

**Holographic Structures Creating Dynamic Governance for NGOs
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Abstract:

Traditionally, trustees or board of directors reinforce governance mechanisms (Smillie & Hailey, 2001). In the case of an organisation that has made deliberate efforts to avoid hierarchy, and implement a participatory, decentralized collectivist structure, traditional governance can be challenged. The literature suggests that non-governmental organizations (NGO), even those that intentionally want to maintain a collectivist structure, when subject to growth and accountability from funders, turn to adopt bureaucratic governance features (Kassam, Handy & Ranade, 2000). However, ‘The Chinmaya Rural Primary Health Care and Training Center’ (CRTC), in India, a rapidly growing rural development NGO, has intentionally remained a collectivist organization. Its structure fits the holographic design for organizations developed by Morgan (1986). Every staff member has a sense of the whole organization, but more importantly all staff work in emerging holographic structures that represent the whole NGO. This design has created a space to foster non-traditional governance features, whereby staff and constituents actively participate in the framing of NGO policy/vision, driving the organizational governance bottom-up. By critically examining governance at CRTC through the lens of traditional governance systems, and explaining its structure using the holograph as a metaphor for organizational design, the authors propose a non-traditional ‘Dynamic Holographic Collectivist Governance Model.’

Section 1- Introduction

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in developing nations presently play a key role in helping rural constituents with different aspects of development. A significant number of these NGOs are answerable to foreign funders about their development approaches, implementation processes, and evaluation of the program/project efficacy. NGOs are not legally accountable to their constituents but they need to establish legitimacy to work for, and with their rural constituents. Expanding NGOs are faced with the challenge to create, on one hand, a sense of balance between their liabilities to their donors, and stakeholders, and to maintain, on the other hand, a creative, and flexible organizational structure. It has been found that NGOs, even those that intentionally want to maintain a collectivist structure, tend to adopt bureaucratic governance features when subject to growth and accountability from funders (Kassam, Handy, & Ranade, 2000). However, some NGOs deliberately choose to remain collectivist organizations despite their expansion initiatives. This choice has implications on the governance of their institutions. This paper makes the case that an NGO having made deliberate efforts to avoid hierarchy, and implement a participatory, decentralized collectivist structure, has the capacity to explore and utilize non-traditional governance features arising from its capacity as a collectivist.

The Chinmaya Rural Primary Health Care and Training Center (CRTC for the purposes of this paper); located in Sidhbari, India, is a rural development NGO, which functions as a collectivist despite its rapid organic growth. Using the holograph as a metaphor (Morgan, 1986) to explain the working of CRTC's overall structure, and its corresponding non-traditional governance features, the authors propose a dynamic governance model that can be adapted by practitioners to meet their requirements.

Section 2 - Literature

Governance outside of a national political context is generally understood as managing or facilitating administration, while being closely associated with strategic decision-making (Ott, 2001). Tandon (2002) makes the distinction between NGO management, and governance by stating that “governance focuses on issues of policy and identity, rather than the day-to-day implementation of programmes” (p.215). Governance addresses the ‘vision,’ ‘mission,’ and ‘strategy’ of an NGO rather than operations. The traditional approach to the study of NGO governance has focused on the structure of trusts/boards (Carver 1990; Houle 1989), especially their role in reinforcing governance structures (Smillie & Hailey, 2001).

Numerous empirical studies on boards have a tendency to focus on how boards should operate, and Bradshaw, Murray, and Wolpin (1992) classified these studies on the basis of subjective versus objective performance measures. A number of studies offer prescriptive advice on the ability of boards to effectively fulfill their responsibilities (Axelrod, 1994; Block, 1998; Callen and Falk, 1993; Houle, 1989; Ingram; 2003; Murray and Tassie, 1994; Price, 1963; Siciliano, 1990). Another angle, frequently used to study governance is the analytical approach, particularly decision-making as a factor of governance when accounting for internal power dynamics and external environmental factors (Bradshaw, Murray, & Wolpin, 1992; Herman & Heimovics, 1990; Herman & Tulipana, 1985; Middleton, 1987; Pfeffer, 1973; Provan, 1980). A significant portion of the literature on nonprofit governance focuses on the North American scenario with very limited conceptual studies done on nonprofit governance in the developing country context, especially NGOs addressing development. Furthermore, the literature has gaps with respect

to addressing the exploration of contextual elements within nonprofits that have implications on governance in terms of structure and process (Ostrower & Stone, 2001). This paper attempts to address the gap in the literature in terms of providing an understanding about the workings of non-traditional governance features within a particular nonprofit structure i.e. a collectivist, working in a developing nation context. Lessons learned from governance given these contingent factors are applied to create a dynamic governance model; but we would have to first look at some of the literature on governance models.

Governance models have focused on the tripartite system, the structure of boards, and the overall governance process. Models are useful as they help us unravel the contextual elements of governance especially as they relate to a given organizational structure. Charles Handy (1976) pointed to the effectiveness of an organizational structure dependent on the interplay between multiple systems, and this idea can be extended to the structure of boards and the overall governance process. Models on nonprofit governance have evolved over time, starting with the seminal policy governance model by Carver (1990), followed by an alternative model proposed by Herman & Heimovics (1991). These grounding models reflect governance as it is traditionally perceived and practiced. Carver's policy governance model (1990) views the board as representing a microcosm of the larger organizational ownership. The model differentiates between the types of policies that boards are preoccupied with framing, such as outlining outcomes and the means to achieving those outcomes, setting the parameters between the board and the staff, and framing accountability standards for the executive or determining board accountability.

Herman (1989) has suggested that the principles suggested in Carver's model are not only demanding, but also realistically difficult for board members to achieve or implement on their own. The alternative model presented by Herman & Heimovics (1991) showed that, as NGOs became more established, the chief executive came to be seen as the key driver of growth; the link between board members, staff, and constituents with the exception of entirely volunteer-run organizations. The alternative model shares the same moral assumptions traditionally followed by non-profits, which holds the board responsible for acting as the steward that oversees the mission, mandate, and values of the organization. However, in the alternative model, policy decisions are not taken solely by the board but are based on the collaborative efforts of the chief executive working in conjunction with staff and board members.

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

these lines of dimensions, organizations may either be single entities or represent multiple entities that place emphasis on minimum change by adhering to predefined policies or on continuous change through innovation in policy and corresponding activities.

By using lessons learned from their classification, Bradshaw et al. (1998) went a step further and created a hybrid model: The 'Adaptive Equilibrium Model'. It relies on the same dual sets of dimension used in their original classification, but uses features from all four scenarios to indicate how a given organization responds to stimuli from environmental factors. For instance, an organization may be drawn to the features of one governance approach, such as a focus on innovation, but it may simultaneously retain or adopt characteristics along the other dimensions that emphasize other interests including framing policy, and the needs of multiple stakeholders. The model aims to foster leadership through learning and adaptability by using a multiple-stakeholder approach to mission framing, and board diversity. The key functions of the board are clustered under 'outreach, stewardship, operations, self-reflection and assessment, and establishing legitimacy' (p.29). The key descriptors of the model are in keeping with present day researcher/practitioner emphasis to have more inclusive, diverse, multi-stakeholder approaches to governance. Besides providing descriptors of such progressive governance features, how does one go about creating a space and culture within the organization that would allow for inclusive governance features? The actual mechanics of achieving progressive governance lies inherently in the very structure of the organization, which allows for a space to develop innovative approaches in the governance process.

Organization structures generally fall between collectivists and bureaucracies. As organizations scale-up in operations, they move towards bureaucratic structures (Kassam et

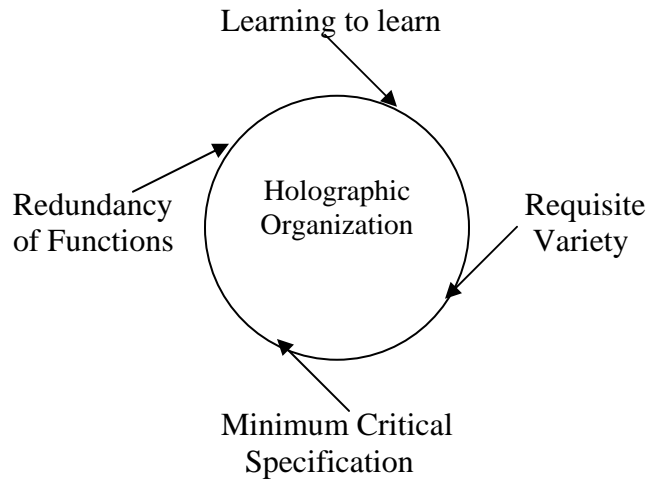
al. 2000, 2002). By gravitating towards a bureaucracy, organizations are likely to increase their reliance on traditional systems of governance. Middleton (1997) cautions that organizational governance cannot be understood without recognizing the complex environments that they function within, and the levels of permeability between boundaries of those environments. For example, as NGOs generally have to apply for recurrent funding they are subject to accountability standards as prescribed by funders, while funders are subject to environmental factors that could affect their mandates and their decision to grant recurrent funding to the NGOs.

One type of approach to framing organizational structures is the use of a 'metaphor' to depict structures. This approach is relevant to the context of this paper for it can be used to explain the working of the collectivist structure found at CRTC. Garreth Morgan (1986, 1989) has explored the concept of a holograph as an organizational metaphor; the critical dimension being each element (person, project, etc.) has a sense of the whole (organization or structure). The concept of the holograph depicts the creation of "organizations that depart from bureaucratic principles on almost every account" (1989, p.52). Morgan's principles of holographic design (1986) drew on work of Bentov (1977), Bohm (1978, 1980a, 1980b), and Wilber (1982), whom had explored the holograph, and holography. To their founding work on the concept of the holograph, he creatively used Emery's (1967) principle of redundancy of parts/functions, Ashby's (1952,1960) principle of requisite variety, Bateson's (1972) concepts on learning to learn to learn, and Herbst's (1974), work on minimum critical specification, respectively.

Figure 1 depicts the Principles of holographic design for organizations revealing four interrelated principles working together within an organization to create smaller forms or systems that replicate the organization as a whole.

Figure 1: Principles of Holographic Design

Source: Morgan (1986, p.99 & 1989, p.53)



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

1) *Redundancy* – The emphasis on multiplicity of tasks by all members within an organization to create a degree of specialization, while simultaneously allowing for overall generalization. It is not the type of redundancy that simply gives rise to ‘spare parts’. But rather, it creates a degree of specialization within the system and simultaneously allows for overall generalization. To balance the level of redundancy, the second principle of requisite variety comes into play.

2) *Requisite variety* – The second principle creates a level of functional redundancy so that smaller organizational forms can develop by being in tune with their environmental factors. Members of each smaller team or organization within the NGO learn to multi-task and adapt to environmental factors and gain broad management and decision-making functions.

Functional redundancy is needed, as no one person can cope with all the factors within a given environment. By creating redundancy within the boundaries of requisite variety, “organizations can develop in a cellular manner around self-organizing groups that have the requisite skills and abilities to deal with the environment in a holistic and integrated way” (Morgan, 1989, p.56). The drawback to having too much flexibility is that it could distract from goals or replicate unneeded structures. The feature of ‘minimum critical specification’ addresses these drawbacks.

3) *Minimum Critical Specification* –The principle introduces just enough control needed to ensure that groups or systems can carry out their tasks. Leadership and facilitating skills are used to keep members informed about the process. This feature is borrowed from a bureaucratic system, but it need not be bureaucratic in function. By not assigning designated positions and by providing a space for all members to take turns leading and guiding (a session, an activity, a project, and ultimately a system), participants have an opportunity to bring a diversity of styles and opinion to the group. The process generates new ideas and calls for continuous reflection, but it keeps differentiation to a minimum, whereby members of a group can learn to focus on tasks or goals without replicating unneeded structures.

4) *Learning to Learn* – To minimize chaos in the process, Morgan introduces the fourth principle: ‘learning to learn.’ As the organization refrains from predetermined rules, it falls on the participants to monitor their learning capacities, growth, outcomes and general direction of the processes that they engage in. The system relies on a looping system of inquiry going from single to double looping. At the first level i.e. single loop level, objects are analyzed as is without framing the context while the double loop level reframes the

problem in context and allows for the incorporation of more variables into the environmental mix (Argyris & Schon 1979; Bach 1992). In a holographic organization, it is necessary to create a culture of learning and self-regulation to gain optimal advantage of the combined work between the four inter-related principles.

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

Section 3 - Methodology

The approach used for this research was ethnography. The data was analyzed to gain a critical understanding of the following: the overall working of the collectivist structure; the non-traditional governance structure; the methods of decision-making by different stakeholders; and the process of accountability on the part of all stakeholders. First stage of data collection focused on gathering and analyzing the archival records of Results Based Management reports sent each year by the organization to its primary funder. The purpose for doing so was to gain an overall idea of the working and growth of the organization and to have a sense of whether it was successfully meeting its goals. We wanted to focus on an organization that is considered to be effectively meeting its development goals, in addition to effectively conducting its administration, management, and governance processes. The archival records, and later the interviews/on-site observation revealed that CRTC is considered to be successful by its funders, its constituents, its staff, its board, and the nonprofit community in India. CRTC has been

instrumental in helping other Indian NGOs with their development initiatives by being a model NGO for the National Agriculture Bank for Rural Development (NABARD), India.

The archival records also helped us frame our questions and then decide on the types of methodological tools we should use to answer our questions. A field trip was essential as on-site observation would be critical to understanding the working processes of the organization, and the manner in which non-traditional governance features were explored within these processes. The entire organization works through small groups, thus, considerable time was spent observing how groups build trust, capacity, and consensus in addition to designing, and implementing their projects. Inter- and intra-group communication was keenly observed. Weekly and monthly evaluation meetings were attended to understand the feedback system used to evaluate programs in lieu of the policies that support these programs and the framing of policies at the grassroots level to make way for new programs or build upon existing lessons learned.

Six of the nine trustees, and all four members of the core management team, including the Executive Director, were interviewed using a semi-structured format (Frey, Botan, Friedman, & Kreps, 1992). The interviews consisted of ten questions that gave the interviewees opportunities to elaborate on each area discussed. Fieldworkers were interviewed using shorter moderately structured questions. As the focus of the questions was the governance process; each interview was preceded by a briefing about how governance is understood in the western context of a tripartite system, the similarities of this context to governance of nonprofits in India, and the normative roles/functions of the governance process. All those interviewed were asked three common questions i.e. to

explain governance within CRTC as they understood it, their role in the governance process, and the role of the Executive Director in guiding the process.

Focus groups were conducted with management and fieldworkers and helped us further understand self-governance of individual smaller groups, the governance processes emerging from group interaction, and bottom-up decision-making. At the analysis stage, the extensive on-site observations were combined with the contextual knowledge obtained from interviews, and focus groups, and the background archival information to give us a clear picture about the structure of the organization, and its capacity to create and use opportunities to develop non-traditional governance features.

Section 4 – Goal of the study

The governance model proposed later in this paper is the outcome of adapting Morgan's ideas on the holograph as a metaphor for organizational structures to the lessons on governance learned from the case of CRTC, India. It is designed specifically for NGOs that choose to be collectivist in structure despite scaling-up operations. It is best suited for those NGOs that have a high integration of programs, and adhere to a bottom-up approach to the framing vision, mission, and values. Moreover, it is a model whose key feature is consensus building based on establishing relations of trust between its members. It is not feasible in an organizational culture devoid of trust or a shared values system. The model sought its inspiration from a successful rural development nonprofit. It is not designed for NGOs that have a prescribed top-down approach to addressing their mandate or those that are bureaucratic in nature. The model is neither ideal nor comprehensive, but it is a conceptual, contingent framework that encourages NGO management, and boards to adopt

the proposed features to suit their organizational needs. It is hoped that the model will give rise to further innovations on more inclusive, diverse and dynamic governance features.

Section 5 - Non-traditional governance at CRTC

CRTC is a fairly large rural development NGO that has grown rapidly and organically in the past ten years. Although, it was registered in 1984, it began as an informal social service initiative in the late 1970s by Swami Chinmayananda, the founder of the Chinmaya Vedanta movement. The initial intent was to devise a social service arm of the Chinmaya movement whose primary focus was rural health care and preventive healthcare. Under the guidance of its founding and present Executive Director, Dr. Kshama Metre, it has evolved to become a rural development organization that addresses multiple needs of its approximately 30,000 direct constituents residing in the Kangra District of Himachal Pradesh. The unique features of the NGO are its rapid organic growth, its deliberate attempts to remain a collectivist organization, its strategy to recruit and train fieldworkers from the same constituent pool that it serves, and most importantly, its steadfast commitment to ensuring that its constituents frame its evolving policies and vision, while concurrently designing the NGOs programs.

CRTC is able to follow its transparent and participatory approach to development because of its structure. The organization has a core tripartite governance system i.e. trustees, executive and staff, but its structure revolves around the creation of small, integrated working groups that are fully immersed in carrying out governance functions, such as framing organization culture, designing of strategic plans and policies, and contributing to its evolving vision. Morgan's metaphor of a holograph aptly describes this structure. CRTC has always utilized Mahila Mandals or women's association and the

Panchayati Raj Institutions (local governance organizations) to mobilize women and men. In order to minimize confusion of roles, effectively utilize all available resources, and ensure transparent accountability and innovation; CRTC deliberately maintained its collectivist structure despite rapid growth in its programs by simply replicating the processes within each self-contained working group.

Fieldworkers belong to the constituent pool being served and a majority of them are women. Each fieldworker acts as the NGO's representative at the Mahila Mandal association of her village. As the fieldworker belongs to that village, she has established the trust necessary to be a part of the working community, but as a member of that village; she has a desire to see that the goals of the community are fulfilled. During Mahila Mandal meetings, the fieldworker ascertains the needs of the villagers, and surveys the resources on hand to meet those needs. The fieldworker then pools her knowledge with other fieldworkers to determine if the same needs are required at other villages. If this is the case, fieldworkers determine which of them is best suited to share their skills to facilitate the design of the project for the villagers. They form a core group, which functions as a self-governed entity, modeled on the organization as a whole.

The emergent core group has a sense of the overall mandate for the NGO and a sense of how their group goals fit within that mandate. In addition, to emergent groups, the NGO has twelve permanent working project groups; for example: Income Generation Scheme, Community Based Rehabilitation, Legal Cell, Youth groups etc. Fieldworkers are rotated among these twelve groups to learn a variety of skills particularly decision-making, leadership and facilitation, to reinforce their common values, and to cultivate their shared sense of purpose.

Fieldworkers work closely with all the constituents using small group meetings to brainstorm on how to make their goals a feasible reality, while simultaneously consulting with their peers and management. They are kept permanently challenged, and seldom face a learning curve plateau. All the permanent groups, the emergent groups, the organization as a whole, and the trustees have the same working structure whose key goals are to drive organizational policy, to frame organizational goals and outcomes, to evaluate the efforts of both fieldworkers and constituents, and to account for their decisions.

Once a month all fieldworkers have an all-day meeting with the NGO's management, and every single project is reviewed giving all staff a chance to know the status of each project, learn from lessons that emerge, embrace successes, and strategize for the future. All members are encouraged to give their personal input to the Executive Director, and to management who prepare quarterly feedback reports for funders. Trustees have access to all of these reports in addition to being continuously updated by management. Trustees perform due diligence on all the projects, and debate the risks and merits of proposed policies, and projects stemming directly from staff and constituents. The NGOs management and trustees focus on facilitating the efforts of the fieldworkers, by arranging external funding, conducting fiduciary duties, and informing the organization about other resources, approaches, and strategies.

At CRTC, functional redundancy is achieved as fieldworkers are trained in multiple tasks through rotation of responsibilities within the NGO's projects. They develop task competency, broad management, and decision-making functions. Staff members meet on a daily, weekly and a monthly basis to brainstorm on ideas, share resources, and analyze their efforts. Staff members are accountable to everyone within the organization and can be

questioned by any other member with regards to his/her actions. The purpose of open and transparent accountability is to maximize on lessons learned through mistakes, while acknowledging and sharing successes. Consensus building starts among a few members of an individual project. It is reinforced through the joint work of staff across projects, and a highly transparent evaluation and accountability system.

Minimum critical specifications is contingent upon the series of beliefs, and values as outlined by the founder/s and staff of the NGO, and further propagated through the course of the NGOs growth. At CRTC, the principle of minimum critical specification is synonymous with the shared humanistic ideology of the staff. The NGO is a secular organization that serves people across all backgrounds and faiths but it was founded as the social service arm of the Chinmaya movement in India. The influence of the founder of the Chinmaya movement, Swami Chinmayananda's teachings is ubiquitous at CRTC as his teachings have set the precedent for the unwritten values and codes of humanistic behavior among all staff. This has created a strong sense of trust among the staff, the management, and the board. Furthermore, the democratic processes used to govern the organization further cement this sense of trust. However, it should be noted that the organization is non-religious, and non-discriminatory as evident from its secular mandate, its equitable hiring practices, its commitment to serve the impoverished regardless of religion, and given the Indian context, regardless of caste.

Every fieldworker and member of management has the opportunity to chair meetings, and develop leadership skills by either facilitating proceedings or overseeing different aspects of any given project. This system does not necessarily lead to a simple decision-making process, but it has created a learning space where members actively

debate the merits/challenges of the proposed ideas. However, given the shared sense of purpose and vision, fieldworkers rarely place their personal development goals, and ideas above those of the organization. The open accountability system acts as an effective checks-and-balance method; for it ensures that the organization's goals are always placed above personal goals.

All members are aware that they work in an environment that changes constantly and are strongly encouraged to remain alert to all changes in their immediate and other surroundings that may affect the working of the NGO. This last criterion of being aware of one's environment as it affects the organization refers to the third principle of a holographic structure: the principle of requisite variety. Finally, a prerequisite to being employed at the NGO is commitment to continuous learning. The multiple accountability system and high incidence of optimal usage of resources stems from the triple-loop teaching (Bateson, 1972) path fervently pursued by everyone from the trustees, the Executive Director to each staff member. This type of learning to learn goes beyond dealing only with evaluating options within contexts but also looks at the very systems that define options, giving rise to exploring "contexts of those contexts" (Bateson, 1972, 293).

CRTC has a tripartite governance system in keeping with the non-profit laws in India. The Chinmaya Tapovan Trust (CTT) oversees the NGO. All but two of the nine trustees are non-local, urban-based business leaders, and professionals. They meet 3-5 times a year, and primarily function to oversee the fiduciary requirements of the NGO, and source external funding. The trustees share their responsibilities to frame policies, and to maintain organizational vision with all members of CRTC by utilizing the governance process that emerged from creating a holographic organizational structure. Initially,

trustees revealed that they were uncertain about the merits of adopting a participatory development approach, and an emergent holographic, participatory governance structure. However, they collectively had little faith in conventional top-down, bureaucratic approaches and decided to try the alternative processes suggested by Dr. Metre in 1985. The vision for the organization stems jointly from the staff, and constituents, and is relayed by management to the trustees. Trustees prudently debate the NGOs vision in keeping with their fiduciary responsibilities and vote to adopt the necessary policies to keep with the vision. The only exception occurred in early 2004, when for the first time, trustees voted to create another independent trust called the Chinmaya Organization for Rural Development (CORD), to overlook CRTC.

The new trust will also oversee the work of the other Chinmaya operated rural development nonprofits in India. Their primary reason to take such a step stems from observing their boundary scanning function. CTT, the present Trust, also oversees the work of the Chinmaya ashram, and the trustees felt the need to formally create a separate trust that did not oversee any religious activities so as to reassure external funders about the secular work of CRTC, especially given the current trends of the global donor environment. Furthermore, they wanted to replicate the collectivist and participatory structure of CRTC across smaller Chinmaya operated rural development nonprofits as it has proved to effectively meet development goals. Although, this decision was a rare showing of top-down governance at CRTC; it does not have impacts on the overall vision and long-term outcomes at CRTC as the NGOs vision and strategic planning will continue to be set by the constituents, and the staff. However, the decision to create CORD will impact the other

Chinmaya nonprofits whose structures will undergo changes to become holographic structures similar to CRTC.

The board-executive relationship at CRTC reveals very different power dynamics because of Dr. Metre's role as a charismatic and influential leader. She connects the staff/constituents to the board. She devised a highly detailed reporting format that informs trustees of every activity and future strategy at CRTC. She seeks continuous input and advice from the board, especially with regards to external funding. Her vision has propagated CRTC as a collective, but the collectivist structure inherently reduces her decision-making powers to accommodate the opinions of staff and beneficiaries. She emphasizes the role of the constituents within CRTC and seeks direction for new programs from them.

Tandon (1995) makes the point that when the founder of an NGO is also its executive for most of the NGO's existence, then "over a period of time, the NGO's identity becomes very closely linked to the person of the founder-leader" (p.46). This may limit the autonomy exercised by the board, as the members of the board are often chosen by the founder. The obstacle in the board-executive relationship highlighted by Tandon does not apply in the case of CRTC for several reasons. First, it was Swami Chinmayananda's idea to create an NGO to serve the people of Kangra. He handpicked the trustees, and asked Dr. Metre to officially register and run the NGO. The NGO's nascent programs were designed and implemented by Dr. Metre before she sought the help and cooperation of the trustees to institute a collectivist structure, with participatory governance and development approaches.

As the NGO evolved, the difference in backgrounds between the board, the executive, and the staff ensured a steady flow of alternative opinions, and revitalization opportunities from the board. Second, Dr. Metre has made efforts to seek out, and groom new management at CRTC. She firmly believes that it is to the detriment of the NGO if its identity is associated with just one person or leader. Staff members are from the same communities as the constituents they serve. They credit Dr. Metre with their self-empowerment. She strongly encourages them to make decisions on their own within their groups and to actively debate and participate in the decision-making process for the NGO as a whole. She makes a sincere effort to incorporate opinions and ideas of each member within CRTC's collectivist structure. Third, at CRTC, the board and Dr. Metre are not the only two variables in the governance equation. Employees and constituents are significant players in ensuring organizational vision, mission, and strategy. They own the policy framing and development design process, in addition to the evaluation and accountability processes.

The staff and constituents understand governance in terms of their own roles and their ability to self-govern their projects. They are also aware that their ideas drive the organization and realize the importance of the collectivist structure. However, all of them do not comprehend how the unique collectivist structure at CRTC is responsible for giving them a large role in the non-traditional governance of the NGO. This is because a majority of the staff and constituents are unaware of the principles of traditional governance. There has never been a need for them to learn about these systems or roles. They do realize that a trust is in place to oversee the welfare of the organization but that is the extent of their knowledge on tripartite governance. They are primarily occupied with fulfilling their

personal goals as employees and community goals as constituents by using CRTC as a facilitator to make their dreams of development a reality. Most importantly, as they have never known any other system besides the emergent holographic and collectivist structure used by their organization, their role in non-traditional governance is considered the norm.

CRTC has witnessed rapid, organic growth that does not leave room for reflection on the evolving nature of non-traditional governance at the organization. There is a slow realization among majority of the staff and trustees about the merits of the governance process in terms of being non-traditional, progressive, and inclusive. Management, the executive and some staff are the only ones who realize the holistic achievement of their holographic collectivist structure beyond just meeting organizational mandate but in terms of really empowering every member of the organization. The advanced leadership skills among employees, including their ability to think a project through from the design and implementation phases to the feedback phase is highly commendable. Their extensive multiple skills training have helped them develop the capacity to think in terms of how projects affect, and influence future organizational policy; and vice-versa.

Section 5 - A Non-Traditional Governance Model for NGOs

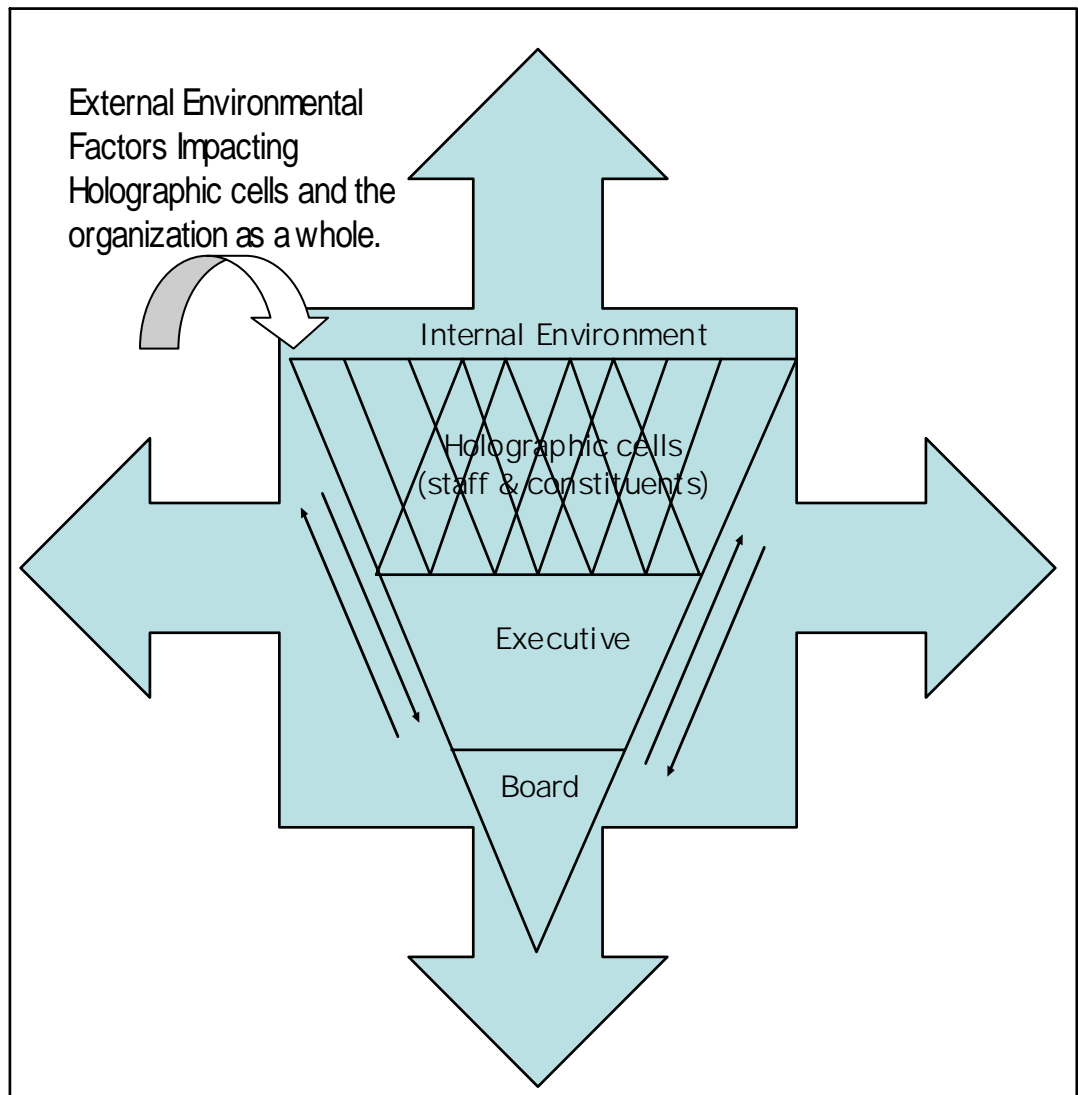
This paper proposes a governance model based on the lessons learned from the holographic structure that facilitates the governance model at CRTC. The model is called the 'Dynamic Holographic Collectivist Model.' It can be summed up as a model with emergent, holographic structures that facilitates non-traditional, multi-stakeholder governance. The model is not designed for a bureaucratic structure but for a decentralized, collectivist structure whose features include democratic and informal decision-making, diversity of members united by a shared ideology and transparency in evaluation systems

(Bordt, 1997). The model utilizes Morgan's (1986, 1989) 'holograph' metaphor for organizational form to create a non-traditional governance structure. The rationale behind using this form for a collectivist is that as members of the collectivist seek out new opportunities and build the capacity of existing systems, the NGO needs a common method of governing all core systems to limit chaos, and ensure accountability. It facilitates collaborative decision-making, and a democratic form of evaluation. Its biggest challenge is that it appears to be time consuming, but in reality it saves time as it minimizes poor decision-making.

When members of a collectivist organization get together to form a smaller structure, the initial groundwork is intensive as all members have to develop skills in multiple areas and take leadership initiatives vis-à-vis the group as a whole. When the organization is faced with making a decision, the evaluation process includes all concerned stakeholders, which slows down the reaction time. Once a decision is made, the holograph allows for quick action and great flexibility. The opportunity that the model presents is its capacity to enable participants to be proactive and anticipate environmental factors in advance. Threats facing the model arise from its vulnerability to participants who are not inherently multi-functional and/or resist learning to learn.

The model as illustrated in Figure 2 depicts the internal aspects of holographic design within a collectivist NGO, and the external factors affecting the NGO. Staff and constituents form small emergent, holographic cells that are self-governing. The inverted triangle that houses the tripartite system alludes to the fact that the staff and constituents within the holographic cells are self-governing entities, driving the organization's policies, and vision.

Figure 2 – The Dynamic Holograph Collectivist Governance Model



The cells reflect the organization as a whole, as each cell while functioning as a team has a leader to facilitate the working of the team. This leader takes on the function that the executive would take on within the organization acting as a liaison/guide for the team. The cell members participate in framing the overall vision, mission and policy for the cell while being held accountable to the organization as a whole, which is similar to the

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

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

1) Evolving, Collaborative Board-Executive Leadership.

Diversity on the board should be encouraged in terms of background, interests, and experience, to stimulate and challenge the relationship between trustees and the executive director. Trustees at CRTC were very initially reluctant to embrace participatory development and governance approaches but overtime their views have evolved to reflect their acceptance of the approach. Board-executive leadership realistically evolves over time to reflect a joint, collaborative vision in conjunction with the rest of the organization. However, despite the individual diversity, trustees and the executive must be clear on the organization's mandate so that they have a common platform for co-operative decision-

making. Furthermore, given the core principles of holographic design, trustees/executive should encourage and initiate periodic evaluation on the governance process as a whole, rather than focusing only on evaluating for statutory requirements. Finally, boundary scanning of environmental systems by the board as advocated by both Herman & Heimovics (1991) and Middleton (1997) is essential to help guide the members of the organization or help initiate actions (in conjunction with the ongoing collaborative processes). However, as part of the principle of learning to learn, in this model, the boundary scanning function is not limited to the board alone but to all members of the organization.

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

In a collectivist NGO, the drive for change comes from the staff working closely with the constituents and then collaborating with the executive and the board. The approach is decentralized as all emerging holographic cells address different issues and work within specific contexts but they simultaneously integrate their efforts to use resources optimally. Board members and the executive must be committed to fostering an organizational culture that is conducive to bottom-up approach to setting strategy and vision, and must emphasize the same throughout the governance process.

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

At CRTC, all members but primarily management, and the board work on promoting the organization to establish credibility, and source funding. They have made efforts to interact with private and non-profit organizations by trying to form relevant alliances or to liaise with co-coordinating funding agencies or agencies with similar interests. They realize that as a collectivist organization, they have divergent stakeholders,

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

Consequently, the NGO's commitment to good governance has been dependent on reaching out to these stakeholders, and integrating their feedback into the organization.

4) *Ownership of the Governance Process.*

Members of emerging and established holographic cells own the governance process. Ownership of the process places responsibility on members to be aware of how their input and self-growth impacts the work of the organization. It teaches them to challenge existing frameworks, and to be open to the inevitable evolution of their cells, and the NGO as a whole. Boards and executives also own the governance process, and, like the members of the cells, they act as stewards of the organization as a whole.

The model depends very highly on the organization's ability to foster a culture where all participants acquire leadership and facilitation skills complemented by a sense of solidarity. The holographic design relies on every member within each cell to be responsible for self-evaluation, in addition to evaluation of the individual cell activities and the NGO as a whole. These factors cannot be achieved if the organization does not make strenuous efforts to ensure consensus building, fostering a culture of mutual trust among all members. In keeping with fiduciary requirements, it allows for boards to assume final responsibility and accountability without reducing the shared responsibility throughout the collectivist structure. Finally, it gives practitioners the option to customize aspects of the model to suit the mandate and vision of the organization.

Section 6 - Conclusion

Traditionally, trustees or boards of directors reinforce NGO governance (Smillie & Hailey, 2001). However, using lessons learned from CRTC, the authors have found that collectivist structures have the opportunities to explore processes for both employees, and clientele to have a major stake in the governance process. A holographic design for collectivist organizations aids non-traditional governance as it expands the tripartite governance equation, giving employees and constituents a chance to actively participate in core governance functions such as, framing policy/vision and ensuring transparent accountability. The inherent challenges of such a design are its dependency on labour, time, and the establishment of a strong sense of trust among all members. The multiplicity of roles and functions creates tremendous flexibility for the organization, but could lead to chaos if members do not learn the appropriate leadership and facilitation skills needed to handle a non-prescribed framework for operations. Moreover it is based on a culture of mutual trust and commitment to consensus and capacity building, without which the entire structure collapses or reverts to a bureaucracy. Not all organizations have the resources and times it would take to initiate such a system but once initiated the results are long lasting and long-term.

Researchers such as Korten (1980) have repeatedly argued for open systems of accountability and evaluation. Such open systems are the trademark of collectivist NGOs, such as CRTC. However, traditional accountability mechanisms are still espoused by most international funders and donors at large. If collectivist structures working within rural development focus on creating sustainable long-term projects, then they will find it difficult to adhere to funder's prescribed reporting formats. CRTC uses facts and figures to answer

to its funders. However, the real progress is not in the numbers alone but in the intangibles, such as self-empowerment, restructuring of traditional power dynamics within communities, indirect impacts on progressive policies i.e. gender, human rights, etc., and most evidently, the high morale among beneficiaries and staff. The merits of non-traditional governance are tied closely to intangibles and it would take a paradigm shift in traditional accountability methods prescribed by funding agencies to recognize these merits.

The paper uses lessons learned from CRTC and draws on the holograph as a metaphor for organization structure to propose a non-traditional governance model within a tripartite system. The model depends very highly on the organization's ability to foster a culture where all participants acquire leadership and facilitation skills complemented by a sense of solidarity. The entire system is one of constant collaboration between staff, constituents, the executive, and trustees. In keeping with fiduciary requirements, it allows for boards to assume final responsibility, and accountability without reducing the shared responsibility throughout the collectivist structure. The ideal situation within any governance process would be a balance of power dynamics so that no one stakeholder dominates the governance process. In practice, this is difficult to achieve, but if structural processes are in place to necessitate collaborative decision-making, then the propensity for one-sided power dynamics can be minimized. Structural processes in this case refer to those processes needed for building trust and strengthening relations among members, which in turn aid consensus, and capacity building. Finally, it gives practitioners the option to customize aspects of the model to suit the mandate and vision of the organization.

This research focused on collectivist, rural development NGOs in developing nations but lessons learned here can be applied to other NGOs as well. Future research could explore the contextual contrasts in non-traditional governance systems between rural and urban-based collectivist organizations. Additionally, NGOs that were collectivist in structure and become bureaucratic over time, as well as those that were bureaucratic and chose to adopt collectivist systems experience a change in governance systems from non-traditional to traditional, and vice-versa. Current literature on governance does not address these changes. Trusts overseeing several collectivists, holographic NGOs, such as the proposed CORD are faced with a different set of challenges, which have yet to be explored. Finally, if an NGO chooses to adopt the Dynamic Holographic Collectivist Governance Model, the process is sure to reveal and end result is sure to reveal the merits and challenges of converting to such a system.

When a rapidly expanding rural development NGO chooses to remain a collectivist it is faced with multiple challenges from funders and constituents. At CRTC, Dr. Metre found a way to address the challenges by devising a simple holographic structure. She does not call it a holographic structure and is not familiar with the work of various social scientists that specialize in organizational forms and structures. Her work and vision has simply evolved through trial and error from exploring various poverty alleviation methods with the people of Kangra. Often there are practitioners in the rural development field whose work is far removed from the rudiments of academia, and who remain largely unknown. From the very outset of this research, it was hoped that this paper would address the gap. The paper presents one type of governance model, but asks that it be used to further expand concepts, structures, and methods facilitating non-traditional governance.

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