger lakes or the white water of the many wild rivers of the area. While many opportunities exist for personal challenge, equal emphasis is given to interpersonal relationships and the vital interdependency of brigade members as they negotiate terrain which constantly harbours potentially destructive forces just below the surface. In travelling through the area, one quickly develops humble respect for the Ogoki Albany wilderness or you soon encounter its dangers. Being the most remote wilderness Outward Bound school in the world, COBWS can not afford to pay lip service to the importance of individuals looking after the collective well-being of the whole community. Unlike most other Outward Bound schools, the region inhabited by COBWS is not forgiving and help is usually many remote hours away.

Those who visit COBWS from the U.S. or Britain are quick to sense the cohesiveness of this community and the sensitivity that staff have for the wilderness which surrounds them. In this regard, COBWS is very much a part of the cultural tradition of Canada. Bravado and competition have

little part to play in the lives of those who live at COBWS nor do such elements manifest themselves in the program. Thus you do not find an instructor giving a student that "final nudge". The student must choose to challenge his environment; it is never something to be conquered. The Canadian wilderness demands respect from those who wish to move with the flow of its seasons and the mood of its stark isolation. Those who fail to learn this lesson are soon defeated.

Such imagery creates a very powerful environment for the individual to learn about himself and the need he or she has for the close support of other good folk. COBWS is indeed a special community and thereby a most unique Outward Bound program. Its close identity with Canadian spirit is intrinsic to its unique dynamic as an educational experience. One walks quietly across its portages and paddles humbly along its waterways, learning constantly to sense and move with the rhythms of the land. The exhilaration of achievement as one successfully navigates a difficult set of rapids is constantly balanced by the knowledge of the 3 km portage through a muddy swamp that lies just around the next bend. While the personal rewards of achieving the first task are only too evident, the will to undertake the latter task with equanimity is a lesson about life itself.

COBWS students gradually learn that you can only conquer your fears and misgivings. The wilderness can never be conquered, only respected.

A PROFILE OF ORGANIZATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF COBWS, 1984¹

by Suchy Suchman

Since its inception in 1976, COEWS has maintained its unique status as the most remote Outward Bound program in the world. Located 80 km from the nearest town, COBWS is the only permanent, regularly inhabited settlement on the 40 km of shoreline along Black Sturgeon Lake in northwestern Ontario.

Remoteness is but one of several features that has contributed to COBWS' reputation among North American Outward Bound programs as an organization with a strong sense of community shared by its staff and students. Other factors, such as the founder's humanitarian idealism, the establishment of a permanent homebase as an integral part of the program, prolonged enthusiasm and dedication on the part of many people during years of sustained financial precariousness, and the school's small size have all played a role in the establishment of an Outward Bound community whose values of equality of individual worth, social responsibility, and compassion are expressed not only on courses, but in everyday living as well.

During the summer of 1984, riding a substantial wave of favourable national publicity, COBWS found itself on the verge of breaking away from two traditions: financial instability and smallness of size. Significant increases in funding and enrollment put COBWS in the hitherto unfamiliar position of considering program expansion. Of primary concern for those involved with the program was the impact that financial stability and expansion might have on

the continued expression of community values. More specifically, would expansion demand that directives replace trust? Would a chain of command replace consensus decision-making? Would systemization replace creativity? In other words, would expansion necessitate that the formal organizational characteristics such as leadership, decision-making and goal-setting change in a way that would undermine or destroy the central value of community?

In an effort to address this concern, I conducted a survey ("Profile of Organizational Characteristics", R. Likert, 1967), to ascertain the actual and ideal organizational characteristics of COBWS as perceived by as wide a range of staff as possible.² Provided with this information, COBWS could then

1. surmise the effectiveness of its current organizational style (against a comparative backdrop of other educational organizations),
2. determine which organizational characteristics uphold, and which undermine, the value of community, and
3. attempt to promote an organizational style that provides the structural sophistication necessary for expansion without compromising the integrity of educational and community values.

The results of the survey strongly suggest that all these steps, and most importantly step 3, are quite possible; a discussion of the survey and results follows.

The Conceptual Model

Rensis Likert's conceptual model of organizational styles consists of four "systems" along a hypothetical continuum. The Systems are number 1 to 4, identified as follows:

- 1: exploitative-authoritarian
- 2: benevolent-authoritarian
- 3: consultative
- 4: participative.

Each system is identified by a set of characteristics divided into the categories of leadership, motivational, communication, decision-making, goal-setting and control processes.

Designing the Study

Likert's survey was mailed to 30 of the 45 staff who worked at COBWS during the summer of 1984. The nineteen people who were not surveyed were known to be in transit, and therefore unavailable for this study. Of the 30 who were queried, 20 responded; four of the non-responders were subsequently discovered to be in transit. Hence, the results are based on an 80% response.

While a number of intriguing possibilities exists for dividing responders into categories,⁴ the most useful seems to be the natural division of Homeplace Staff (support and staff and those who oversee homeplace operations), Field Staff (instructors) and Administrative Staff (course directors, program manager, program director). Members within each group generally serve similar functions and work environments and are likely to share common views of the organization.⁵

Results

In general, responders from all groups tended to characterize the COBWS organization as a combination of Systems 3 (consultative) and 4 (participative). The detailed results are shown in Figure 1.

Overall, this means that COBWS is generally characterized by a high degree of trust, confidence and support between supervisors and subordinates; communication and interaction are high within and between all levels; motivation is based on intrinsic rewards; responsibility for the organization's goals is felt throughout all levels; decisions are based on input from all levels; and the formal and informal organizations usually act in concert.

Some distinctly different perspectives emerge, however, when one compares the viewpoints of the three staff categories. Field staff consistently perceive themselves as highly involved in decisions, enjoying good communication and shared goals and responsibilities. Homeplace staff, on the other hand, view themselves as being significantly less involved in decision-making, goal-setting and two-way communication. Interestingly, management falls in the middle.

One possible explanation for the difference in views could be linked to the degree of contact with the "institution", and the degree of autonomy. Homeplace staff, being involved in the day-to-day operation of homeplace may have a more accurate view of how it operates. Field staff autonomy may lead them to sense a higher degree of responsibility and perceive greater input into decisions.

COMPARISON

of Actual Mean Scores

KEY

— = Administr.
 ---- = Homepl. St.
 ... = Field Staff

Organizational variables

SYSTEM 1

SYSTEM 2

SYSTEM 3

SYSTEM 4

None

Condescending

Substantial

Complete

How much confidence is shown in subordinates?

Not at all

Not very

Rather free

Completely free

How free do they feel to talk to superiors about job?

Seldom

Sometimes

Usually

Always

Are subordinates' ideas sought and used, if worthy?

Is predominant use made of 1 fear, 2 threats, 3 punishment, 4 rewards, 5 involvement?

1, 2, 3, occasionally 4

4, some 3

4, some 3 and 5

4, based on group

Where is responsibility felt for achieving organization's goals?

Mostly at top

Top and middle

Fairly general

At all levels

How much cooperative teamwork exists?

None

Little

Some

Great deal

What is the direction of information flow?

Downward

Mostly downward

Down and up

Down, up, and sideways

How is downward communication accepted?

With suspicion

Possibly with suspicion

With caution

With a receptive mind

How is upward communication accepted?

Often wrong

Censored for the boss

Limited accuracy

Accurate

How accurate is upward communication?

How accurate is downward communication?

Know little

Some knowledge

Quite well

Very well

How well do superiors know problems faced by subordinates?

How well do subordinates know problems faced by superiors?

Mostly at top

Policy at top, some delegation

Group policy at top, more delegation

Throughout but well integrated

At what level are decisions made?

Not at all

Occasionally consulted

Generally consulted

Fully involved

Are subordinates involved in decisions related to their work?

Nothing, often weakens it

Relatively little

Some contribution

Substantial contribution

What does decision-making process contribute to motivation?

How are organizational goals established?

Orders issued

Orders, some comments invited

After discussion, by orders

By group action (except in crisis)

How much covert resistance to goals is present?

Strong resistance

Moderate resistance

Some resistance at times

Little or none

How concentrated are review and control functions?

Highly at top

Relatively highly at top

Moderate delegation to lower levels

Quite widely shared

Is there an informal organization resisting the formal one?

Yes

Usually

Sometimes

None—same goals as formal

Also of interest is the higher degree of consensus among management: management staff tend to view the organization in much the same way, while homeplace staff have a larger range of viewpoints. Possible reasons for this difference may include:

- a greater homogeneity of management
- more opportunities or willingness for management to confer
- greater hesitation on the part of management to disagree.

How Is This Useful?

In my view, in expanding to meet the demands for future participants, the school is likely to have to implement new systems and further bureaucratize the organization in order to maintain a smooth-running, efficient program, not to mention everyone's sanity. Nevertheless, the unique and essential nature of COBWS as a community that values open communication, consensus decision-making and humanistic ideals is likely to become increasingly fragile. However, I believe that a rift between the community and the program is not inevitable. On the contrary, the participative nature of the organization reflects the very style that is viewed as the most effective, productive and cost-efficient style among managers in business and industry. By perpetuating and improving upon this participative style, we will remain capable of simultaneously expanding the program and maintaining the community.

Recommendations

Firstly, and most importantly, consider the level at which decisions are being made. This appears to be the area of most dissatisfaction. While the centralization of certain decisions

is most appropriate, the school must be willing to experiment with various models and structures which will more effectively include staff in decisions they feel are important.

Secondly, as the program builds more systems to handle more students, the community functions must be increased. Support and homeplace staff have the least-developed support network in the community. It is important that support networks be strengthened, either through more functions such as community meetings, or similar, more regular meetings for staff sub-groups.

In conclusion, I would suggest, even warn, that if COBWS' approach to expansion were to involve retreating from the participative model in any area, be it decision-making, communication, leadership or goal-setting, the outcome of expansion is likely to alienate the majority of the staff, reduce the shared commitment and responsibility, and undermine the community values. On the other hand, in light of Likert's conclusive evidence favouring the effectiveness of the participative model, and the unanimous views among the staff that this model is indeed the ideal, the deliberate pursuit of the participative style is likely to contribute to both successful expansion and the continued integrity of community life.

1 Edited from "A Profile of the Organizational Characteristics of the Canadian Outward Bound Wilderness School", 26 pp., spring 1985; "Report to COBWS Staff Members", 3 pp., spring 1985; both by Suchy Suchman. (Ed.)

2 It is an unfortunate oversight that board members were not included in this survey as their perspective would have been valuable.

3 Likert, Rensis, The Human Organization, New York: McGraw Hill, 1967.

4 Two other options that were considered are groups of males and females, and groups based on longevity of association with COBWS.

5 A somewhat arbitrary decision was made to categorize responders according to their most recently held position, i.e. during August of 1984. Thus, the breakdown of responders was: homeplace staff, 5; field staff, 10; administrative staff, 5.

THE 1985 UPDATE:
CO-OPERATION AND CENTRALIZATION

by Andy Orr

At the end of August 1985, the survey conducted the previous summer by Suchy Suchman¹ was repeated with the then current staff. It was felt that a follow-up study could be valuable for two reasons. Firstly, it could help to confirm dominant organizational characteristics identified in 1984. Secondly, changes in characteristics from one summer to the next could be identified. Thus, not only could a clearer picture of the organization be obtained, but a good indication could be made as to the direction in which it was moving as perceived by its staff.²

The survey forms used were the same as those used in 1984. While some changes in language and staff categorization could have been useful,³ it was felt that the most important parameter for a second study should be consistency with the first, thereby eliminating the possibility of changes noted being due to changes in the measuring instrument.

Survey forms were distributed to all staff present at the

Community Meeting at the end of August 1985. Of the approximately 40 people present, 23 returned survey forms,⁴ slightly more than in 1984.

Results

Their survey results⁵ are tabulated on a facsimile of the survey form in figure 1 b) on the following page. (The symbols used are explained in the Legend below.)

The comparisons of the mean scores of each of the staff groups in each of the years is shown in figure 2. While the 1984 study showed that field staff were the most satisfied group within the organization, the 1985 survey found that administrative staff had become most satisfied. More significantly, only the administrative staff rated the 1985 organization as highly as had their counterparts in 1984; both field staff and homeplace staff showed a notable decline in their evaluation.

A sector analysis of the results follows.

figure 1 a) Legend for Figure 1 b), following page

	<u>1984</u>	<u>1985</u>
<u>Mean scores:</u> Administrative Staff	■	---□---
Field Staff	●	---○---
Homeplace Staff	▲	---△---

Degree of agreement: Each horizontal bar represents the standard deviation for each response, an indication of the degree of agreement or disagreement among responders. (1985 on (Statistically, two-thirds of the responders would indicated answers within the range of the bar.)

PROFILE OF ORGANIZATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

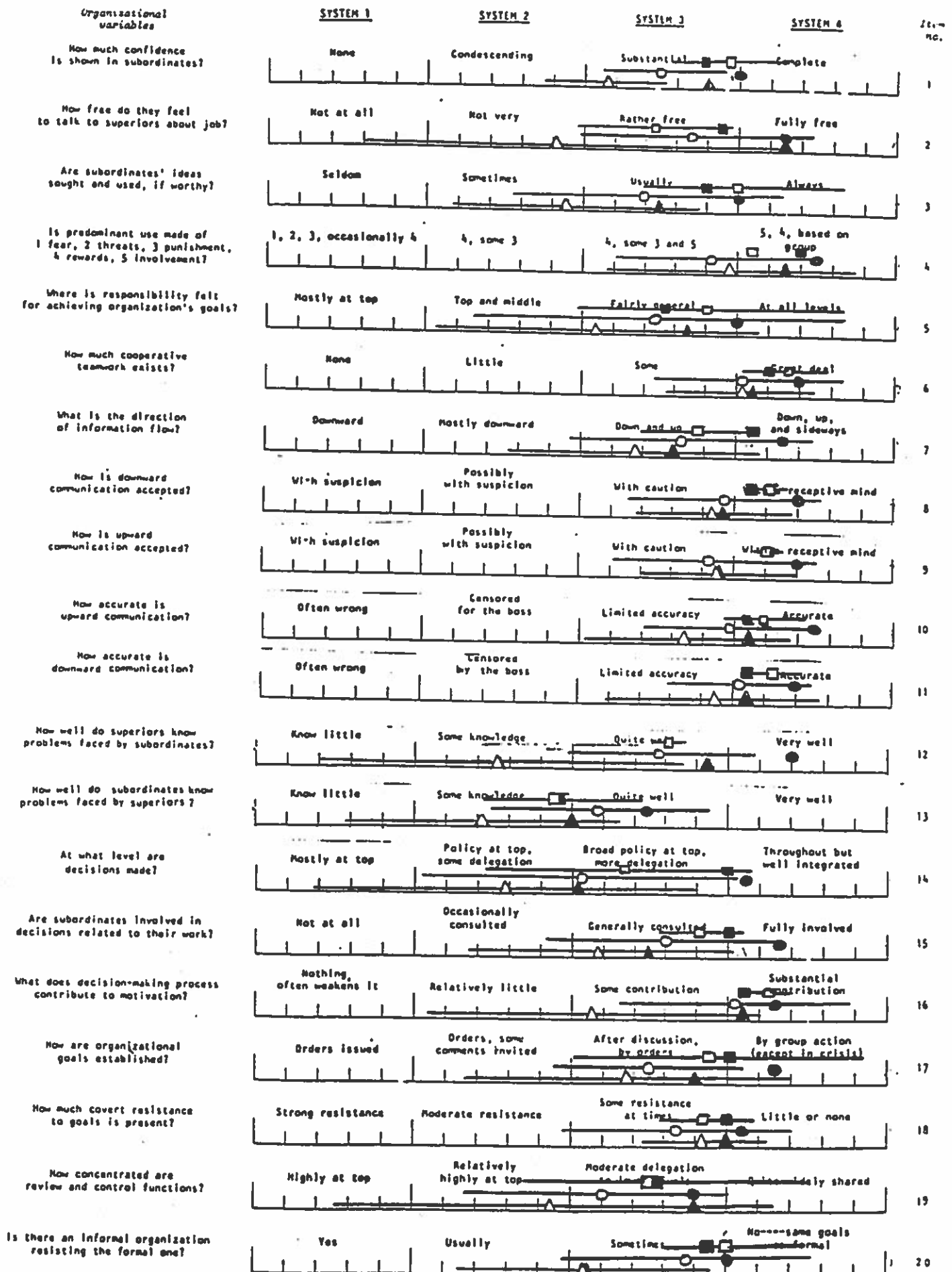
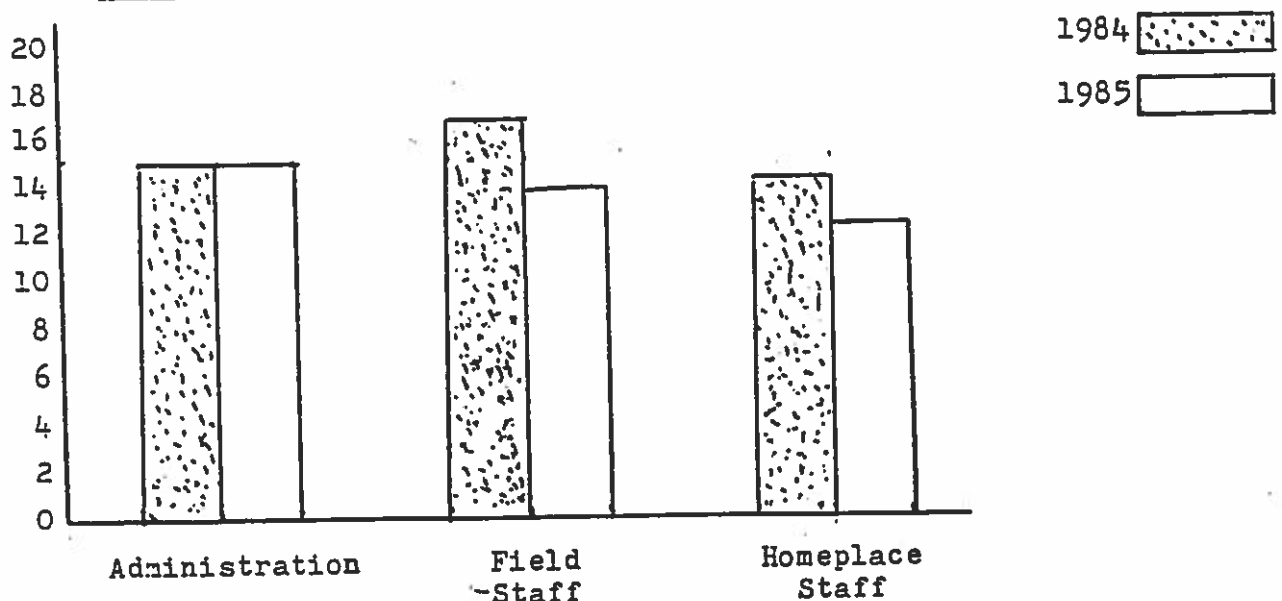


figure 2 Mean Scores (average of all responses)



LEADERSHIP (Items 1 - 3)

All groups perceived that a "substantial" degree of confidence was shown in subordinates and that their ideas were "usually" sought and used. Yet, homeplace and field staff felt that "usually" was not enough, rating it as one of the weakest areas of COBWS.

However, the major cause for concern in this sector involves the dramatic decrease in the perceived freedom of staff, especially support staff, to talk to superiors. Comparing 1984 and 1985 results, the largest change in the entire survey was the drop from "fully free" to "not free" reported by homeplace staff.

MOTIVATION (Items 4 - 6)

Co-operative teamwork is clearly perceived by all groups in both years to be the strength of the organization. However, while most staff felt that the school in 1984 had predominantly

used reward and involvement, most homeplace and field staff in 1985 detected an increase in the use of punishment at the expense of involvement.

The perception of the levels at which responsibility is felt for achieving organizational goals should be noted. While administrative staff felt that there was a broadening of responsibility in 1985, field staff and homeplace staff perceived a marked decreased responsibility for meeting goals at the lower staff levels. It is possible that administrative and other staff are perceiving "responsibility" in quite different ways.

COMMUNICATION (Items 7 - 13)

In both years in all groups, the accuracy and acceptance of communication in both directions is perceived to be relatively high. However, no group in 1985 felt that there was any significant "sideways" communication, it all being of the "up and down" variety.

The major communication problems appear to lie in the areas of superior's and subordinates knowledge of each other's work and problems. Compared to 1984, all 3 groups reported large decreases in the perceptions of superior's knowledge of subordinates problems, and smaller ones in the subordinate's knowledge of their superior's problems.

DECISIONS (Items 14 - 16)

All groups felt that subordinates were "generally consulted" in decisions relating to their work. While administrative and homeplace staff showed little change over the 2 surveys, field staff perceived a significant change from "fully involved" to "generally consulted".

In both 1984 and 1985, all groups except 1985 homeplace staff felt that the decision-making process made a "substantial contribution" to motivation. Nonetheless, the major area of dissatisfaction continues to involve the level at which decisions are made. Rather than moving towards a more participative model, all staff groups in 1985 perceived a continued movement towards centralization first noted by homeplace staff in 1984.

GOALS (Items 17 - 18)

The staff continue to report only occasional covert resistance to organizational goals. However, in 1985, all groups also perceived an increase in the use of orders in establishing goals at the expense of group action.

CONTROL (Items 19 - 20)

Although review and control functions are consistently perceived as being of "moderate delegation to lower levels", both field staff and homeplace staff reported a much greater concentration of these functions in 1985. Perhaps paradoxically, no group perceived significant changes in the existence of a non-formal organization resisting the formal one, although the acknowledgment of such an organization is highest among homeplace staff and lowest among administrators.

Strengths and Weaknesses

The strengths and weakness of the organization as perceived by the staff in 1985 are tabulated in figure 3, ranked in order. The "greatest" strengths or weaknesses are at the top of the respective columns. Combined with the 1984 results, the following picture emerges.

All groups see co-operative teamwork as the strength of COBWS. A decision-making process that generally contributes to motivation, accuracy and acceptance of communication and the use of involvement also figure highly. These strengths may be tied to the strengths of the community.

On the negative side, the biggest problem continues to be the level at which decisions are made. Coupled with the lack of knowledge of problems facing senior staff, the majority of dissatisfactions revolve around the formal side of the organization: the over-concentration of review and control functions and the inadequate use of subordinate's input and ideas.

Figure 4 Perceptions of Changes in Organizational Characteristics, 1984 - 85

Homeplace Staff	Field Staff	Administrative Staff
<u>Characteristics which have remained relatively constant:</u>		
Existence of non-formal organization resisting the formal one (0.0)	Existence of non-formal organization resisting the formal one (-1.3)	Increased feeling of responsibility for meeting goals (+1.5)
Acceptance of communication (0.0)	Contribution of decision-making process to motivation (-1.4)	Increased confidence shown in subordinates (+1.3)
Co-operative teamwork (-0.4)	Co-operative teamwork (-1.7)	Increased seeking and use of subordinate's ideas (+1.0)
Resistance to goals (-0.7)		Increased contribution of decision-making process to motivation (+0.8)

Characteristics with the largest negative changes:

Decreased freedom to talk to superiors (-7.9)	Increased level at which decisions are made (-5.3)	Increased level at which decisions are made (-3.5)
Decreased knowledge of subordinate's problems (-6.8)	Increased use of orders in establishing goals (-4.0)	Decreased knowledge of subordinate's problems (-2.5)
Decision-making process has decreased effect on motivation (-4.8)	Decreased knowledge of subordinate's problems (-3.7)	Decreased freedom to talk to superiors (-2.3)
Increased concentration of review & control functions (-3.0)	Decreased involvement of subordinate's in decisions relating to their work (-3.5)	
Decreased confidence shown in subordinates (-3.0)	Increased use of punishment (-3.2)	
Decreased responsibility felt for achieving organization's goals (-3.0)	Reduction of "sideways" flow of information (-3.2)	

Fig. 3 Perceptions of Organizational Strengths and Weaknesses (1985)

Homeplace Staff	Field Staff	Administrative Staff
<u>Organizational Strengths:</u>		
Co-operative teamwork (15.6)	Co-operative teamwork (15.8)	Co-operative teamwork (17.0)
Predominant use of reward (15.3)	A decision-making process that contributes to motivation (15.6)	A decision-making process that contributes to motivation (16.8)
Limited resistance to goals (14.8)	Accuracy and acceptance of communication	Accuracy and acceptance of communication
Accuracy and acceptance of communication	Use of involvement and reward (14.8)	Use of reward and involvement (16.0)
<u>Organizational Weaknesses:</u>		
Insufficient knowledge of superior's problems (7.6)	Policy-making overly-centralized at the top (10.7)	Insufficient knowledge of superior's problems (10.0)
Insufficient knowledge of subordinate's problems (8.2)	Insufficient knowledge of superior's problems (11.3)	Level at which decisions are made (8.4)
Level at which decisions are made (8.4)	Over-concentration of review & control functions (11.4)	Insufficient freedom to talk to superiors (12.8)
Insufficient freedom to talk to superiors (9.6)	Inadequate seeking and use of subordinate's ideas (12.5)	Over-concentration of review & control functions (13.3)
Inadequate seeking and use of subordinate's ideas (10.0)	Responsibility for achieving goals felt only "fairly generally" (12.8)	
Over-concentration of review & control functions (10.0)		

Changes Since 1984

The changes since the last survey, tabulated in figure 4, are overwhelmingly negative. While administrative staff perceived small increases in some characteristics, neither homeplace nor field staff reported an improvement in any single category.

Most noted by staff was the increased concentration of decision-making, review and control at the upper levels, coupled with a decreased awareness of subordinate's problems, confidence in subordinates, and the seeking and use of subordinate's ideas. Increasingly, goals were perceived as being established by orders. There was a marked decrease in the freedom to talk to superiors about jobs.

Analysis

Between the two studies, there is a good deal of useful information which can be used to develop or confirm ideas on the structure and operation of COBWS. Many comparisons, both formal and informal, have been made in the past between COBWS and other institutions. In the vast majority of cases, the comparisons have been flattering. Such kudos have been deserving. COBWS, unlike many outdoor programs or educational institutions is clearly perceived by its staff to be a "consultative" organization. An organization that has at its heart truly co-operative teamwork, supported by a concern for the way in which decisions are made and a high quality of communication among staff, and which successfully motivates staff through involvement, has much to teach sister organizations.

Nonetheless, there is a perceived gap between COBWS as it is, and as it could or should be. Rather than compare COBWS to other organizations, this paper will examine issues that may hinder the closing of the gap between the real and the ideal organization.

Thus, the discussion will focus on three issues in an attempt to uncover underlying trends and focus the development of possible responses. These issues are certainly not the only, or even the best, way of looking at these results. Hopefully, they are useful.

1. "We vs They"

The "we vs they" issue raised its head at a number of Community Meetings in 1985. Usually, the existence of the issue was challenged, there were few or no responders, and the issue was deemed to be dead or non-existent. Evidence from this survey would suggest otherwise. Nonetheless, the exact nature of the issue is not clear, but it appears to be essentially a split between the senior administrative levels and the rest of the staff. The wall that is being built shows itself in the relatively low level of understanding of each other's problems, the failure to adequately use resources across the barrier, and the lack of freedom to talk to superiors about problems.

More work needs to be done to establish the exact nature of the problem and the manners in which personalities, leadership styles and new organizational structures and constraints play a part. This issue is not illusory and needs to be addressed.

2. Rhetoric and Reality

Why do staff state that one of the strongest points about COBWS is a decision-making process that contributes to motivation, then turn around and report that the biggest problems are over-centralization of key functions, and the perception that responsibility for meeting goals is felt only "fairly generally"? Why has the "we vs they" issue been so difficult to address? Part of the answer may lie in the language and rhetoric of COBWS.

There are two COBWSes. One, COBWS #1, is the System 4, participative, community-centred organization that exists to varying degrees in our collective histories, minds and imaginations. Beside that is COBWS #2, the "small business" that has no room for the "community" on its organizational flowcharts. Neither COBWS is the real one. Yet, while the reality is closer to COBWS #2, the rhetoric is closer to that of COBWS #1. Problems which arise are manifested in two ways.

Firstly, new staff may arrive with the full expectations of COBWS #1. Adjusting to #2 could very well mean a adjustment downward of expectations, and thereby result in disappointment. If, however, new staff had been expecting a traditional educational institution rather than a community-based organization, they could feel relatively more pleased with the same COBWS.

Secondly, once here, all staff can have their attempts to deal with certain problems frustrated by the rhetoric. When questions are raised regarding

problems arising from the structure or operation of COBWS #2, they can be deflected with the language of COBWS #1. "If we only trust each other it will all work out." Trust may not be the issue, but perhaps involvement is.

One easy solution to this dichotomy would be to lower people's expectation to the degree that they become happy with COBWS #2. This would be a denial both of the ideals of the community and of the expressed desire of the staff for a truly participative organization. Rather, COBWS needs to continue to aim for the ideals of COBWS #1, even if these ideals are not likely fully attainable. To do this, everyone must endeavor to ensure that language remains a tool for rooting out hidden and essential ideas and issues below the surface, rather than deflecting inquiry from the essential process of meaningful introspection.

3. Centralization

In her 1984 report to staff, Suchy concluded that COBWS "must closely consider the level at which decisions are being made. This appears to be the area of most dissatisfaction." Yet, rather than a reduction in the degree of centralization, the 1985 staff reported the continued increase in centralization as the fastest growing problem.

Such changes are congruent with the move towards a more efficient organization envisaged to compete successfully in the outdoor education market. Commenting in his 1985 Safety Review, Ted Moores, Executive Director at the Voyageur Outward Bound School wrote:

"COBWS is in the process of changing from a high energy, low pay, altruistic community to a small

business competitive with other outdoor programs. The values that bring people together have not changed, but in order to evolve, things have to be planned ahead of time and by definition the whole staff will be involved in fewer decisions. This has to happen for the school to remain healthy and staff must learn to let go of some of that input and trust in the people making those decisions. One the other side of the coin, the administration then would be wise to try to create regular forums so that staff know that their input is valued and in fact needed. There is obviously some discussion about this change, but it appear to be very healthy."

These comments are typical of many, both within and outside of the organization that either advocate or approve of the general thrust of the changes being made. There is no question that a more centralized structure can produce an organization that is more "manageable" and more "accountable" (presumably to management). Yet, are these changes the best ways to further the aims of the school? Are these changes even consistent with the aims of the school themselves?

The 1934 survey found that all staff strongly preferred a "participative" organization. While most staff would likely associate such an organization with the values of the community, staff preference does not, in itself, provide sufficient grounds for justifying the value of the community. Neither is it necessary to resort to utilitarian arguments that the community/participative organization is "really" more efficient than a centralized one. Rather, the values which are rooted perhaps

uniquely in the community are, in fact, integral to the school.

How is this so? At the highest level, the aim (or purpose) of the school may read something like "to provide students with certain types of worthwhile experiences that may lead to enhanced self-concept". This is only an approximation of the aim; the purpose here is not to define the aim precisely. Rather, the point is that an aim is a general statement of the highest order of purpose.

These aims are realized through the establishment of specific goals and, in turn, the setting of objectives. Specific goals, objectives and procedures exist in the service of the larger aim.

Yet aims, although the supreme statements of the school, are not immune from constraints. Rather, the school and its aims operate within a series of constraints that shape them both as much as the statements of purpose shape the school. There are at least two sets of constraints. One is that of the Canadian wilderness, not only the physical wilderness, but also the historical, metaphorical and social constructs that surround it. A second set is that set of values that are assumed to encompass all aspects of the program, such as respect for the environment and certain social and human values such as respect for each other. The highest aims of the school, then, exist within and are thus partially defined by, the constraints of the wilderness and those encompassing values.

Now the link. Both these sets of essential constraints are clearly tied to the concept of community. The role of "community" in defining the Canadian wilderness experience has been discussed by Bob Couchman

elsewhere in this issue.⁸ The human and social values too are closely tied to community, as opposed to individual, values. Thus the values of community may be recognized as an integral, essential part of the school at the very highest levels of purpose.

Set in this light, the move towards centralization must be re-examined. Should the trend continue, the effect on the day-to-day operation of the program may be of a relatively minor one. More fundamentally, such a trend would necessitate an examination of the aims, the very reasons for existence, of the school.

Notes:

¹ Suchman, Suchy. "A Profile of Organizational Characteristics of the Canadian Outward Bound Wilderness School", spring 1985.

² Though not to be construed as the ideal framework for analysis, a survey such as this can be a useful tool in help-to understand COBWS. Yet, its full value can only be realized when it is used in conjunction with other tools and frameworks. While some staff members objected to the survey form or its language as being too corporate or institutional, nonetheless, it provides a good starting point for further investigation. Thus, the study reveals an important, though not the exclusive, picture of COBWS.

³ In future, it would be recommended that words like "superior"

and "boss" be changed. Although all staff apparently knew what was intended, a small number felt that the use of such terminology was inappropriate at COBWS. In addition, information on sex and length of time at COBWS would be very useful.

Most importantly, it would be essential in the future to include staff in all levels of the design, establishment of criteria, implementation and analysis of future surveys. Rather than being simply passive subjects of a survey, they should be active participants within it.

⁴ The breakdown was 4 administrative, 13 field, and 5 homeplace staff.

⁵ Each question on the survey form requested an answer on a 20-point continuum. Results were obtained by obtaining mean scores for each question for each group.

⁶ Suchy's complete study include a survey of staff perceptions of what the organization should be like. All staff desired a System 4 "participative" organization (mean of 17.5 on all questions).

⁷ See note 6.

⁸ Couchman, Bob "Internal and External Rhythms: The Canadian Wilderness as a Learning Environment", p. 3 in this issue.

THE ROLE OF STORY-TELLING IN INNOVATIVE ORGANIZATIONS

by Daniel Vokey

Story-telling at COBWS is a time-honoured activity. Whether the stories are of "my worst course", "the old days", an exemplary leader or an unforgettable character, they capture part of the essence of the place in an entertaining and enjoyable fashion. Yet, this article will maintain that they have an important organizational function as well. If this is true, and if the roles of stories both formal (staff and student trainings) and informal (community and camp-fire chats) can be better understood, new opportunities may exist for both the school and the community to strengthen and improve themselves through the use of these potentially powerful tools.

The intent, then, of this article is two-fold. First, to investigate the functions of stories in organizational processes. Second, to discuss the implications of that investigation for promoting organizational innovation. The rationale for these intentions is drawn from recent research which reports that stories are an important and significant feature of organizational processes. (In Search of Excellence by Peters and Waterman published in 1982.) If this is true, it follows that an understanding of the functions of stories in organizations will be relevant to encouraging innovation.

This investigation is comprised of three sections. The first section identifies four interrelated functions of stories in organizations discernible in Peters and Waterman's research on "excellent" companies. The

characteristics of stories which lend them to fulfilling these functions is explored in section two. Section three contains the discussion of the implications of the preceding analysis for promoting organizational innovation. The article concludes by noting the limitations of the investigation and making related recommendations for further research.

Stories and Organizational Processes

Four closely related functions of stories in organizations may be discerned in Peters and Waterman's book. The most important of these is the communication of values. By values is meant the fundamental beliefs that give meaning to an organization's activities and shape its priorities. Stories frequently communicate values by recounting an individual's actions in a concrete situation which are deemed representative of an organization's deepest convictions and highest aspirations.

The second closely related function of stories is the effective retention and expression of assumptions about cause-effect relationships. For example, Peters and Waterman dedicate a goodly part of their book telling stories that illustrate not only that but also how assumptions that people do not necessarily dislike work and are motivated far more by positive reinforcement work better than assumptions which state the opposite. Indeed, they state that recounting concrete examples is the only way they could adequately describe the consequences of the excellent companies' commitment to their people.

The third related function of stories is providing models for

action. By recounting situations wherein specific acts are tied to desirable outcomes, precedents are set for action in future, analogous situations.

The fourth function of stories is the interpretation of an equivocal or ambiguous situation. The equivocality of a situation can be reduced by telling a story which accounts for the way things are, perhaps by specifying or describing how they got that way. In reducing equivocality and in providing precedents/models for action, stories thus function as exemplars.

The four functions of stories and their interrelationship are discernable in the following account of a meeting of sales managers with Thomas Watson, Sr. of IBM:

"The purpose was to assess some customer problems. On the front table there were eight or ten piles of papers identifying the source of problems: 'manufacturing problems', 'engineering problems', and the like. After much discussion, Mr. Watson, a big man, walked slowly to the front of the room and, with a flash of his hand, swept the table clean and sent papers flying all over the room. He said. 'There aren't any categories of problems here. There's just one problem. Some of us aren't paying enough attention to our customers.' He turned crisply on his heel and walked out, leaving twenty fellows wondering whether or not they still had jobs." (P&W: 159)

A new sales manager, hearing this story in the context of advice on how to land and keep big accounts could reasonably form the following five conclusions:

1. Mr. Watson really seems to believe that customer satisfaction is important.

2. The source of customer dissatisfaction is failure to pay enough attention to the customer.

3. It follows that if I want to keep my accounts (and my job), I'd better pay attention to my customers and keep them happy.

4. What Mr. Watson says, goes.

5. To make a point in a meeting, be dramatic and decisive.

This story thus communicates a value/priority (keep customers happy); an assumption about how to do so, and a consequent precedent for action; and an interpretation of an equivocal situation in the framing of customer problems as a failure to pay attention.

From this analysis of the four-fold functions of stories, it seems reasonable to suggest that stories retain and communicate the values, assumptions and exemplars which constrain enactment and selection processes within the organization. The extent to which stories can influence sense- and decision-making in an organization is more fully appreciated in the context of the following brief inquiry into human rationality.

Stories, Decision-making, and Human Rationality

Human decision-making, both individual and collective, is constrained by the limited ability of people to perceive and process information. When faced with a problem, people generally do not base their solutions upon all the available data and all the myriad possibilities. Instead, they tend to collect only the minimum information necessary to justify a solution; and further-

more, to decide what constitutes sufficient data according to simplistic guidelines. Specifically, in decision-making, people tend to be biased in favour of evidence that is immediate and concrete.

This predilection in decision-making for what is concrete suggests why stories are such a powerful and prevalent means of retaining and communicating the values and assumptions formed in prior experience. For stories, in portraying particular events or acts as exemplary of basic principles and/or illustrative of cause-effect hypotheses, mediate between the concrete and the abstract.

A related point is that meaning is determined by context. It follows that general principles, when abstracted out of particular contexts, become equivocal or ambiguous. For example, thousands of ethics classes have debated "love thy neighbour as thyself" and its real meaning in day-to-day life without arriving at consistent conclusions. Consequently, if the implications of such a statement are to be clear, it must be located within a particular, concrete context. It is not surprising, then, that actions speak louder than words. For in action, values and beliefs receive their most concrete expression. Stories thus participate in the power of incarnate meaning by portraying the decisions and actions of exemplary figures in actual situations.

Related to the notion of bounded rationality is the observation that decision-making in complex situations is less the outcome of left-brain, linear data analysis than of right-brain, holistic/intuitive perception. A complex situation is constituted by a multiplicity of variables in intricate interrelationships too

subtle to be expressed discursively or grasped sequentially. However, people do have the capacity to retain and recognize complex patterns of relationships unconsciously. Such gestalt perceptions can be objectified, retained, and evoked by images, for images present relationships not discursively but simultaneously: hence a picture may be worth a thousand words. Stories both constitute and utilize symbols and metaphors and so share the ability of images to portray complex relationships in a compact way.

Emotion and intuition are often presented as linked, if not synonymous, although this is by no means obviously the case. It is probably more correct to understand feeling as permeating all cognitive activity. Be that as it may, it remains that people are at least as much, if not more, motivated by feeling than by ideas. The power of stories to communicate values in a way that will influence decision-making is through the portrayal of actions which embody feelings and beliefs concerning what is truly worthwhile. In short: stories speak to both heart and head.

A final point, contained only implicitly in Peters and Waterman, is that stories are both interesting and memorable. Everyone enjoys a good story, and so again it is not surprising that the wisdom distilled from an organization's prior experiences is often communicated in the form of anecdotes and tales.

Stories and Organizational Innovation

As noted previously, this article assumes that an organization must retain the ability to adapt in order to survive. Unfortunately, retaining the ability to adapt is no straight-forward matter. Organizations are faced with the paradoxical necessity of combining stability with flexibility, of maintaining continu-

ity through change, or being open to new perspectives without letting go of old wisdom.

Within this context, then, what are the roles of stories in organizations for promoting such an innovative climate?

The first point is that actions speak louder than words. As has already been noted, the power of stories to communicate values derives in part from the fact that they portray the actions of exemplary figures. It follows that to promote such values as openness, enthusiasm, willingness to risk, and so on, one must first embody them. Peters and Waterman stress that no occasion is too insignificant to grasp as an opportunity to affirm one's principles in word and deed.

The second point is that action often precedes and engenders commitment. Consequently, if one wishes for people to come to hold certain values, it is most important for them to begin to act consistently with those priorities -- belief will tend to follow. Now, we have seen that stories serve to provide models and precedents for action. The implication is clear: tell stories wherein the desirable outcomes of taking risks, being open, trying something new in the face of doubt, etc., are exemplified.

The third point to be made concerns the effectiveness of stories in the formulation of common purpose. Peters and Waterman cite many authors who identify one of the prime tasks of "transformational leadership" to be the elevation and enlightenment of their followers through the articulation of a common vision. The implication of the singular capacity of stories to

communicate values -- to speak to both mind and heart -- is well-recognized: leaders are enjoined to utilize myth and legend.

The fourth point is that stories have a unique capacity to reduce equivocality by providing a plausible account of how things came to be the way they are -- to "make meaning". For to shape how a situation is perceived is to shape how it will be responded to. The implication is again easy to see: to promote one's vision of the innovative organization, tell stories which interpret the environment and the actions of one's organization in terms which cohere with one's vision.

The final point is that stories can simultaneously aid in the retention of old wisdom yet emphasize the fact that things change while acknowledging the limitations of past perspectives. In Weick's terms, an organization must both credit and discredit its prior experience, as, if retention constrains enactment and selection completely, the result is self-fulfilling prophecies which can blind an organization to ecological change, and so lead to disaster. On the other hand, if past experience is discarded, the organization sacrifices its identity. There must be continuity through change.

Now, we have seen that stories shape meaning and action by virtue of communicating the product of previous sense-making in a compact and concrete manner. However, this very strength of stories constitutes a danger, for it can reinforce the bias of bounded rationality to decide on the basis of what is immediately evident, interpreted in terms of past experience. How can the perspectives contained in stories be discredited without creating instability?

The relevant insight is that stories, taken out of context, are equivocal. Like experience, they are rich in many possible meanings. In re-telling an old story, one can change the context and so bring new possibilities to light. One way to re-interpret a story is to give it a new ending. Another is to place it alongside other tales which afford a new perspective. For example, if the previously cited story of Thomas Watson, Sr. had ended with two of his best managers resigning in a huff, with a subsequent decline in company morale and performance, then Watson's actions would have been seen in an entirely new light. Or, if the story had been presented as an example of effective leadership rather than a homily on customer satisfaction, different elements than before would have received emphasis (a figure-ground reversal) and its interpretation change accordingly. Thus, this capacity of stories to take on successive different but related meanings provides one way in which continuity can be maintained through change. Indeed, it has been argued that it is through reinterpretation of its central story that a religious tradition both preserves its identity and allows for new perspectives.

Telling new stories and re-telling old ones constitutes a powerful set of approaches to promoting the values conducive to organizational innovation. However, it does have its limitations. First, myth should not and generally cannot be manipulated. Should not, for to do so would be inconsistent with the values of open communication, trust, and so on, upon which the self-renewal of both individuals and organizations depend. Cannot, in that inconsistencies between words and deeds sooner or later

come to light, and inauthentic profession of values promotes nothing but cynicism.

The second limitation is that inherent in any one perspective. The implications for action of even such values as openness, risk-taking and perseverance in the face of doubt is by no means always evident in concrete situations (e.g., how to differentiate the fanatic geniuses from the fakes?). One must be careful in promoting one's vision of the innovative organization to make room for other perspectives, other visions. To do otherwise would be to exclude the variety and complexity necessary to adequately perceive and respond to an equivocal environment.

The third limitation is that constituted by the status of the organization in which the innovation is to be promoted. One must be sensitive to the level of investment in the status quo. If members of the organization have a great deal invested in the existing order, they may be threatened by any attempts to redefine it and reject even well-intended reforms. If they have very little invested, they may resent any attempts to impose meaning on their activities. Promoting the values conducive to organizational innovation is more like "planting seeds" than "laying down the law", for such things as trust, responsibility and creativity cannot be legislated into existence.

Conclusion

By way of conclusion, it will suffice to set forth the limitations of this investigation. The first of these is that the above discussion is based upon Peters and Waterman's work with large, hierarchical organizations. Research is required into the degree to which dissimilar organizations and cultures conform to these results.

The second limitation is that constituted by considerations of time and space. Three topics in particular seem worth of further exploration.

1. The possible use of stories in the diagnosis of organizational climate. For example, what stories are told by people at different levels or with different functions within an organization might be a useful indicator or whether they are working complementarily or at cross-purposes.

2. The relationship of emotion and intuition. For example, it would be rather interesting to know to what extent the same stories evoke different images and feeling in different people.

3. The implications of a study of different kinds of stories. For example, one might inquire into possible different capacities of myths, parables, fables, etc. to communicate values in a manner susceptible to creative interpretation.

The final point to be made is that this investigation of organizations is undertaken within the paradigm that locates the validation of theories in praxis. The test of this theoretical (and hence rather abstract) account of stories and organizational innovation is whether it proves helpful to individuals intent upon promoting innovation in their own organizations. With this, or another appropriate framework, we at COBWS may be able to better use and understand the story-telling tool in the maintenance and development of the essential values of both the community and the institution.

Notes:

1. Edited from "The Functions of Stories in Organizing and the Implications for Organizational Innovation" by Daniel Vokey, 24 pp, extensively footnoted. (Ed.)

References: (2 of 12)

Peters, T. J., and R. H. Waterman (1982). In Search of Excellence. New York: Harper & Row

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A NEW INSTRUCTIONAL TOOL

by Peter Morgan

The use of metaphor is being recognized as an increasingly important instructional method. However, without accurately identifying the role that metaphor is to play in Outdoor Education, people working within the field will squander energy, adding further misunderstanding to the already confused public perception of outdoor activities. This paper will examine the role that metaphors ought to play in instruction at Outdoor Education centres such as COBWS.

To begin this examination it will first be necessary to define metaphor. Next, the role of metaphors in learning will be illustrated. By looking at both effective and inappropriate uses of metaphors, it will be possible to clarify their place in instruction at COBWS. Lastly, the future of the metaphoric tool in outdoor education will be considered.

In the Beginning . . .

Metaphor is a linguistic term meaning to liken one thing

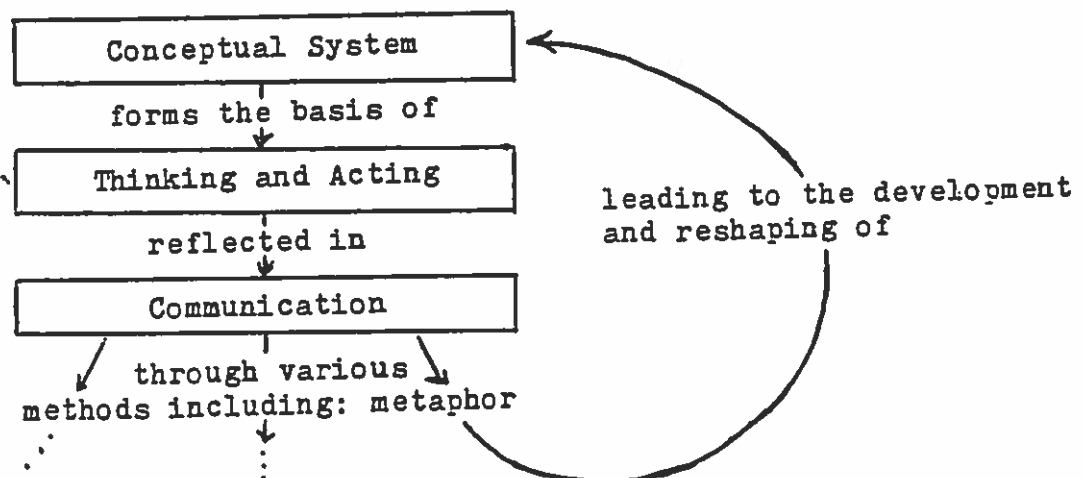
to another such as "kayaking is a dream" or "our group is a microcosm of society". Both of these examples illustrate the conventional role of metaphors: a means of conveying and acquiring new knowledge and seeing things in new ways (Ortay: 361). A more radical definition suggests that metaphor, as an integral component of communication, in fact, reflects and shapes our very thinking and acting (Lackoff and Johnson: 3). This role for metaphors is illustrated below.

For the purposes of this paper, it will be assumed that this is indeed the role that metaphors play.

What the Research Says . . .

Considerable research has been done on the role of metaphor in linguistics. The same benefits derived from metaphoric use in linguistics can plausibly be ascribed within Outdoor Education as well. The use of metaphors has three main strengths.

1. Metaphors can express the inexpressible, increasing understanding and comprehension (Lackoff and John-



son: 115). This is especially valuable to Instructors who often deal with unfamiliar, difficult to communicate concepts. For example, students' attitudes towards dogs may reflect, in part, their attitudes to other living animals.

2. Metaphors can enable understandings at different levels (ibid.: 115) For example, rock climbing may show how a student deals with stress at work.

3. Metaphors can create new realities (ibid.: 145). For example, the Indians viewed nature differently than the white man seeing nature as an integral part of their lives, rather than something separate from them.

(Steven Bacon's The Conscious Use of Metaphor in Outward Bound provides a valuable, if overly enthusiastic, "manual" for the use of metaphors.)

Despite these notable attributes, there exists dangers in the use of metaphors.

1. Metaphors are not effective in all situations, thus selective and judicious use is essential. (Ortany: 367)

2. Metaphors can take longer to understand than other forms of communication (ibid.: 358).

3. Metaphors can hide meaning. For example, "Protein complementarity is a way of life."

4. Metaphors must address a concept at the appropriate level. For example, comprehension of a simple concept may be hindered through the use of a complex metaphor.

5. Consciously using new metaphors might adversely affect an Instructor's natural ability or previously-developed and effective techniques.

6. Metaphors are tools of communication and understanding, just as paddling strokes are part of canoeing. However, how the use of this tool is transferred to students is unclear. Understanding an experience through metaphor can be like giving students a valuable tool box, but not the means to use it. Although students may learn new realities, these new realities may not include the power to discover further new realities. Unless metaphoric techniques are shared during the course, the students will be unlikely to be able to continue their independent explorations after the course.

The Future . . .

Outdoor educators are now in the process of recognizing how important metaphors can be in communicating, examining and understanding ideas and experiences. With judicious use, "metaphor" promises to be a valuable addition to the resources of instructors as COBWS.

Notes:

1. This paper is based on one originally prepared for Prof. Bert Horwood, Faculty of Education, Queen's University. His comments have been incorporated into this essay.

2. Daniel Vokey provided the tool box analogy.

3. Andy Orr made comments on a draft which have been incorporated into this version.

LETTERS:

A RESPONSE TO
"COBWS AND OUR BOARD"¹

by Ken Victor

Dear Andy;

Firstly, the "Journal" is so obviously and transparently a labor of love. I thank you for it. Your energy for COBWS and your dedication to O.B. and experiential education never cease to re-energize me! You are a power source, Andy. Where does it come from? Also, how the hell are ya? Life in Syracuse is like life in Ontario, only its in Syracuse -- you know, food, clothing, shelter, etc. . . You are in my heart. Here's some thoughts in response to the first article, hope it can spark you as your thoughts sparked me.

Your essential thesis -- namely that there are forces at work, externalities that push COBWS and that we are not immune from, I accept. That there is a pattern that co-operative organizations evolve through or vacillate within, I don't know. But if true, then COBWS becomes susceptible to this pattern and we should be aware of all that implies. So far so good. It seems that your paper functions as a warning: there seem to be some inevitable/inexorable forces/processes that happen in organizations and if we want to prevent the inevitable we damn well should be both aware of our place in history and deliberate with our future.

However, your paper approaches this inevitability from a certain perspective or slant, placing COBWS within the larger history of non-profit organizations.

It is an approach that speaks of the organization in its largest common denominator; that is it doesn't speak of COBWS as a tripping camp, an Outward Bound school, or as an institution of experiential education, but as a non-profit organization. It is an address, then, not to the school's uniqueness, but to its commonness, and from this viewpoint it depicts the forces, the environment, that COBWS is "not immune from".

COBWS, in this set-up, does not deal from its strengths - people, commitment, community, relatedness, etc. -- but from a seeming powerlessness: its susceptibility to a variety of organizational and societal imperatives. Although I respect your efforts to situate COBWS in such a context, I want to acknowledge that what resists such processes, or slows them, or deflects them, or, more powerfully chooses or rejects them, is precisely those strengths mentioned above. I want those strengths to be at the centre of the dialogue.

More specifically, that there might be different world-views between staff and board members, I can applaud. Whether or not these differences will be divisive or, in some cases, energizing and unifying, I don't know, though it does seem to me to be a factor particularly responsive to human actions and ways of relating. Certainly Hahn would support an organization that has diversity within it and, even more, he'd applaud the volunteerism of the board -- in this they are more "outward bound" perhaps than the field staff.

However, the implied position of your paper seems to be that the world-view of board members and their leanings towards financial security are somehow contradictory to Outward Bound; they are as oil in water. Yet, I see nothing in the article that would lead me to that conclusion. Your implied criticism that their viewpoint concerning the validity of the welfare state is not in keeping with that of the staff is, to me, irrelevant. I respect a person's right to different politics, given that their commitment to the school is serious. That board members have limited experience of the service provided is not surprising; it is, after all, something easily remedied. What seems significant in your discussion of board members is the importance of the members being educated as to the nature of Outward Bound -- an education we are "expert" in offering. Your heading "Forces of Diversity" reads too easily as "Forces of Adversity". Diversity is a path well-trodden to co-operation.

One of your conditions necessary for unionization is the staff's loss of effective power or control. You don't specify what you mean by control; control of what? As I'm not sure what you mean, let me take this from my own history.

The one season there was strong movement towards staff unionization at MOBS, policies regarding field procedures came "down" from the administration. Staff felt that they lacked control over their area of expertise; the policies were given as a fait accompli and staff's advice was sought only after the fact. It was a stormy summer -- never mind the weather -- and understandably so. Control?

Yes, the staff felt they lacked control and wanted it back. The control wanted was very specific -- decisions, policies and procedures in the field. Such specific control is valid.

The important question becomes: what is appropriate control and what is the nature of that control? I accept that there are areas where I as a staff member should have control and other areas where it is more appropriate for other to have control. I balk at the inclusive nature of your conclusion -- "full participation by the entire community". Again, you don't specify in what, but I am struck by your choice of "full" and "entire". Not only do I think that an impractical prescription, but I am not interested in participating fully in all aspects of COBWS. (It would burn me out more than COBWS already does!) I don't want to keep track of student deposits or financial aid requests, and I am glad there are people who do. Let us grant some division of labor.

I am less concerned with control per se, than with ownership. Others can have their areas of control. Ownership for me is a more workable/understandable idea. While we can have different areas where we can have control, we all need to have equal ownership. Having an area of control is one way in which ownership is generated, but I think ownership is generated primarily by human relations: by listening and by being heard, by receiving praise, by being given trust. It is human relations that are primary to, and more important than, specified areas of control. If I feel ownership, I'm less concerned with the minute particulars of control, for I am held in trust and I hold others in trust.

Lastly, your paper is, essen-

tially, a class analysis. If I accept the divisions and workings of class, I accept the analysis. But Outward Bound's thrust is people, not class, and that when you meet the person, their class ceases to matter: our differences become irrelevant in the face of share goals and common concerns. To place Outward Bound under a class analysis is essentially antithetical to the assumptions that underlie it. Given share goals and commitments, our differences pale before our common humanity. It is the assumption, it seems to me, that we take with us as instructors whenever we convince ourselves that a feuding brigade needs just "one hard day" to bring it together. Differences, class or otherwise, can be superseded. All the externalities and forces not withstanding, we are, and I think we must remain, an organization first and foremost of people -- you, me, and all the other wonderful and committed souls who have and will pass through C`BWS.

Much love to you.

Vic.

References:

- ¹ Orr, Andrew (1985), "What Makes Us So Special? COBWS and our Board", The Journal of COBWS Education 1, 1(March): 3 - 10

