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JOSEPH E. McCANN

Two or more social actors—individuals, groups, and organizations—engage in social problem solving when resolving or managing a shared problem. Social problem solving poses significant conceptual and control difficulties that make it highly episodic and prone to setbacks. This paper proposes a framework for understanding social problem solving and offers four guidelines for designing interventions to facilitate the process. A case study illustrates the usefulness of the framework and design guidelines.

Efforts to solve social problems like crime are inherently difficult and prone to setbacks. The dynamic, unbounded nature of social problems creates many conceptual difficulties that limit a shared understanding of their causes and effects (Rittel & Webber, 1974; Schön, Note 1). The very scale and duration of such problems also mean that a great many social actors—individuals, groups, and organizations—will be affected. Simply identifying who is affected and to what extent becomes a major task.

The need for prolonged, collaborative action also poses significant implementation difficulties (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973). The great amounts and varieties of resources and skills needed to affect a social problem also create new interdependencies among those affected. Resources and power are usually diffused and must be exchanged and shared. Clearly defined authority usually does not exist and new institutional arrangements are needed for gathering and allocating these resources, renegotiating relationships, and coordinating and controlling implementation efforts.

Because shared problem definitions are hard to achieve and institutional relationships difficult to renegotiate, social problem solving (SPS) processes are poorly understood and managed (Aaron, 1978; Lindblom & Cohen, 1979; McCann, Note 2, Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973; Trist, Note 3).

The framework and design guidelines

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Joseph E. McCann is assistant professor in the Department of Management and Administrative Sciences, the University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida 32611.

presented here emerged from action research involving over 75 groups and organizations in two states. The framework builds up earlier conceptual work by Trist (Notes 3 and 4), Warren (1967), and Williamson (1975). A case study drawn from the field research illustrates the value of the framework and guidelines.

Three assumptions underlie the approach advocated in this paper. First, SPS must be grounded in a theoretical or conceptual framework robust enough to capture the scale, complexity, and dynamic quality of a social problem. SPS in the past has been dominated by constrained, even dysfunctional, and frequently implicit social action theories. As Schön (1971) points out, centralized, bureaucratic control and incremental decision making in public policy formation has been largely harmful. Similarly, interventions guided by traditional organization development (OD) concepts are overly constrained. SPS interventions may include 100 participants, a number well beyond the effective scope of most OD intervention designs (Gricar, 1981; Williams, 1979).

Second, social problems are dynamic. Any specific goals of SPS processes are a function of the larger society's values and capacity for response at a given time. Social problems may remain, but preferred solutions change. A critical SPS task is to raise the level of understanding among those affected about how larger social processes shape the definition of social problems and solutions.

Third, those attempting to solve social problems must take an interventionist stance. The conceptual framework presented in this paper identifies several SPS processes and issues that are prone to failure or setbacks. As many, perhaps even more, SPS efforts fail as succeed because of the complexity of the processes and issues. We must become more effective interveners in large-scale social processes if we are to manage endemic, damaging social problems like crime, pollution, and poverty.

SPS AS A DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

SPS consists of three integrally woven processes, each posing a critical developmental issue for those affected. Each process comprises more or less correlated events and actions that collectively provide over time a resolution to the specific developmental issue confronting those actors. Resolution of the developmental issue is, in other words, achieved only when fundamental questions posed by the problem are answered.

The three processes describing SPS are called problem setting, direction setting, and structuring. Ideally, the three are logically related: problem setting precedes direction setting, direction setting precedes structuring. As the discussion below illustrates, all three processes greatly overlap and interact. They are also open-ended and continuous in the sense that they are never "complete." SPS is not the result of a once-and-for-all, discrete problem-solving event because of the dynamic social context in which social problems emerge. Questions and issues may be temporarily resolved, but will re-emerge in new ways. Table 1 summarizes the processes, questions, and issues describing SPS.

The framework linking these processes concerns problems shared by two or more social actors—individuals, groups, and formal organizations. Such actors are called stakeholders. The unit of analysis for best understanding SPS in the problem domain—the region of social space defined by the set of stakeholders and field of forces (Lewin, 1951) that describe the problem. Crime, as an example of a social problem, is a domain composed of a set of stakeholders—victims, offenders, law enforcement agencies, and the courts, to cite

Table 1
SPS Processes, Issues, and Outcomes

Developmental Process	Problem setting	Direction setting	Structuring
Questions posed in Process	What is the current state? Who is affected and in what ways? Is the current state less than desirable?	What is a more desirable state? What must be done to bring about this desired state?	Who shall assume what functional roles and responsibilities? What mechanisms must be created and managed to regulate relations?
Dominant Developmental Issue	Problem Identity	Ends Legitimacy	Functional Viability
Primary Process Outcome	Recognition of the problem and agreement about bounds and identity of stakeholders	Agreement about valued, shared ends and a direction for action	Design of regulative processes and negotiation of functional roles and responsibilities

a few—and a field of social, economic, and cultural forces. Note that stakeholders and forces work at many levels—community, county, state, national, even global levels. The problem domain is thus independent of traditional organization and hierarchical relations; it transcends established institutional boundaries and is, in fact, a conceptual or cognitive unit of analysis. Defining the membership of a problem domain and the set of forces that define its boundaries is an initial, continuous difficulty.

The problem-setting process

The first developmental issue is problem identity. Problem setting describes the great number and variety of events and interactions among stakeholders needed to reach agreement about the definition and membership of their problem domain. Problem setting legitimizes the claims of stakeholders by building social recognition of the problem's existence and provides opportunities for them to communicate with each other about their shared situation.

The problem-setting process asks three questions: What is the current situation? Is the current situation less than desired? Who is affected, both positively and negatively, by the current situation? Legislative hearings, research studies, conferences, and meetings may occur over months, even years, and involve various subsets of stakeholders in search of sufficiently shared answers to these questions. Events may or may not build upon others; ideally, they will be related, but frequently they are not. Considerable disagreement may exist about who is and is not a legitimate stakeholder, and rival interpretations of the problem's specific dimensions may abound. In the case of crime as a social problem, only recently have authorities acknowledged the rights of victims. Crime itself is subject to redefinition when social norms and expectations change.

The quality of the problem-setting process is easily constrained. The severity of the problem can force premature action. Geographical distances can limit needed interactions among stakeholders. Differences in the distributions of stakeholder power and resources can prevent participation in problem-setting efforts and lead to the capturing of a domain by dominant

stakeholders. The views of law enforcement agencies or judges, for example, may dominate those of less powerful stakeholders, which results in different definitions of the problem domain.

Stakeholders must also understand the role their dynamic larger environment plays in defining their problem since events within the larger environment ultimately determine what they can or cannot do. An economic recession, for example, will limit available resources and thus constrain stakeholder interactions. When problem setting is incomplete or severely constrained, later SPS processes suffer. Kilman and Mitroff (1979), for example, cite the potential for "Type 3 errors"—effective solutions to the wrong problems—when interventionists fail to define problems sufficiently.

Activities that facilitate problem setting are an important class of SPS interventions. Such efforts try to (a) link the incremental activities and events that help define the problem's dimensions, (b) establish the legitimacy of various stakeholders, and (c) build among stakeholders an awareness of their larger context and its impact.

The direction-setting process

Problem setting results in a sense of common predicament (Sherif, 1966). Two questions drive the direction-setting process: What is a more desirable state? What must be individually and collectively done to bring about this more desirable state? Efforts to answer these two questions ideally result in superordinate goals that imply a more or less explicit direction for action by stakeholders. Stakeholders will create mission statements, enabling legislation, by-laws, and other instruments.

The direction-setting process also attempts to resolve the second developmental issue—ends legitimacy. The legitimacy of valued ends depends upon two conditions. First, and most critically, the ends and direction for action they imply must be valued by the larger society if sufficient resources and power are to be allocated. Social problems compete for attention and resources, and a state legislature, for example, must perceive sufficient value in stakeholders' actions to allocate resources.

Second, programs, policies, and actions created to achieve those ends must be perceived as accurate and feasible. For example, stakeholders may offer a strict "law and order" approach to crime reduction. Research may indicate, however,that programs and policies implied by that direction have little impact on crime statistics. A "law-and-order" approach, including specific policies like mandatory prison sentencing, will thus have little lasting legitimacy.

Stakeholders may disagree about the legitimacy of alternative directions for action. Complete consensus is not necessary, but ends must sufficiently accomodate the diverse interests of stakeholders. Note how ends legitimacy depends upon the quality of the problem-setting process. If the problem domain is not defined—that is, the three questions posed in problem setting are unresolved—then stakeholders will probably disagree about ends.

Efforts designed to build ends legitimacy and facilitate direction setting are an important second class of SPS interventions. Direction-setting interventions build consensus among stakeholders about the legitimacy of a desired direction by (a) helping stakeholders articulate a set of valued, shared ends, and (b) assuring the accurate operationalization of those ends through programs, policies, and actions.

The structuring process

The structuring process resolves the third development issue—functional viability. Structuring concerns how agreed-upon ends become institutionalized (Metcalfe, 1974; Perlmutter, 1965). To better generate economies of scale, reduce uncertainties, and

manage interdependent strategies and action plans over a long time, there is a strong, natural tendency for stakeholder relations to become structured—that is, recurring and predictable. Stakeholders must negotiate their functional roles and responsibilities and create new regulative processes to promote coordination. The structuring process poses two fundamental questions: Who shall assume the functional roles and responsibilities defined by the direction for action? What mechanisms must be created and managed to regulate relationships among stakeholders?

A great variety of structural arrangements may emerge—from the creation of a specialized, formal bureaucracy to a loosely coupled network of organizations (Gricar, Note 5; McCann, Note 2, Note 6; Metcalfe 1974; Sarason, Carrol, Maton, Cohen, and Lorentz, 1977; Warren, 1967; Williamson, 1975). The United Nations, for example, is the institutionalized expression of a direction for action called international cooperation and a means for resolving international conflict. At the opposite structural extreme may be a temporary coalition of community-based groups created to advance a specific cause (Gricar, Note 5). From an SPS perspective, an organization, whether a formal bureaucracy or a temporary coalition, is built around some problem thought worth solving.

Whatever arrangements emerge reflect the tension between what the situation and environment can support and what is actually needed. For example, while a new coordinating council with a full staff may be needed to implement a piece of legislation, limited resources and a competitive, low-trust climate among stakeholders can prevent creating any more than a loosely coupled network.

All structural arrangements that emerge must perform at least five regulative functions to achieve viability (McCann, Note 2). All negotiated arrangements must do the following:

(a) assure that benefits accruing to stakeholders as a result of their involvement are favorably balanced against their contributions over the long run;
(b) manage uncertainty and complexity within the domain by developing coordination and control mechanisms for implementing policies and programs;
(c) generate economies of scale or otherwise facilitate the efficient procurement and allocation of resources among stakeholders;
(d) help maintain the sense of shared direction and legitimacy of that direction by creating and building a visible identity for those involved—e.g., a legally formed association or cooperative; and
(e) provide an orderly process for adapting to change by building the learning capacities and skills of stakeholders.

Many factors may impinge upon the structuring process. Too frequently, mechanisms for explicitly and equitably negotiating roles and responsibilities are missing. There is also a tendency to rely upon bureaucratic designs and precedents to guide organizing efforts (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973). As a consequence, the range of perceived structural options may be overly constrained. For example, problems like crime are simply too dynamic and authority and power too diffused for bureaucratic designs built around centralized control of resources and authority to work.

The inability of stakeholders to negotiate needed roles and responsibilities and perform regulative functions will ultimately limit the viability of their problem domain. Stakeholders will simply be unable to move in their desired direction and realize val-

ued ends. Low functional viability eventually results in low ends legitimacy. SPS collapses, not because the desired direction was wrong, but because relations among stakeholders were not effectively managed. The failure of many of the Johnson administration's Great Society programs can perhaps be explained by this (Pressman & Wildavsky, 1973).

Efforts to promote viability and structuring processes form a third class of SPS interventions. Structuring interventions attempt to (a) enrich the perceived range of structural choices available to stakeholders, and (b) facilitate the negotiation of needed roles, responsibilities, and regulative functions.

Framework Summary

The framework discussed above is complex and, like any model, raises many questions. Essentially the framework attempts to describe SPS in terms of three overlapping, though not necessarily congruent, processes that build upon each other. The processes are composed of episodic, ambiguous, and incremental events rather than one continuous, explicit, and comprehensive event. The processes describe the means by which stakeholders make choices about their problem bounds, shared ends, and functional linkages.

Above all, the domain development framework is a device of use to stakeholders in describing a highly complex phenomenon. The framework helps stakeholders understand the dynamics of their situation and provides a working vocabulary to help them communicate with each other. The case study described next illustrates the usefulness of the framework in identifying critical intervention issues. Guidelines for designing appropriate interventions are then presented using examples from the case study.

IMPLEMENTING THE MINNESOTA COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS ACT

The Minnesota Community Corrections Act (CCA) was made law in 1973 to decentralize power, resources, and responsibilities from state to county government. The CCA was framed as a desired direction for action by stakeholders in a very ambiguously defined problem domain called "Crime, Including Its Consequences for People and Institutions in Minnesota." Specifically, this problem domain concerned both violent and nonviolent crimes committed in the state. The domain affected local and state program providers, government, and interest groups such as probation and parole officers.

The CCA manifested a normative direction for action that significantly differed from the prevailing direction, best called "Institutionalized Treatment and Control." The previous direction emphasized incarceration of offenders within state institutions and the control of resource and offender flows by the State Department of Corrections (DOC). Little agreement existed about the legitimacy of this direction. Minnesota residents disagreed about whether punishment or rehabilitation should be advocated (Conrad, 1975; North, 1973; Stanley, 1976). Polarization resulted in contradictory expressions of ends and programs. Some stakeholders believed that "nothing works" (Martinson, 1974) and that shifts in direction would occur with each change in state leadership.

Importantly, the motivations for abandoning the DOC-dominated domain were mixed. The motivations reflected widely different, though related beliefs in such ends as decentralized community control of resources, greater cost effectiveness through nonbureaucratic programs and services, protection of human rights and constitutional law from administrative state

encroachment, and reduced populations for state-run correctional facilities. The CCA thus represented many things to many people. Because it promised so much to so many, the perceived legitimacy of the CCA was generally high, judging from media reports, legislative hearings, and interviews with many stakeholders.

Such ends, in fact, helped redefine the problem domain itself as the awareness of crime's impact at the local level grew. The limitations of the state-run facilities and programs forced citizens and local governments to ask whether crime was solely a state-wide problem. Given this changing perception, the problem domain became reframed as "Crime In a Community Context," ambiguous though the concept of community may be (Lerman, 1975; Mann, 1978). Similarly, the normative direction for action became known as "Community Treatment and Control of Crime," or, more popularly, community-based corrections (Fox, 1977). Under the CCA, counties decided how that direction was to be operationalized. No one anticipated the degree of confusion and disagreement that resulted.

The CCA established a funding arrangement that gave primary responsibility for providing programs, services, and management of offenders to the counties rather than DOC. Counties could enter the program voluntarily. Counties not meeting objectively defined funding formulas and legislative criteria could band together to create regional organizations. Decisions about the allocations of resources within the counties and regions were made at those levels. County and regional administrations thus became responsible to their own local constituencies, including many stakeholders with whom they had few functional relations in the past.

The role of the DOC in supporting the implementation of the CCA was far from clear. The DOC was unwilling to determine the precise nature of the organizational arrangements that were to fill the leadership void created by the CCA. Counties and regional organizations were left to organize themselves within very broad design parameters set by the act.

Some stakeholders feared that implementation would fail. After all, they felt, coordination between counties and between other stakeholders like commmunity-based providers was required in ways historically unprecedented nor even necessarily desired by some stakeholders. Resources became increasingly scarce as the state's economy slowed. Ideological conflict about the community-based direction also continued. The shift from centralized, vertical, and control-oriented relations to decentralized, coordination-oriented, and lateral relations among stakeholders happened neither easily nor quickly. In late 1978, representatives of three key stakeholders—the DOC, a community group, and a regional organization—decided that interventions were necessary to facilitate implementation. Their objectives were to clarify stakeholder roles and improve coordination and communication.

INTERVENTION DESIGN GUIDELINES

The Minnesota case study illustrates the complexity of SPS processes and the need for an organizing framework to define specific issues confronting stakeholders. Few stakeholders in the state had an appreciation of these larger dynamics and issues. Most typically, stakeholders took parochial positions and acted on purely local issues. Based upon early conversations with the three representatives from the community group, DOC, and regional organization, it was possible to tentatively apply the domain development framework to the CCA setting. These conversations became the basis for a later, more systematic as-

sessment using survey instruments, structured telephone and on-site interviews with a cross section of stakeholder representatives, and archival data (McCann, Note 1). The framework guided this inquiry by focusing survey and interview questions on the three developmental processes and issues.

Frequency and variability analyses of the data revealed that the problem-setting process was much less problematic than the direction-setting and structuring processes. For example, community groups and county and DOC staff were uncertain of their roles. In addition, difficulties existed at the level of the individual stakeholder; some county governments were not organized or staffed to perform as required. Subsets of stakeholders like the counties also did not communicate effectively, although an association of CCA counties was struggling into existence. As a result, some stakeholders believed that the CCA would simply not work—ends legitimacy became an increasingly great issue as a result.

Several types of interventions were clearly feasible and needed within that domain. Some interventions would better confront difficulties in direction setting while others would better deal with structuring difficulties. Both processes were implicated and needed attention.

Given the tremendous ambiguity of the situation for some stakeholders, interventions that could help overcome conceptual difficulties were also needed. For example, Williams (1979) describes the use of search conferences for building a group's collective awareness of its larger historical and environmental contexts. At the same time, control difficulties, such as ineffective implementation of programs, required interventions that built shared program-planning and decision-making skills among several stakeholders (Friedman, 1973; Michael, 1973; Schermerhorn, 1979).

For successful results, interventions needed to be systematically selected and integrated so that each reinforced and supported the other. The following four guidelines proved useful in directing the intervention design process:

1. the dominant developmental process active in the domain should be given primary attention, but the linkages to and transitions between other processes must be considered as well;
2. interventions must work at two levels—a conceptual level and a task level;
3. work with three different units of analysis was required—the single stakeholder, one or more groups or subsets of stakeholders, and the entire domain; and
4. since multiple interventions were implied, mechanisms independent of the interventionist must be created to link intervention outcomes over time.

Using these design guidelines, three major workshops were convened over one year with more than 60 stakeholder groups and organizations. Representatives from county governments, community-based groups, state agencies, private foundations, and regional organizations were involved in these workshops. In addition, one-on-one work with key individuals and organizations like the DOC occurred. Survey instruments and structured interviews provided pre/post-test evaluations of the workshops to the facilitator and participants.

Design parameter one

To some extent, all three developmental processes were simultaneously implicated within the problem domain for two reasons. First, elements of one process were contained in another—processes overlapped (Emery & Trist, 1973). If legitimacy and viability were in question, all

three processes were implicated by definition. That is, ends legitimacy depended upon a good fit between problem-setting and direction-setting processes; functional viability similarly depended upon a good fit between direction-setting and structuring processes.

Second, not all stakeholders worked at the same speed. For example, one group of community-based providers was still grappling with problem identity while others were already engaged in structuring. The provider group was struggling to define the implications of crime when viewed from a community perspective. The CCA counties, on the other hand, were trying to build a viable association to lobby in the legislature and share information. Everyone could benefit through forced interactions between those lagging and leading. Those lagging were accelerated when asked to work with stakeholders already working ahead. Those stakeholders representing the "leading edge" (Emery & Trist, 1973) also benefited when their ideas and efforts were questioned by those lagging. In this sense, domain-level interventions helped link and focus diverse stakeholder perspectives and actions.

Design parameter two

Each of the three processes was worked with at two intervention levels in each workshop and with individual stakeholders: a conceptual level and a task level. Stakeholders needed to understand the larger developmental processes in which they participated. The interventionist asked workshop participants to identify critical ideas and events in their environment and discuss how these affected how they defined their needs. For direction-setting, stakeholders engaged in idealization (Ackoff, 1970; McCann, Note 2) in which subgroups of participants created and shared written scenarios that expressed their values and desires. In one workshop, participants were asked to evaluate in small groups the pros and cons of four alternative ways of organizing. They reported their feelings to the full group and discussed the implications of their work (McCann, Note 2, Note 6).

Attention to task-level concerns within each of the three developmental processes served to generate learning and useful products (Bion, 1959; Pridham, 1977; Rioch, 1972). Workshop reports, for example, informed new stakeholders who had not been active in earlier interventions and attracted resources such as technical assistance funding from federal agencies.

Task-level work within an intervention took two forms: (a) planning and (b) implementation. Stakeholders needed to develop an explicit, agreed-upon sense of their problem as a starting point for additional work. They often produced a concise problem definition. Planning resulted in a better sense of the goals and strategies; the products were, for example, a revised mission statement and action plans for a regional organization. Planning also resulted in a clearer articulation and negotiation of the stakeholder roles and responsibilities necessary for implementing some programs. Specific techniques for negotiating roles and responsibilities would be introduced as needed (McCann & Gilmore, Note 7).

Implementation was guided through flow charts. Implementation issues would also be surfaced and explored, thus bringing action plan implementation within the boundaries of the intervention. Written contracts among participants were often produced, for example. Monitoring and regulation of action plan performance assured that stakeholder roles and responsibilities were being fulfilled as negotiated in a workshop.

Design parameters one and two emphasized multiprocess/multilevel interventions. Only when stakeholders were asked to con-

sider all three developmental processes did they gain a full appreciation of their total developmental context. Intervention levels also depended upon each other; any one attempted without attention to the other lessened the overall effectiveness of the interventions. Table 2 summarizes the interaction needed between developmental processes and intervention levels.

Design parameter three

Not only were interventions multiprocess and multilevel, they also worked with multiple units of analysis. Theoretically, the primary unit of analysis was the problem domain—the total set of stakeholders affected by the problem. This set included a great variety and number of organizations. Convening group sessions of all stakeholders posed significant scheduling and group process difficulties (Emery, 1976; Williams, 1979). Domain-wide survey feedback yielded less than 100% response (McCann, Note 2). Only subsets or groups of stakeholders became active and the membership of these groups was unstable and depended on the issue or focus of a specific intervention.

Often, stakeholders severely affected by the problem were marginally viable. Some community-based groups, for example, were unable to participate in the workshops because of their limited resources and management capacity. Yet a stakeholder with limited viability may have been a critical actor. One-on-one work was needed to improve their representativeness and capacity of the total set of stakeholders. Limited resources, however, hindered this effort, although considerable work was done with a community-based providers' association and a regional organization. As a rule, conceptual-level learnings proved to be of greatest benefit to these stakeholders. Providing them with a better understanding of domain-level processes and issues helped them make better sense of their own needs and next steps.

Of particular value were group-based interventions. The group process mode was a primary intervention form within the Minnesota setting because of its ability to (a) create a shared vocabulary of concepts within the domain which support communication; (b) overcome interaction obstacles such as geographical distance;

Table 2
Interaction of Developmental Processes and Intervention Levels

	Developmental Process		
Intervention Level	*Problem Setting*	*Direction Setting*	*Structuring*
Conceptual Level	Setting the environmental and developmental context	Creating an awareness of desired values and ends	Enriching and evaluating organizing options
Planning Level	Articulating a shared definition of a problem	Articulating desired ends and direction for action	Articulating stakeholder roles/responsibilities and coordination/control strategies
Implementation/ Operational Level	Fact finding and identification of cause-effect relations among problem variables	Identifying specific action steps and implementation issues	Monitoring and regulating action step performance

(c) generate economies of scale in producing workshop products and allocating intervention resources like the facilitator's time; (d) model positive behaviors in a protected social island setting; and (e) acquire and use new skills and techniques introduced to many stakeholders simultaneously.

Given the ambiguous nature of the problem domain, a group process mode also had one additional feature. Since their problem domain was a conceptual, cognitively based unit of analysis, convening the stakeholders made this cognitive structure real. The group of stakeholders became, for operational reasons at least, the "stopping rule" (Rittel & Webber, 1974) in setting boundaries on the problem domain.

The group process mode also had several disadvantages. The most basic disadvantage arose because the representativeness of the group of stakeholders could be questioned: Were the organizations represented in the group the best, most accurate manifestation of the domain? Ideally, an intervention would have actively engaged all stakeholders that wanted and needed to participate. In reality, resource limitations and group size constraints became very real.

The learnings and products produced in the groups were also threatened for another reason. Learnings gained through the group experience were often not implemented beyond the group setting. To achieve this, three preconditions for the group process intervention needed to be met: (a) the concepts, processes, and techniques used within the group setting needed to be readily understandable and usable by the average group member; (b) group experiences within a domain needed to be valued as significant learning opportunities; and (c) group experiences needed to be open-ended enough to confront implementation issues within the group setting itself.

The group unit of analysis introduced a number of group-process variables into already complex interventions. It may have been ill-advised to convene stakeholders as a group because of the highly conflicted setting. Yet the dynamics of the group and the behaviors of individual group members were legitimate targets for work; interpersonal and personal issues often became barriers to effective cooperation inside and outside group sessions.

Design parameter four

The continuity and coordination of several interventions within the Minnesota problem domain became a serious concern. Intervention continuity and coordination will always be an issue because of the complexity and scale of most SPS processes. For example, there were often several interventions occurring within very short periods, each attended by different stakeholders and each initiated by a different stakeholder for an apparently different reason.

Outcomes can be overly incremental and disjointed unless order is encouraged in the intervention process. Intervention initiators need to communicate and share perspectives and learnings with each other. Frequently, this did not occur. Reports and studies produced after an intervention also needed to be systemmatically collected and disseminated more than occurred. Written histories of events and activities became invaluable for providing continuity. Frequently, such histories were missing; interventions took place without a sense of the work done elsewhere in the state.

An important intervention task should have been establishing better contacts with participants in other interventions and systematically sharing information with them. Sharing resources across interventions and occasional joint ventures were also desirable, though operationally difficult. Such possibilities deserved greater consideration, nonetheless.

SUMMARY

The SPS framework conceptualizes social problem solving as a dynamic, unfolding, often episodic, process. Over time, however, problem situations can show increasing organization. The nature of the processes involved pose fundamental issues that may necessitate intervention. To be effective, interventions must work with the inherent qualities of a social problem. Multiple interventions are required because of the need to work with multiple developmental processes, levels, and units of analysis. To the extent possible, interventions need to be linked over time through written and verbal accounts.

The design guidelines offer a rich, though formidable, perspective to guide the work of policy makers, community-based service organizations, and individual consultants. The specific tools and techniques used within workshops and with individual stakeholders are varied. The guidelines suggest how and when a specific tool or technique is most appropriate.

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Comments on "Design Guidelines for Social Problem-Solving Interventions"

CHESTER L. CHILES

It is the burden of this critique to show, based on McCann's description of events, that the intervenor(s) did not use the proposed SPS model (see Table 1, p. 179; Table 2, p. 186). McCann offers no evidence that the interventions were successful, and admits "As many, perhaps even more, SPS efforts fail as succeed because of the *complexity of the processes and issues*." [italics added] It is my contention that more SPS efforts fail than succeed precisely because they do not follow the SPS model suggested by McCann. I disagree that "social problems like crime are inherently difficult. . . ," and I disagree that *social* problems are of an "unbounded nature." There is a vast body of crime theory and research that makes crime quite understandable, and there are a number of variables that are known to relate to criminal behavior. I don't know of a single unbounded social problem. The universe may be infinite and unbounded, but not social problems. Social problems are defined by people, and the definition determines the boundary of the problem. Social problems are not inherent. They come into existence by definition. Consider the following popular definition: "A social problem is a condition affecting a significant number of people in ways considered un-

Chester L. Chiles is an associate professor in the School of Social Work at the University of Texas at Austin, Austin, Texas 78712.