

FROM NETWORKING

TO CENSEGRITY

ORGANIZATION

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Introduction

These papers arise from an ongoing concern with the problems hindering effective organizational action, especially within the international community of organizations. The papers cover the period from the early 1970s in which "networking" emerged as a favoured alternative to conventional approaches to organization. It is not surprising therefore that in 1976 the United Nations University designed its own structure on the basis of a world-wide network of research institutes. Its first major project (1978-1982) on Goals, Processes and Indicators of Development (GPID) was also designed as a network and had a sub-project on networks. The later papers in this collection were a specific response to the GPID concern with networks and the apparent need to look for means to overcome the weaknesses of networking as currently conceived.

The first group of papers on Recognition of the Problem constitute a variety of approaches to the identification of the difficulties in inter-organizational action. The last two are experiments in formulating sets of principles to clarify the issues.

The second group of papers on Networking as an Alternative reflect a number of attempts at envisioning the potential social significance of networks in all their variety. Some of these papers attempt to distinguish those features of networks which have so successfully caught peoples imagination. One paper draws attention to the need for a suitable vocabulary of network-related concepts to facilitate network activity.

The third group of papers is on Networks as a Complement to Systems. The first paper reports on a debate on the distinction (if any) between "networks" and "systems". The second discusses the complementarity between systems and networks as modes of organization. The last paper reviews the implications of networks for the operation of international organizations.

In the fourth group of papers on Enhancing Network Action there is a general concern with how to facilitate networking processes, whether amongst organizations in general, within a possible network of "research and service communities", or within a "trans-national university" (like UNU). In the case of the latter, the use of "computer conferencing" has also been explored in a separate volume on Transformative Conferencing. A particular concern is with the nature of a "network organizational strategy".

Despite considerable enthusiasm for networks throughout the 1970s, it became progressively clearer that this mode had its own weaknesses. In rejecting the rigidity of hierarchical organization, networks tended to fail to counter their own susceptibility to "flabbiness". The fifth group of papers on Networking Weaknesses and Project Failure endeavours to clarify

this condition in different ways. As a first response to these weaknesses, the possibility of "tensing" networks is explored in the sixth group of papers on Tensing Networks.

The seventh group of papers is entitled Beyond Networking to Tensegrity Alternation. It takes the argument a stage further by investigating the relevance of models of tensional integrity ("tensegrity") as a means of designing viable organizations to transcend the somewhat sterile duality between vertical, hierarchical "systems" and horizontally structured "networks". Such tensegrity structures are viewed as a form of "marriage" between systems and networks in which the advantages of each are enhanced appropriately, whilst counter-acting their respective weaknesses. The second paper presents this as an alternative to current visions of "alternative organization". The third explores the relevance of this to the organization of a complex network like GPID itself. The final paper responds to criticism of the perceived rigidity and closedness of tensegrity structures by introducing the possibility of alternation between several structures. This theme is explored in a separate volume on Policy Alternation for Development.

Just as "network" is not limited to social organization but is also useful in the organization of concepts, so is "tensegrity". The relevance to the representation and communication of human needs is shown in papers in a separate volume on: Forms of Presentation and the Future of Comprehension. The relevance to the organization of concepts in general is presented in a volume entitled: Patterns of Conceptual Integration.

As annexes are reproduced papers by other people (or in collaboration with them). The first three were produced by people who were involved in a meeting of The GPID sub-project on networks (Brussels, 1979).

The above concerns with networks are fundamental to the organization of the Yearbook of World Problems and Human Potential (of which a revised edition will appear in 1985). This attempts to interrelate networks of over 3,000 world problems with the networks of international bodies focusing on them and with the networks of other relevant psycho-social resources (human values, intellectual disciplines, concepts of human development, etc). This information is also presented by subject in Global Action Networks (vol. 3 of the Yearbook of International Organizations).