

AN ECOLOGICAL DESCRIPTION
OF
SOCIAL WORKER'S MENTAL HEALTH

by

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submitted in part fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN SOCIAL SCIENCE (Mental Health)

in the

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL WORK

at the

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA

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NOVEMBER 1996

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ECOLOGY ISN'T AN IDEA,
IDEAS ARE ABOUT ECOLOGY.

(Anon)

A HEALTHY FOREST FACILITATES THE CONNECTION AND AUTONOMY OF
A DIVERSE RANGE OF SPECIES AND KINDS OF INTERACTION.

(Keeney 1983: 127)

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The financial assistance of the Centre for Science Development, (HSRC South Africa) towards this research is hereby acknowledged. Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at, are those of the author and are not necessarily to be attributed to the Centre for Science Development.

I declare that '**An ecological description of social worker's mental health**' is my own work and that all sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete reference.



Désirée Ann Tennant

30 November 1996

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I sincerely thank the following people whose loving involvement and unfailing commitment to me created the context for this work to emerge and to finally be completed.

I honour you: - My mother,
- My father and family,
- My sister and brother-in-law, Sandra and Patrick,
- My precious companion, Michael,
- My friends, Berdine and Peter,
Sandy and Shane
Marquerite and Deon
Marietjie and Carl

The researcher thanks - those at the research site for their time and participation in the research during a particularly trying time in the organization,

- Prof. Wilfred van Delft, for conversations of clarity and challenge.

In reflection of - my grandmother and two friends, Dietmar and Elaine who passed away during this study.

Soli Deo Gloria.

SUMMARY

In this study the social worker-in-work context relationship in a welfare organization is described within an ecological epistemology so as to construct an alternative view on employee mental health.

A literature study shows how descriptions of the interconnectedness between a sense of individuation and a sense of belonging creates a double view of both levels to form a more holistic view of an ecological relationship system.

Organizational interrelationships are described within this framework as being congruent or incongruent and thereby promote or detract from social work practitioner mental health.

Conclusions and recommendations discuss the usefulness of such a perspective for social work management practice and suggest a framework for managers to view organizational mental health and to evolve ideas for co-creating a greater sense of coherence in disrupted organizations.

Key Concepts: Epistemology, Ecological relationship system, Autonomy, Diversity, Sense of community, Congruence, Incongruence, Person-environment relationship, Mental health.

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CHAPTER 1

SCOPE OF THE STUDY:

The conceptual and methodological framework

1.1 Introduction and Problem Statement

Social work concerns itself with interventions at the interface of people in relation to their environment.

Historically, researchers have approached the person in environment relationship from varying angles. Both Kantor (1924) and Koffka (1935) made a distinction between the geographical (physical) and behavioural (psychological) environment and viewed the psychological environment as a function of the interaction between the physical environment and the organism. Lewin's (1935) research suggested that both individual behaviour and environmental factors need to be assessed to understand behaviour. In 1938, Murray suggested that behaviour is a function of the individual's personality needs and perceived environmental pressures.

More recent studies, however, expand on these researchers' work. Walsh et al (1992) mentions the following approaches:

- Holland's research suggested that individuals tend to choose and remain in environments consistent with their personality types (an artistic personality in an artistic environment).
- Swindle and Moos suggest that a person's perceptions of environments (life domains) tend to influence personal agendas (goals) and resulting coping responses and well-being.

- Pervin views an individual as having multiple goals and multiple plans for achieving these goals. The environment will offer a range of possibilities which may be congruent with some of those goals but not with others.
- Altman et al view behaviour as influenced by a cultural environment.

This study draws from the work of Jeger and Slotnick (1982) which is guided by the three concepts of competence, diversity and psychological sense of community as a way of viewing the ecology of the persons-in-environment relationship.

The social worker in relation to his/her work context is the focus of this study. Burnout among social workers has received attention by numerous researchers. This study in contrast, focuses on the mental health of the social worker by describing the social worker-in-work context relationship within an ecological epistemology.

1.2 Aim and objectives of the study

The aim of the study is to describe the mental health of the social worker employee by viewing the social worker-in-work context relationship within an ecological epistemology.

The objectives of the study can be stated as follows:

1. To do a literature study on mental health as an ecological idea;
2. To explore the utility of describing mental health within an ecological framework by implementing qualitative research procedures;
3. To conclude how such descriptions can expand on organizational management practice so as to facilitate mental health in social work practice.

1.3 Research methodology

1.3.1 Orientation

Research, as a process of diagnosing or knowing, is viewed as the way in which an observer abstracts and arranges data.

Epistemology or how a person processes information, creates the basis from which data in research is extracted and arranged.

(Auerswald 1968; Keeney 1983; Mouton and Marais 1990)

According to Keeney (1983) three levels of data abstraction can be identified as:

- distinguishing of raw data, at a concrete level;
- arrangement and organising of data by attempting to distinguish patterns of connection between raw data, at a more abstract level; and
- recollection by the observer that he/she has drawn these distinctions and that his/her abstractions are not the only way of distinguishing and arranging that data, at a higher level of abstraction.

Traditionally, social work research has been influenced by scientific epistemology which implies:

- a research methodology that is realistic, objective and reductionistic in that a single, tangible reality 'out there' can be predicted;

- the observer and the object of observation are independent from each other;
- an analytic and atomistic logic which places emphasis on the fragmentation of discrete variables that are studied independently, with no consideration for the context in which these variables occur. (Lincoln and Guba 1985; Keeney 1979)

This study in contrast to traditional social work research is based on a research methodology that is influenced by an ecological epistemology. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985) such research, referred to as naturalist inquiry, assumes the following:

- respect for the natural context in which the entity being studied occurs so as to emphasise the interrelation and complexity of the whole system;
- the researcher makes use of him/herself and other humans as data-gathering instrument since this is considered sufficient, to grasp the meaning of a variety of realities that will be encountered. Both practical knowledge and experiential knowledge are involved in the research.

In conclusion, this study assumes the following:

- the unit of analysis is viewed in the widest possible natural context in which it exists so as to avoid dualistic descriptions but rather whole ecologies;
- no objective facts or truths will be abstracted but rather subjective descriptions with the aim of communicating understanding and not prediction.

1.3.2 Research design

A qualitative descriptive research design guides the research process and strategy of this study.

Qualitative research is defined by Collins (1991: 304) as:

'... the observation of forms of behaviour as they occur, so that the phenomenon as it exists should reveal itself and the researcher will register it.'

This implies that no objective measures of the unit of analysis are made. Instead descriptions arise out of 'intentional engagement with and experience of reality' by the researcher and is what Aristotle (Groome in Newbrough 1992: 20) refers to as a 'practical way of knowing.'

As a descriptive study this research is referred to by Mouton and Marais (1990: 43) as:

'... an in-depth description of a specific individual, situation, group, organization, tribe, sub-culture, interaction or social object.'

In conclusion, this study provides a qualitative description of mental health in social work practice within an ecological epistemology. Both qualitative, naturalistic research and ecological epistemology are appropriate for studying the social worker-in-work place ecology of relationships since both suggest the following:

- 'context' as constituted by a fitting together of ideas; that include
- a researcher as co-constructing with participants a social reality known as 'participant observation'.

(Bateson in Steier 1991: 180 and Collins 1991: 304)

1.3.3 Data collection

The researcher made use of the following methods for the abstraction of data:

1.3.3.1 Literature study

The assumptions of an ecological epistemology are reviewed and integrated with assumptions on mental health and applied to the relationship between the social worker employee and his/her work context.

1.3.3.2 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 18 respondents out of a population of 19 respondents; the researcher being the nineteenth respondent who was also employed by the organisation at the time of the research.

A semi-structured interview schedule based on the literature review was designed and used to conduct interviews with all social workers in the Gauteng Province employed by a certain welfare organization. Social workers on both top and middle management levels as well as those employed in general field work were interviewed. The specific questions asked in this study focused on the individual's perceptions on the following themes, namely:

- their sense of individuation or self (autonomy);
- their sense of belonging or we-ness (diversity);
- their sense of wholeness or ecology (sense of community).

Refer to Appendix 1 for the semi-structured interview schedule.

1.3.3.3 Audio recordings

All interviews were viewed in retrospect as transcribed audio recordings. Descriptions were identified from the content with reference to the three main themes of the study and brought into relation with each other so as to describe various configurations of the person-in-environment relationship.

The application of the research method is described in chapter three.

1.4 Definition of concepts

The following concepts are defined as the central terms used in this study:

1. Epistemology

'As a science, epistemology is the study of how particular organisms or aggregates of organisms know, think and decide. As philosophy epistemology is the study of the process of knowing, thinking and deciding.' (Bateson 1979: 246)

2. System

Bateson in Keeney (1979: 119) defines a living system as:

'... any unit containing feedback structure and therefore competent to process information.'

3. Ecological relationship system

'... the network of complexly intertwined human relationships in which symptomatic communication has a function.' (Bateson in Keeney 1979: 120)

4. Ecology

'Ecological epistemology emphasizes ecology, relationship and whole systems. In contrast to linear epistemology it attunes itself to interrelation, complexity, and context.' (Keeney 1979: 118)

5. Constructivism

'... a theme of knowledge in which knowledge does not reflect an "objective" ontological reality, but exclusively an ordering and organization of a world constituted by our experience.' (Von Glasersfeld 1984: 24)

6. Mental health as an ecological description

This study refers to health in an human ecosystem in the following way:

'... when the interactions of a large number of diverse species are held in balance, the term "ecological climax" is used. This balance of diversity in an ecosystem is a way of talking about health. ... The alternative to health ... is characterised by the maximization or minimization of any variable in an ecosystem ... (which) rather than diversity leads to the escalating sameness we have defined as pathology. This formulation characterizes the healthy individual as an integrated, whole unity of diverse differences.' (Keeney 1983: 125 - 126)

This balance is characteristic of human systems that facilitate and compensate the connection and autonomy of a diverse range of kinds of interaction.

7. Autonomy

'A full consideration of autonomy will always take us to the whole that connects each part of our experience. Considering the autonomy of an individual leads us to seeing the individual as part of an autonomous system, which in turn can be seen as a part of a more encompassing, autonomous ecology.'

(Keeney 1983: 144)

8. Competence

'Competence is described as the way humans fit within their contexts. All living systems are competent as they all know how to survive in the best way they can.'

(Le Roux 1987: 58)

9. Diversity

'In biology, when the interactions of a large number of diverse species are held in balance, the term "ecological climax" is used. This balance of diversity in an ecosystem is a way of talking about health. A unilineal focus on part of a system will disrupt and fractionate the balanced diversity of an ecosystem.'

(Keeney 1983: 125)

10. Sense of community

'The sense of mutuality and reciprocity that characterizes psychological sense of community is linked with a sense of purpose that transcends both selfish "individualism" and irresponsible "group interest".'

(Sarason in Jeger and Slotnick 1982: 31)

1.5. Variables that influenced the study

The following variables can be regarded as impacting on the outcomes of social science research:

- According to Mead (Steier 1991: 166) our methodological assumptions about the nature of data limit out questions, which in turn limit what we might experience and describe.
- Furthermore Dean (1993: 136) suggests that, '...while we try to create an atmosphere of trust, we know that some clients will never tell us their stories or only tell us some portions of their stories that they feel able to share or they think we are able to hear non-judgementally.'

By implication:

- the researcher as participant observer and as an autonomous system is always only capable of making descriptions within the limits of her own autonomy;
- the researcher-respondent relationship can be assumed to be limited in some instances due to the mistrust that was either expressed or unobservable to the researcher during interviews which then creates fragmented and oversimplified descriptions;
- in language a multitude of configurations of description of any phenomenon are possible. This study can only be viewed as a punctuation of a more encompassing description;
- it can be accepted that different researchers using different research methodologies can contribute to the diversity of descriptions of the phenomenon described in this study.

Further variables that influenced this study are as follows:

- Out of the 18 interviews conducted as the data collection part of this study, two of the audio-recordings were damaged and the dialogue was lost. The data analysis in chapter three of this research is limited in that it could have been enriched by the contributions of these two respondents to add to a more inclusive view.
- Attempts by the researcher to introduce an external consultant to facilitate the management of diversity in the organization succeeded in one session but was stopped by the organization without explanation to the researcher. Such a process would have provided an opportunity to verify respondents perceptions as well as expand on the method of data collection to include the descriptions given in the small group context.
- This study did not include various components of the mental health of social work employees but focused on specific processes between social work employees. This study is based on what Anderson and Goolishian (1988: 378) explain as:

'... the mental characteristics of a system are immanent in the system as a whole. The mind (meaning) is not in someone's head, but, rather in interaction. Bateson called this new way of thinking about ideas as an "ecology of mind" or "ecology of ideas".

A more extensive study could include a variety of mental health components such as self-esteem, emotional strength and other relationships at peripheral and core levels impacting on social work employees to expand on the description of social worker employee mental health.

The study does, however, provide a description of how person-environment relationships can be viewed as a perspective on the mental health of the ecology of relationships in an organization.

According to Auerswald (1987: 205) such a description 'will emerge as an idiosyncratic template of the structural and operational configurations of that community.'

The researcher's descriptions are useful in as much as they are congruent with the given set of experiences described in the study.

1.6 Presentation of the content

This study consists of the following:

- Chapter 1 provides a conceptual and methodological framework for the research by stating the research orientation and strategy, definition of concepts and limitations of the study.
- Chapter 2 provides a literature study which guides the research strategy and influences the way in which data is arranged.
- Chapter 3 contains a demonstration of the application of ecological descriptions of the social worker-in-work context relationship.
- Chapter 4 provides a concluding discussion and recommendations.

CHAPTER 2

AN ECOLOGICAL APPROACH TO MENTAL HEALTH IN SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

2.1 Introduction

Different theories of social science view mental health in various ways. The description in this study is based on an ecological epistemology. In this chapter certain assumptions central to ecological thought are discussed as a framework for viewing mental health and more particularly within an organization.

The concepts of autonomy, diversity and sense of community are referred to as interrelated and create a more encompassing view of whole networks of ecological relationship systems (Jeger and Slotnick 1982).

Three aspects are discussed in this chapter, namely:

- Sense of self, sense of we-ness and ecology as ideas central to an ecological epistemology;
- Autonomy, diversity and sense of community as ideas central to mental health; and
- The interrelatedness of these ideas as a way of describing mental health in an ecological way as applied to an organization using the Open Organization Model of Mink, Downes and Owen (1994).

2.2 Ecological epistemology

The social ideas arising from the social sciences have been important social forces shaping social realities through history.

Bell in Carlock (1994: 60) has observed that 'the shift from industrial to post-industrial economies is dramatically changing social structure, politics, culture and social thought'. Post-industrial society is a concept used to characterize the structure, dynamics and possible future of advanced industrial societies since the end of the World War II. Recent discussions of the character and future of advanced industrial societies have been formed by researchers such as Seidman 1994; Carlock 1994; Borgatta 1992 and Newbrough 1992. Implicit in these discussions is the acceptance of the 'pluralistic character of social experiences, identities and standards of truth, moral rightness and beauty in place of a universal, unitary concept of reason and uniform cultural standards'.

(Seidman 1994: 324)

Ecological epistemology embraces the social realities implicit in post-industrial social thought. An ecological epistemology goes beyond dualistic conceptualizations of isolated parts that act, react, interact or transact with each other towards a recognition of whole interactive systems thereby embracing the 'pluralistic character of social experiences' as referred to above.

(Keeney and Sprenkle 1982: 6)

Bateson, in Keeney (1979: 120) supports this view in saying:

'If you want to understand some phenomenon or appearance, you must consider the phenomenon within the context of all completed circuits, which are relevant to it.'

The 'relevant completed circuits' for the observer refers to the network of complexly intertwined human relationships or ecological relationship system in which symptomatic communication has a function. (Bateson in Keeney 1979: 120)

A further description of an ecological relationship system is referred to by Newbrough as the persons-in-community approach described as 'the One and the Many' where both the development of the individual and the community are enhanced within a functional balance and complex interdependence.
(Newbrough 1992: 17)

In his approach the following is noted:

The One refers to the following:

- * loyalty, belongingness and dependability are primary virtues of this form of community, otherwise called 'Gemeinschaft' (community welfare).
- * the problem of this type of community is its dominance over individual capacity.

The Many refers to the following:

- * a community known as 'Gesellschaft' as being a support system for the individuals within it.
- * human freedom and individual independence are primary virtues of this community where human rights (individual welfare) take priority over the rights of the collectivity.
- * the fragmentation of such a community is alienating since people are encouraged to be ambitious and self-serving. (Newbrough 1992)

The imbalances in both the 'Gemeinschaft' and 'Gesellschaft' communities turns the social scientist's focus to a new integration that offers both the community feel of 'Gemeinschaft' and the complexity and differentiation of 'Gesellschaft', made possible within an ecological epistemology.

2.2.1 Assumptions of an ecological epistemology

Various assumptions related to the extracting and arranging of observed information in an ecological way can be described as follows:

2.2.1.1 Wholeness

The term ecology comes from the Greek word 'oikos' meaning house, and significantly, has the same Greek root as the word economics from 'oikonomos', meaning household manager. (Borgatta 1992: 848)

The idea of household is described by Steier (1991: 180) as 'Umwelt' being the 'important world a being creates by its experience, by sensing its importance to its activities that are 'invisible' or 'unhearable'.

This view of 'household' or 'Umwelt' follows the axiom of ecology in that 'mutual, reciprocal, simultaneous interaction between parts within a system define, identify and constitute the whole system'. (Keeney 1979: 123)

To view a living system (ecological relationship system) as being alive only when every part of such a system interacts with every other part of that system acknowledges what Maturana in Dell (1985: 5) views as central:

'... it is the circularity of its organization that makes a living system a unit of interactions, and it is this circularity that it must maintain in order to remain a living system.'

An ecological epistemology recognizes whole interactive ecosystems that is, no action can be viewed as an island rather all action is viewed as part of an organized interaction. (Keeney 1983)

2.2.1.2 Autonomy

The self-regulating feedback processes which generate and maintain a living system's wholeness is referred to as its autonomy. Autonomy literally means control of the self and is derived from the Greek 'autos' for 'self' and 'nomos' for 'a law'.

(Le Roux 1987: 45)

The self-rule or self-regulation of a living system implies it is closed to relationship with an outside environment and instead feeds upon itself due to its own self-corrective feedback process.

Keeney (1983) notes that the autonomy of a living system acts as a haemostat enabling it to retain its identity or wholeness or sense of self within the limits for its survival. If a system moves beyond this threshold it will cease to be a system.

Stated differently, whatever an autonomous system does, can be viewed as an effort to maintain or conserve its organization, hence, the term self-rule or household manager.

2.2.1.3 Adaptation

Ecology is referred to by Le Roux (1987: 64) as 'the widest possible context for studying the reciprocal relations and interrelations in and between systems'.

A living system such as a family, a work team or an organization is therefore viewed as a system within a system within a system, ad infinitum.

For a living system to continue to function means that it is harmoniously and adequately joined to the context, or systems in which it exists, which could include other people, the physical environment or systems of thought.

According to Le Roux (1987: 58) 'the way in which human systems survive and fit in the best way they can within their contexts, describes them as competent'. In other words, all parts within a system or all parts of a system within a system, add on one another creating coherence.

The way in which this coherence between systems is achieved is determined by the flexibility and nature of that system's structure. The structure of a system, in contrast to its organization, is not a static property and is in constant flux by means of interaction. It is this property which determines how a system will adapt under any and all interactions in order to maintain its wholeness or autonomy. (Dell 1985 and Maturana 1975)

This implies that any information from outside the organizational closure of a system cannot have an effect on that system without the systems structurally self-determined response to that information or disturbance.

In summary, Keeney (1983: 85) says the following:

'Though the organization of an autonomous system is closed, we can interact with its wholeness in a variety of ways. An observer ... "can interact with a system by poking at it, throwing things at it and doing things like that, in various degrees of sophistication" ... These interactions represent perturbation of the stability of the

whole system, which in response, will compensate or will not compensate ...'

By example:

A balloon may be considered an autonomous system. If you squeeze it, your action can be seen as a perturbation. If you get inside the closed boundaries of the balloon, or system, it will burst. Your perturbations if not too severe and that exceed the flexibility of the balloon, will be compensated for by the system's structure. Hereby, the balloon's ability to change its shape allows it to stay in tact. (Keeney 1983: 103)

2.2.1.4 Structural coupling

An ecological epistemology is functionally based on the idea that all things in nature are interrelated morally, mentally and physically. This idea proposes that the earth can be perceived as a single evolving system of life.

Interactions and communications between living systems are regarded as mutual disturbances which trigger responses in each system that are determined by each system's structure. (Maturana 1975; Dell 1985; Leyland 1988). In other words, individual systems may respond in diverse ways to the same disturbance.

The relationship between a structurally determined system and its context (system within a system) in which it exists is referred to as 'structural coupling'. (Maturana 1975: 320) If the interactions between a system and its context do not result in its destruction then that system is able to continue living.

Bateson and Maturana in Dell (1985: 12) say the following about structural coupling between systems:

'To be structurally coupled is to behave intelligently. The most fundamental behaviour is "to exist": the most fundamental knowledge is to "know how" to exist.'

Inherent in the idea of 'existence' is the idea that a structurally determined system continually interacts with its environment which in turn leads to structural change within itself and so on.

This ongoing coupling between living systems are the building blocks of all known interactional systems and is characteristic of human behaviour that is adequate to and fits its environment.

Auerswald (1987: 324) explains as follows:

'In the new science (ecological epistemology) thought system, there is no "error". The concept of error is based on the rule of single truth and the rule of dualism. There is, instead, incongruity or lack of synchrony. In an ecosystem, whether it is a river bed, a family, or a complex of ideas, the both - and rule prevails. Ejection of a subsystem from an ecosystem may occur, as a reaction to a foreign body, when the entering species or idea does not "fit" and cannot adapt; but there are no confrontations at boundaries, no wars.'

The idea of 'fit' or congruity is referred to by Maturana (1975: 326) as a 'consensual domain of conduct' which arises when the structurally determined changes of state of coupled

systems mutually correspond to each other and form an interlocked, interacting closed system.

Human systems are participants of a communicating system which implies that any consensual domain is a linguistic domain of interlocked descriptions made by an observer. (Keeney and Sprenkle 1982; Maturana 1975; Anderson and Goolishian 1988)

2.2.1.5 Linguistic domain

Any linguistic consensual domain that is mediated between interacting human systems is a domain of meaning or understanding within a social context and is referred to as the social construction of reality by various authors such as Anderson and Goolishian (1988); Hoffman (1990); Von Glasersfeld (1984) and Dean (1993); also previously by Steier (1991: 180) as 'Umwelt'.

Le Roux (1987: 65) explains this idea as follows:

'... an observer can come to know the properties of a system only by interacting with it. Therefore, an interpretation or description of an ecology can be nothing more than:

- a further development (evolution) within the ecology (system);
- a fragmented description of a larger whole; and

- a never-ending process of influencing an ecology (system) which also influences itself (self regulation) ...'

The linguistic coupling that occurs between human systems in conventional interaction is supported by Bateson's (1979) idea of an 'ecology of minds' or 'ecology of ideas' meaning that there is no objective reality only a constantly evolving mutual reality between human systems.

Constructivism as philosophy, influenced by the thinking of Kant, is supportive of the idea of subjective experiential knowledge as explained by Von Glasserfeld (1984: 20) by way of example:

'The metaphysical realist looks for knowledge that matches reality in the same sense as you might look for paint to match the colour that is already on the wall you have to repair ... If on the other hand we say something "fits", we have in mind a different relation. A key fits if it opens the lock. The fit describes a capacity of the key, not of the lock. Thanks to the professional burglars we know only too well that there are many keys that are shaped quite differently from our own but which nevertheless unlock our doors.'

By implication the following can be said:

- in language humans create the world they know;

- social organization is the product of social communication; including:
 - a problem-organizing system, which exists between those who are in active linguistic coupling;
 - a diversity of meanings constantly evolve in ongoing dialogical interaction between human systems;
 - the environment or medium within which a human system functions is referred to as that system's perceived environment ('Umwelt') or, environment in language.

2.3 Mental health as an ecological idea

Based on the assumptions central to an ecological epistemology health is viewed in terms of the wholeness of relationship systems, that is, healthy ecological systems are an indication about that whole ecological relationship network and the way in which the individual parts are 'harmoniously' connected to the whole. (Keeney and Sprenkle 1982)

In the absence of harmony the terms 'misfit', 'incongruence', 'ejection' and 'lack of synchrony' are used to refer to the imbalance between interacting parts in a system. The outcome of such an imbalance is referred to as pathology, ill-health or stress within that system.

Keeney (1983: 126) refers to health in an human ecosystem as:

'... a vital balance of diverse forms of experience and behaviour.'

This balance is termed 'ecological climax' and is characteristic of human systems that facilitate and compensate the connection and autonomy of a diverse range of kinds of interaction.

Whitaker in Keeney and Sprenkle (1982: 10) explains this idea of health as a

'... creative tension between individuation and belongingness.'

This implies that an individual needs to experience both the 'we-ness' that comes from a sense of belonging and being harmoniously connected to the whole system of which he/she is a part and individuation, or a sense of 'self' which allows the person the freedom to alter the role he/she fulfils in that system.

In summary, healthy individuals and human systems can be described as:

- able to escape dichotomous descriptions; and
- able to integrate diverse interactions to form
- a whole unity, that fluctuates between;
- experiencing separateness and togetherness.

The three concepts autonomy (sense of self), diversity (sense of we-ness) and sense of community (ecology) are described as ways of viewing mental health as an ecological idea.

2.3.1 Autonomy

Individuality is determined by a person's structure and those feedback processes which operate to maintain the wholeness of individuality.

Adaptation is the structurally determined capacity of an individual to adapt or not adapt to the perturbations arising from interactions between the individual and the context within which he/she functions.

Individual competence refers to the capacity of the individual to adapt to demands exerted on him/her arising from the context within which he/she functions.

When incongruence, misfit or ejection of a system (eg. the individual) from its context (eg. work environment) occurs a discrepancy between the demands and resources of the environment and the abilities and needs of the individual can be described. (Ross 1993 and Jeger and Slotnick 1982)

Bloom (1984: 158) says the following on adaptation of the individual necessary to deal with these discrepancies:

'Because the world never presents itself in a fashion that is perfectly suited to our needs, we either have to attempt to change some portion of that world, or change ourselves to fit within it. It is important to note that our adaptations may take many forms, from defensive struggle to creative leaps that may lead to changes in the world itself.'

According to White in Jeger and Slotnick (1982: 28) competence and adaptation refers to 'the ability of individuals to influence their environments' and 'is a constant striving toward a balance between total triumph and total surrender to the environment.'

According to these approaches people are viewed as resourceful and problems are seen as opportunities for competence development.

Competent adaptive behaviour requires the following:

- individual autonomy that permits freedom of self expression and originality in solving daily problems; and
- a continuous process to achieve the fit between the individual and the environment.

An environment that acknowledges autonomous adaptive behaviour values the usefulness of diverse differences between individuals.

2.3.2 Diversity

A view of individual autonomy as part of an interacting ecosystem requires an inclusive view of a diverse range of individual behaviours and interpretations as connected to the whole context.

Bateson in Keeney and Sprenkle (1982: 10) states the following:

'... the relation between an individual and the larger system of which he is a part, must necessarily be complementary, or the ecology will suffer innumerable offences.'

A complementary person-environment relationship is characterized by the following:

- 'individual characteristics "make whole" or complement the characteristics of the environment.' (Muchinsky 1987: 267)
- 'the actions or characteristics of the individual are different but mutually fit those of the environment.' (Keeney 1983: 39)

In contrast to complementary interactions, symmetric person-environment interaction is characterized by:

- competition and sameness; and
- the idea that individual interests will be 'supplemented by a given environment'; and (Muchinsky 1987: 268)
- escalating sameness, that is the 'maximization or minimization of any particular characteristic, which creates polarization and imbalance and can be defined as pathology.' (Keeney 1983: 126)

In summary, Walsh et al (1992: 43) states the following regarding person-environment congruence or what has previously been referred to as 'ecological climax' or 'the harmonious connections' between individual parts to the whole:

'Complementary person-environment links are viewed as being reinforcing and satisfactory. Uncomplimentary person-environment links are thought to be punishing and contributing to change ... This is not to say that congruence is good and incongruence is bad, but it suggests that a state of incongruence may be part of the learning and developmental process.'

Complementary person-environment links value individual differences as the resourcefulness of the ecological relationship system and evokes a sense of belonging or 'we-ness' where individual investments are respected.

According to McMillan and Chavis (1986) environments that are competent in promoting a sense of belongingness see problems as a 'community responsibility' thereby creating a shared sense of community.

2.3.3 Sense of community

In an ecological relationship system where a diverse range of individual parts are harmoniously connected to the whole creating a dependable structure a sense of co-operation and partnership can be defined.

McMillan and Chavis (1986: 9) view a shared sense of community as 'that shared faith that members needs will be met through their commitment to be together.'

For Greef (1994: 7) the extent to which people are actively involved in planning, decision making and problem solving concerning work that should be done, is an expression of their 'collaborative partnership'. Collaboration between people encourages commitment to a common bond (sense of we-ness) and freedom of creative self-expression (sense of self).

The following assumptions on a balanced ecological relationship system, where individual autonomy and a sense of belonging and connection to the whole system are coherent with each other, are described by McMillan and Chavis (1986) within four elements, as:

- Membership which is the feeling or belonging or of sharing a sense of personal relatedness;
- Influence which is a sense of mattering, of making a difference to a group and the group mattering to its members;
- Reinforcement which is the integration of resources received through the individuals membership in the group for the fulfilment of needs;
- Shared emotional connection refers to the commitment and belief that members have shared and will share history, common places, time together and similar experiences.

2.4 Ecology within an organization

Mink et al (1994: 31) views the organization as '... an energy exchange system comprised of interdependent components. Interdependence is the hallmark of our universe: it does not matter where within the pond a rock is dropped, its very presence will cause ripples across the entire surface.'

Implicit in this idea are the ideas expressed by Maturana (1975); Dell (1985); Bateson (1979) and Keeney (1983) on living systems as communicating and interacting parts to form a closed ecological relationship system.

The nine window framework presented by Mink et al (1994) provides a way to conceptualize interrelationships in an organization and is described with reference to the following diagrammatical representation:

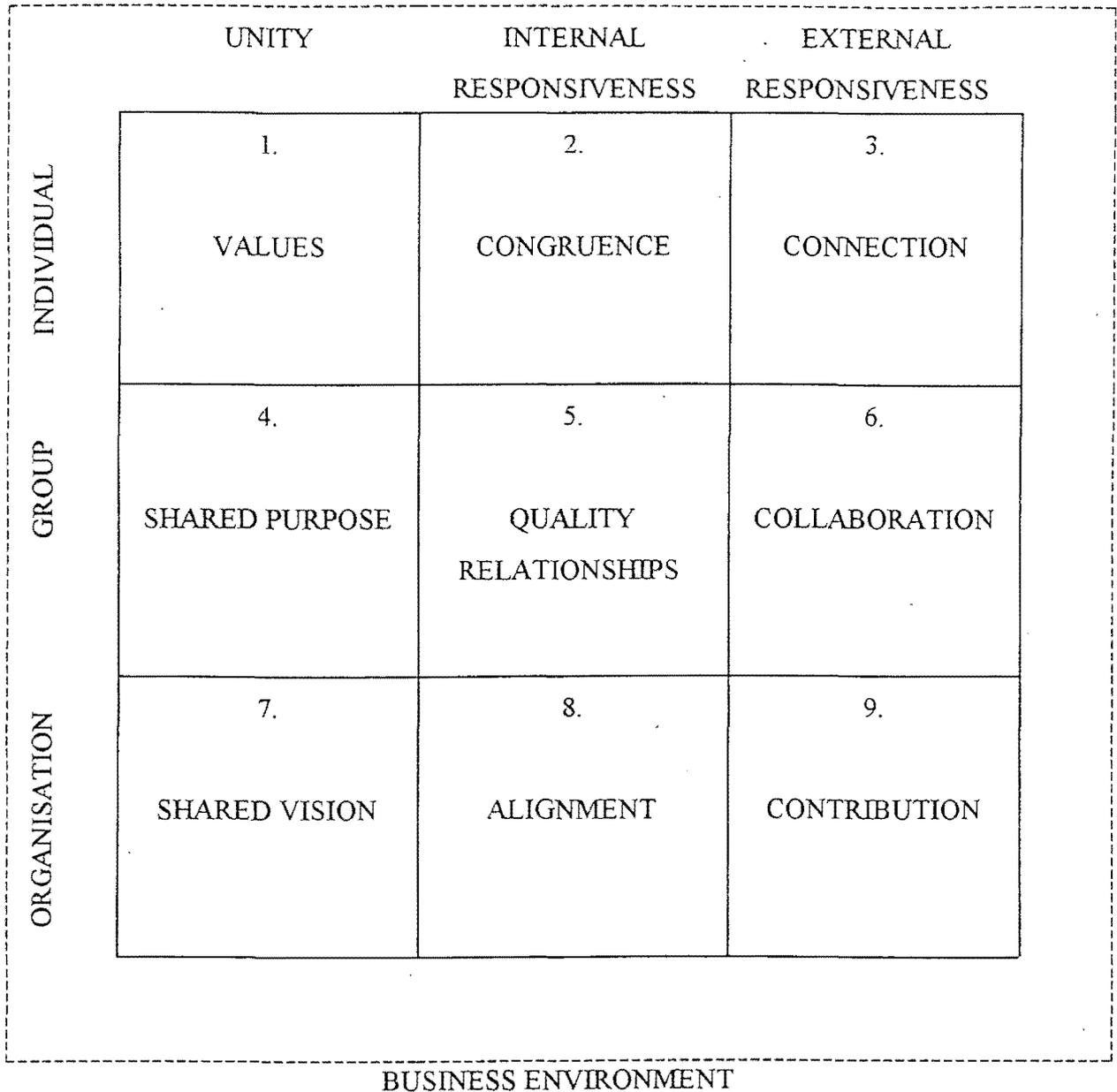


Figure 1: The Open Organization Model (Mink et al, 1994)

The model views an organization as a system composed of subsystems located within a larger environment. Continual exchange of information and energy between the various components of a system is affected by the openness or rigidity of the boundaries between the components. Mink et al (1994: 18) refer to boundaries as the 'responsiveness or unresponsiveness of the components to receiving input and giving output to each other.' The nine windows in the model (Mink et al 1994) are viewed as interacting and interdependent components.

This study refers to the interconnectedness of human systems as linguistic connectedness to form a domain of shared meaning. The social organization of a system is viewed as a product of the social communication within that system. 'Openness' or 'closedness' between components is viewed in this study as a matter of 'compensation' or 'non-compensation' between those components and is reflected in the meanings that constantly evolve in ongoing dialogical interaction and adaptation.

The model draws on the three principles of unity, internal responsiveness and external responsiveness and are discussed at three levels namely: the individual, the group and the organization along with the researcher's integration of ecological assumptions, as follows:

- (a) Unity refers to integrated wholeness, coherence, or centredness and promotes consistent, purposive, unifying and self-organizing behaviour.

This study describes the wholeness of a system as maintained by that systems self-regulating or autonomous behaviour.

- (b) Internal responsiveness refers to the ability of component parts to align and work together toward a common purpose, responding to each other rather than being fragmented. Such collaboration involves generosity and sacrifice as opposed to competitiveness between people.

This study refers to the ability of a system's diverse parts to collaborate with each other as the 'balance of diversity' where individual differences are the resourcefulness of the relationship system.

- (c) External responsiveness in an organization comes from the continuous interchange of activities, data and energy with other systems it serves or depends upon.

This study refers to interdependence of systems within systems or the context within which they exist as the transcending of selfish individualism and irresponsible group interest to a sense of shared community responsibility where the actions of a system mutually fit the larger system of which it is a part.

- (d) This study describes the individual as the 'gesellschaft' where individual interests and needs take priority over the welfare of the collectivity.

This study refers to individual autonomy as a 'sense of self'.

- (e) The group is referred to in this study as 'the gemeinschaft' where the development of loyalty and belongingness dominate over individual capacity.

This study views a sense of we-ness or shared domain of meaning as characterising the way in which the components in a system interact to form an interlocked closed system.

- (f) The organization in this study is referred to as the 'sense of ecology' which is characteristic of systems that facilitate the connection and autonomy of a diverse range of kinds of experience, behaviour and interaction.

By integrating the assumptions of an ecological view on mental health already discussed in this chapter, the following descriptions, based on the work of Mink et al (1994), are proposed by the researcher:

	AUTONOMY	DIVERSITY	SENSE OF COMMUNITY
SENSE OF SELF	1. VALUES	2. CONGRUENCE	3. CONNECTION
SENSE OF WE-NESS	4. SHARED PURPOSE	5. QUALITY RELATIONSHIPS	6. COLLABORATION
ECOLOGY	7. SHARED VISION	8. ALIGNMENT	9. CONTRIBUTION

BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

Figure 2: The Ecology of Organizational Interrelationships

Each of the nine windows in Figure 2 are described as follows:

Window 1 refers to the identity of the individual and their 'values' which form the basis for the person to understand his/her behaviour and provides a context from which to make decisions and decide on what is worth living for.

Window 2 refers to one's wants and needs and the permission to act on them. Being congruent about these means being able to match opportunity with your desires, interests and goals.

Window 3 refers to individuals interacting with others to produce mutually beneficial results, searching for new frames or references; being open to others ideas and experiences involves transforming experiences which involves interconnection. This implies knowing your role and how it fits into the bigger organizational picture; it requires the capacity to sense what is happening, interpret its meaning and adapt, check out your adjustment and adapt again.

Window 4 refers to group purpose and group character and enables collaborative action. Shared purpose binds people together and enhances commitment and meaning and provides a common map and can only emerge if individual values fit the group values.

Window 5 refers to members awareness of each other and the ability to support each other, provide useful feedback and develop quality relationships providing the context to meet needs for influence, belonging and competence. The quality of team relationships also reflects how individual differences are accommodated, whether relationships are complementary or symmetrical.

Window 6 refers to cooperative interaction with members and other groups to optimize problem solving by using a shared information base. Collaboration

involves the capacity to identify needs (of self and others) and learn about continuous improvement.

Window 7 refers to shared values, vision and goals and helps clarify the organizations strategic needs. Senge (1990: 274) quotes, 'without a genuine sense of common vision and values there is nothing to motivate people beyond self interest.'

Window 8 refers to alignment which involves members understanding how various roles and systems in an organization interact and are dependent on each contributing to the whole and requiring mutual adjustments.

Window 9 refers to the gathering of information from stakeholders/customers and planning accordingly. Contribution is the purpose of an organization to provide products and/or services. Work force skill influences an organizations ability to respond to opportunities.

The above descriptions of each of the nine windows are summarised in the researcher's proposed graphic presentation of Figure 3 as follows:

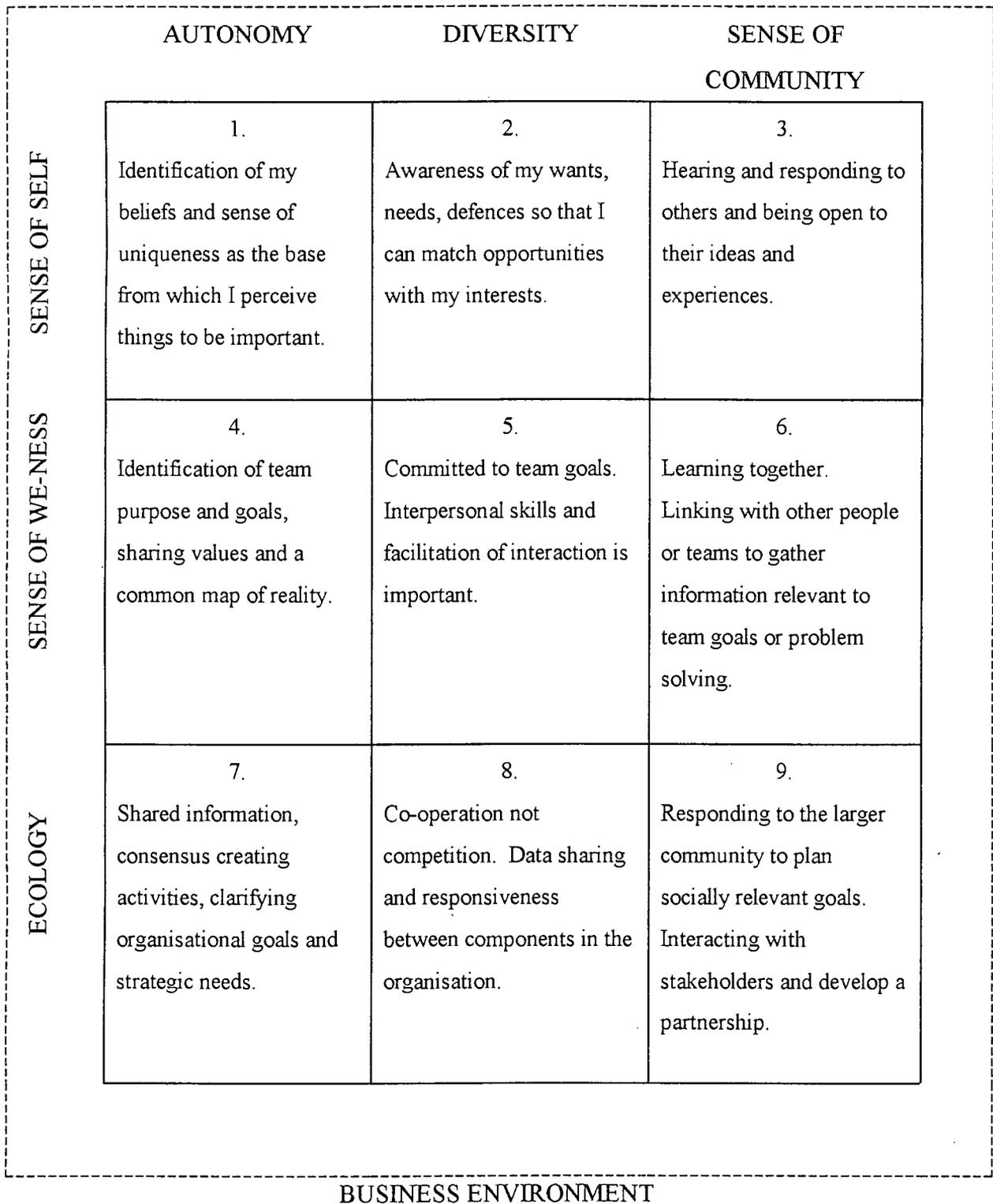


Figure 3: The ecology of the nine window interrelationships

In summary: Figures 1, 2 and 3 demonstrate the researcher's proposed integration of the concepts of Mink et al (1994) and the assumptions central to an ecological view on mental health and show how the interconnectedness between a sense of individuation (that is, autonomy and sense of 'self') and a sense of belongingness (that is, diversity and sense of 'we-ness') is developed to create a double view of both levels to form a more holistic view of an ecological relationship system (that is, sense of ecology and sense of community).

2.5 Summary

Assumptions central to an ecological epistemology create a framework within which to view human interaction. Within this understanding descriptions of mental health are more concerned with the interconnectedness between human systems in an enhancing and harmonious way to create an ecology of interconnections, than with the needs of an individual or the welfare of a certain community.

Within this reciprocal balance between the demands and resources of the individual and that of the context within which he/she exists a functional sense of congruence or a sense of community is created.

The interconnectedness between the levels of systems within an organizational system can be viewed in the same way and is demonstrated in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3

AN ECOLOGICAL DESCRIPTION OF MENTAL HEALTH IN SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE: EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

3.1 Introduction

This chapter is the researcher's subjective description of the perceived ecological relationship system within a certain welfare organization. The descriptions made in this chapter are a reflection of the epistemology of the researcher and the congruence in the researcher- environment relationship.

The goal of this chapter is to illustrate that the interrelationships in an organization can be viewed as an ecological relationship system thereby creating a framework for describing mental health in social work practice.

This chapter includes a brief description of the background of the organization, an explanation of the research process and illustrations of how the different themes discussed in chapter two are used to describe the ecology of the organizational interrelationships.

3.2 Background of the organization

The researcher is of the opinion that with the inception of the new democratic government on 27 April 1994 and the accompanying policy changes introduced into civil society by the government of the day, the social work profession in the new South Africa has had to face many challenges to adapt to in order to remain a relevant service provider in accordance with such changes.

The social workers interviewed in this study were all employed by a church welfare organization based in the province of Gauteng and working in the field of child and family care.

Two of the primary changes to be made in the field of child and family care by all welfare organizations in the country were expressed by the then known Department of Welfare during early 1995 and emphasised the following:

- government funding to welfare organizations (both state and para-statal) would be re-distributed to organizations whose services respected the principals of the reconstruction and development programme (a welfare policy framework introduced by the government of the day); and
- certain areas that were over catered for in terms of social work manpower would be restructured so as to ensure social work services were more evenly distributed.

By implication, the concerned organization needed to develop service strategies that met both criteria in order to secure its government subsidised social work posts. Simultaneously, various adjustments in the concerned church to its new political arena challenged the organization in finding a suitable strategy in accordance with church policy. The final strategy adopted by the organization would need to reflect both state and church principals as both were funding the welfare services of this organization.

At the time of this research numerous negotiations were in process between government, welfare, church and non-governmental stakeholders concerning their role and function as the welfare kaleidoscope was re-positioning itself. In relation to this 'business environment' (Mink et al 1994) the concerned organization was redefining its social relevance as welfare service provider.

3.3 Application of the research method

Interviews were conducted with 18 social work employees in a certain welfare organization. All social workers were based in Gauteng although this did not constitute the entire quorum of social workers employed by the agency. This selection was purposive as all 18 employees were functionally in relationship with each other and they

all concerned themselves with child and family care services in the province of Gauteng. The employees were based at 5 different offices in the province which were responsible for the programme planning thereof to secure funding and thereby each employee's job for the following year.

Eighteen single interviews of approximately 90 minutes were conducted with each employee using a semi-structured interview schedule to guide the researcher's conversation with employees. The audio-recordings from these interviews were transcribed so that selected responses in which the themes identified in chapter two were reflected could be extracted. This process of data analysis took place after all interviews were conducted and not during the whole data collection period. A variety of descriptions from all respondents (social work employees) were identified and used to describe the social worker-in-work context relationship as a way of constructing a perspective on the ecology of organizational interrelationships or mental health in social work practice.

3.3.1 Diagrammatical explanation of the semi-structured interview schedule

Figure 4 below illustrates how the questions that were used reflect on the themes discussed in chapter two as a way of describing the social worker-in-work context relationship as follows:

	AUTONOMY	DIVERSITY	SENSE OF COMMUNITY
SENSE OF SELF	1. Is this change in line with what you value, plan, aspire to do?	2. Can you be open to others in your life about what you really want to do? Do you see opportunity for yourself here?	3. What is your role in this agency? Is it still needed and how does it affect others?
SENSE OF WE-NESS	4. Do you feel other people in your life share your values/vision?	5. Are your plans/ideas/needs encouraged and respected? How could you compensate/adapt to others suggestions?	6. How do you let other people know what you need? How do you solve problems together with others?
ECOLOGY	7. Is the organisation's vision clear or unclear and real or unattainable to you?	8. If you had to co-write the strategy and vision of this agency what would you propose?	9. What contribution could you make at this time to the life of this organisation?

BUSINESS ENVIRONMENT

Figure 4: A summarised explanation of the semi-structured interview schedule in relation to the ecology of organizational interrelationships

Appendix 1 gives a detailed outline of the semi-structured interview schedule. All questions focused on the respondents reaction to the organization's choice to reposition its service strategy to emphasise community development as a way of adapting to the changes within the social work profession in South Africa at the time.

3.4 General observations

Out of the 18 interviews conducted two of the audio-recordings were damaged and the dialogue was lost. The data analysis consists of extracts from 16 interviews. Seven respondents were in middle or top management positions and nine respondents in general social work practice. All respondents were qualified social workers. For ease of reference all respondents are referred to as female although both male and female employees were interviewed.

Some general observations are made by way of clarification and description as follows:

3.4.1 Years of working experience

- * Two of the respondents were new employees with a few months of social work experience.
- * Seven of the respondents had 2 - 5 years of social work experience.
- * Four of the respondents had 6 - 10 years of social work experience.
- * Five of the respondents had more than 10 years of social work experience.

By implication, the weight of experience in social work practice is evenly distributed among respondents both above and below five years of work experience illustrating an even spread of skills distributed among those whose

knowledge is drawn from new university trends and those whose knowledge is pragmatic.

3.4.2 Years employed by the organization

- * 50% of the respondents were employed between a few months and three years.
- * 25% of the respondents were employed between 3 years and 5 months and 5 years.
- * 25% of the respondents were employed for more than five years.

By implication, half of the social work employees were not long standing employees of the organization which could imply less opportunity for these employees to find a fit between themselves and the rest of the organization.

3.4.3 Personal trauma experienced

72% of the respondents experienced some form of personal trauma during the last two years, dating back from the time of the research process in the following categories:

- * Death of a family member or close friend
- * Motor vehicle accidents
- * Spouse loses job
- * Marital stress
- * Family members illness
- * House break-in
- * Immigration plans failed
- * Infertility

Other personal adaptations

67% of the respondents had to cope with serious illness or maternity during the last two years.

By implication, the majority of respondents were using both emotional and social support systems to capacity in order to adapt to both personal and work stress. Ongoing stress and demand to adapt to a consistently changing environment could facilitate a strong quest to stabilise one's environment by conserving one's sense of autonomy.

3.4.4 Anxiety experienced due to potential threat of unemployment

40% of the respondents mentioned that they were willing to accommodate any changes irrespective as to whether it was not coherent with their personal life goals so as to secure their financial income.

By implication, the researcher was interested in what experience facilitated these respondents coping with the ambivalence of having to work yet not feeling coherent with the work environment and what effect this had on other colleagues.

3.4.5 Suspicious of research process

28% of respondents questioned the research process and were mostly concerned about the confidentiality of the interviews.

By implication, the majority of the respondents interviewed did not express any reservations about the research process and were either comfortable with the process or did not have the freedom to clarify their uncertainties with the researcher. As was discussed under the limitations of this study the researcher is aware that any descriptions made by an observer are always part of a more

encompassing ecology and that this study can only ever be a punctuation of this ecology of descriptions.

3.5 The nine windows of organizational interrelationships

Descriptions of the social worker-in-work place ecology of relationships are illustrated by way of the following nine themes or windows, each commenting on the perceived autonomy, diversity or sense of community mutually constructed within the researcher-respondent dialogue.

The following key is used in the dialogue:

R = Researcher

Number = Indicates the respondent who was allocated a number by the researcher to record the data.

3.5.1 Window 1: Autonomy and sense of self

The following descriptions illustrate each respondents perception of how his/her sense of uniqueness or self-structure is confronted by various changes in the perceived environment and contributes to that persons efforts at conserving his/her autonomy.

R: Do you feel you want to stay here and that its worth the struggle to try and make sure there is a place for you?

1: Yes, I'd like to unless I could create my own work.

R: What makes you say that?

1: Because here we are dependent on the state.

R: So what you are told to do you have to do?

I: Yes, so I won't leave unless I have other work. I'm a career woman so I don't want to stay at home and I also won't let them kick me out.

R: Has your vision for social work always been in line with the organization's vision?

I: No, I think it has happened over time; people talk and there are rumours and then one day we were told to begin to do community work immediately and drop doing case work. One day you hear this is a fact and the next day it's just a rumour so, after a while you realise you shouldn't take what people say seriously. So I told myself not to panic. The message they gave us is so confusing they can't expect me to do what they say because tomorrow they change their minds. Initially I began to organise my day and week accordingly then gave up because the plan changed so much so I decided to continue doing my own thing.

Comment: The respondent expresses a sense of autonomy in the choice to stay dependent on a state-funded employer over and above being involved in creating self-employment or staying at home. Amidst this choice it appears that the respondent organises daily working activities according to her own autonomous agenda and not to that of the tentative change towards the practice of community development. Her choice would possibly be more coherent with that of self-employment yet conserves her need to do her 'own thing'.

R: Are you involved and enjoying being involved in community work?

I: Yes, I don't like sitting in the office the whole day. I'm still in an initial phase, building trust in the community.

R: What is it about social work that makes you want to be in the profession?

4: I'm a person who wants to help others, I have a desire and need to put my own needs aside to help others. As a social worker that desire can be fulfilled.

Comment The respondent appears to find fit with both the action surrounding the practice of community development and a need to pay more attention to others needs than her own.

R: Where would you like to be as a therapist.

3: It is difficult for me to jump up and down between methods.

R: Is it practical to combine the two, case work and development?

3: I am a therapist in heart and soul so I feel I have to balance on two chairs at the moment.

R: Yes, in the past I learned these methods as two separate techniques, not as a holistic approach.

3: Yes, the whole social work approach has changed. I drive to work and don't know what to do or how to do.

R: Does this require more than skill from us but a different attitude?

3: I go into the community and come back realizing how spoiled I am, it is such a separate world out there, so different from what I know; for one person to integrate both worlds. I don't know?

R: It's a real adjustment to move between two realities and drastic differences - it demands different things from you as a person. So the conversation you're having with yourself says it doesn't matter where I am in the country or which organization I work for I'll have to go through the same adjustments. ... all these new ideas. Can you bind yourself to where the profession is going or do you feel fragmented.

3: I left the profession once and when I returned I knew I belonged here irrespective of the salary. It must fulfill some need in us - we keep giving like masochists!

R: Perhaps the fact that there still is opportunity to give must keep us going.

3: At least you can go home at night knowing you've done something worthwhile and there are people who are successful as developers.

Comment: The respondent seems to be attempting to integrate the two worlds of being a therapist and a community developer; the one world represents her 'heart and soul' the other reflects a world so 'different' to what she knows and yet knowing that she can still be of value in that world. Perhaps not wanting to leave the social work profession again contributes to her search, although a difficult one, for a place where she can be of value.

R: What were your original ideas which were not approved of and disappointed you?

7: I'm not really interested in community work. I like organizing things though but I prefer individual work which doesn't fit in with the organization anymore. To do community work isn't even an option

anymore. I just don't feel safe and I'm tired of this thing of having to negotiate for your own post. Why should I?

R: What do you feel are unacceptable limitations within this work structure that you can't be yourself here?

7: I feel things are very vague. Management that says one thing and does another, they aren't involved with your work. I don't feel supported at all.

R: Supported in that you aren't noticed?

7: All that's noticed is what you don't do. There are no incentives, not financially, not from clients, not from management, not from colleagues.

R: Yes, and not everything you dream about will become a reality. In the past things you've planned have worked out for you ?

7: I think it has to do with all the changes in South Africa now. I battle to keep up with all of this. I get worried about next year if I look at this year and all that has changed. I feel unsafe.

R: What acknowledgment do you give yourself then by way of survival?

7: Well, I see my work as a service. As a way of tithing, just to mean something.

R: Do you feel that the past years have been a waste?

7: Yes, although everyone reminds me of all the things I've learnt and the experience I've gained. If I could chose a career again I will but I really have learnt a lot.

R: A lot of new skills which you could use anywhere?

7: Social work has a hold on you. I don't know what it is.

R: A person's identity fits with it may be? I wonder what the connection is? If I'm not a social worker then what am I?

7: It's the only place you feel comfortable and you know you can do it.

Comment: The respondent expresses a need for support and incentives in her work. Her personal incentives are to tithe her time by way of service to the church and that she feels comfortable and competent within the profession. A sense of unsafety amidst rapid change in South Africa appears to confront her sense of safety by reminding her of all that she is 'not doing' and possibly not comfortable, safe and competent in doing.

R: You've really identified with the organization's policy all these years. Even with the changes, you made the adjustments to them and it fitted with you. Somewhere is all came unstuck. The fact that these changes now are about your security, what are the implications?

6: I think in October 1995 after various meetings, I realised how serious management was that our office moves. I realised I needed to resign. There was no escape. I can't drive so far to a new office every day and I can't sit in a black area permanently.

R: Do you feel you have sacrificed too much and were hoping for some kind of remuneration or incentive?

6: I don't think I hoped for it, I thought it was my right. This was the shock and is the hard reality that an organization, any organization, will not care for your interests. It's about its own profit, its own survival and they won't

give you any compensation. I've been loyal to them but they're not loyal to you. So the conclusion is, don't be loyal to any organization they only take what they can get. I'm not supported anyway. The worst reality for me has been to realise that I'm on my own. I've been told by management, 'every man for himself. Don't wait for me to look after you'.

Comment: The respondent views certain practical issues as contradictory to her view of the context in which she would like to practice social work. The realisation that her limitations and expectations are in conflict with organizational changes is a stark realisation and is framed by her as the selfish survival and disloyalty of the organization implying her sense of unwanted independence. It appears that her need for loyalty would illustrate her sense of autonomy which is being confronted. Being on her own is her perception of the confrontation.

R: What keeps you here?

14: Its a spiritual thing. I've prayed and I'm convinced this is the right place for me.

Comment: The respondents sense of spirituality and definition of the work place as a spiritual place is congruent.

R: Your future scenario?

16: It's confidential. There are many options to me.

R: Is that an incentive?

16: Yes and that I know my work is valuable and sustainable.

Comment: The respondent sees opportunity for and value in work contributions as an illustration of a sense of individuality and uniqueness. The work context is perceived as coherent with that sense of self.

R: The policy changes in the organization to do development, what do you feel about this?

11: I'll have to learn a lot. It's a brand new thing for me. I'm prepared to learn. I'd prefer to practice only one method. To do case work and community work together is too much. It's too diverse.

Comment: The respondent expresses a need to learn and a need to consolidate diverse approaches which are apparently perceived as possible within the community development approach being pursued by the organization.

R: What do you visualise yourself doing as a social worker?

12: I think there is enough room here to do whatever you visualize. I can present my ideas on paper for any project I would like to do.

Comment: The respondent expresses a sense of being accommodated and the freedom to design any project within the work context as a way of exercising her autonomy.

R: Your initial response to the organization's policy changes?

13: I think its something that has come a long way. You have to be very honest with yourself though. I think social work in South Africa is changing radically and you can't ignore it. You have to get involved. I feel a bit stuck within the limits of my job description. I feel I need more freedom to do the type of work I think is appropriate.

R: **You don't want to be limited.**

13: Yes, we all know we have to get involved somewhere.

R: **Three things; creativity, freedom and opportunities - are these specific needs you have?**

13: Yes, to create something that fits with me, where I decide what and know that it will make a significant contribution to people's lives.

R: **Is that amount of control not a scary thing for you?**

13: No, it's not about control its about being independent.

Comment: The respondent identifies with the opportunities in the work context for her to work independently and with significance which apparently describe her individuality.

R: **What is it about development that you don't like?**

8: The masses of people and being so public; having to address so many people at the same time.

R: **So your ideas about social work are not of such a nature that you will pursue them?**

8: No, I really will go and do something else. May be I need a break. The tiredness I experience here I take home and that's bad. I get irritated with my husband.

R: **I suppose you're under a lot of pressure to define where you're going with your life.**

8: Yes, and I want to be a responsible mother as well. My baby really makes me think about what I'm doing with my life.

R: **Are you busy excavating new things in yourself for the sake of your survival?**

8: It has a lot to do with my baby - its a new life phase. Work issues just make it more tense.

R: **You're juggling with two identities - being a mother and re-defining who you are as a social worker.**

8: It's tough. I'm living in two worlds.

Comment: The respondents perspective on what development entails is contrary to her view on how she likes to work as a social worker. None the less her emerging sense of self as a mother appears to be challenging her sense of self as a professional and the direction which her life could take on. Her quest is for rest which is contrary to the dynamic picture about development she illustrates.

R: **Its' been an enriching change then?**

9: I can't say I know much about community work. But I like the feeling about it and the principles its based on.

R: **Does this fit with the principles by which you live your life?**

9: I think the principles of community development have influenced my personal life, more than my life fitting with the principles of community development.

R: **Like what?**

9: I think I'm quite a rigid person. I think I've had the mentality that I'm always right and everything I believe in is right and that's where I grew disillusioned. I realised I'm not always right. The process of community development is one in which, 'I learn from you'.

R: **Co-learning?**

9: Yes, and I have to be open to other peoples' views and the way they think and do things. It's enriching. I've not resisted it. It's made me a more open person in my personal life.

Comment: The respondent describes her sense of self as being enriched by being involved in the process of community development.

R: **People's visions don't really connect. People's perceptions about change don't necessarily connect?**

15: Yes, sometimes people hang on to things, for the sake of tradition despite the fact that they're dysfunctional.

Comment: The respondent perceives other colleagues who need to maintain tradition as a way of conserving their autonomy and familiar values as dysfunctional.

R: **What's your life goal? What's your identity as a social worker? What are you aligning yourself with?**

10: I don't really see myself as a social worker because the role of a social worker has changed. I don't think we're therapists anymore.

R: **What do you think we are?**

10: Uplifters or educators ... if you want to make a difference. I still see myself as a therapist ... that's what I do best.

R: **Do you know exactly what it is you want to do?**

10: I think I've managed to sort out what I'm interested in and now I'm involved in equipping myself. Why I'm sticking with the agency is for financial stability. If you work because you want to not because you have to then you're not scared to venture out and to be aggressive about it.

R: **So you hold back to be able to conserve what you have?**

10: I think very few social workers have a calling - things have changed so drastically.

R: **Because the context has changed its affected their calling?**

10: Are you called to serve black people or white people?

R: **What context are you called to? Do you hear others ask this?**

10: No, but it's what I'm asking. Its easier to love your own skin colour, I think.

Comment: The respondent views herself within the parameters of therapy. Any social work task outside of that is in contradiction with her sense of self. The challenges within the work environment which bring her into relationship with people of another culture are described by her as confronting to her sense of spiritual purpose or spiritual self.

3.5.2 Window 2: Diversity and sense of self

This window illustrates the individual respondents perception of whether he/she experiences a sense of coherence in the social worker-in-work context relationship, that is the reciprocal adaptations between the autonomy of the individual and the medium in which he/she exists. The descriptions given illustrate a diverse range of individual perceptions whether there is opportunity to fit or not to fit with the work environment.

R: If you have any hassles who do you go to?

16: The hassles I've got no one has answers for.

R: What happens to your vision? Do you just have to keep the fire burning on your own?

16: I think my idea fits in with what communities want and the vision of management. I think we need to train communities to do things for themselves.

R: Do you feel that you're compromising on your vision in any way?

16: Yes, you may lose your job if you say too much.

R: I guess there may be conflicting interests between the needs in your social network and those in your work network? Conflicting interests create a stuckness. People can't afford to lose their jobs so they end up compromising on their actual idea of what they want to be doing.

Comment: The respondent views her ideas about community development as consistent with that of the management of the organization, yet the problems she experiences are unanswered and preferably kept unspoken

as they may result in unemployment. It seems apparent that these 'hassles' confront the autonomy of the work context and are perceived by the respondent as toxic and remain unaccommodated.

R: Do you think people are watching you for direction?

13: No, I think everyone has to internalise their own process. You can't do it by watching someone.

Comment: The respondent describes her processes of adaptation to a changing work context as personal and independent of others. Her expectation is that others follow the same course thereby excluding alternative processes for the facilitation of change.

R: You sound quite satisfied with the place you're at. What are the losses?

12: It's going to be difficult to do less case work. I've been doing it for four years so I'll miss it.

R: Should you discover that you don't want to be here any more what will you do?

12: It's a bit scary for me. If there's nothing else to do what then? Social workers can't do anything else anyway. In the beginning I was so afraid I would be depressed for days after our office meetings. Please don't tell anyone. It was really bad. I think you have to learn to believe in yourself and to say you can handle things. I had to tell myself to calm down. My work is my bread and butter and I'll just have to learn how to do this.

Comment: The respondent describes her work context as void of opportunity when she reviews her skills. The experience of perceiving her work context as a financial provider creates a point of connection for her where learning to do something new is described in 'bread and butter' terms and creates a sense of coherence.

R: Do others know about your vision and support you in this?

10: I don't think others know.

R: Do you chose not to inform them?

10: Yes, especially my colleagues. With other supervisors, we respect each other but don't really listen to each other. We all have such different needs. Management can't do much about my role - they still need a supervisor in this office no matter what, whether it's still what I see myself doing or not.

Comment: The respondent describes a fit between her role as supervisor and that of the need of the organization for a manager despite an unexpressed idea about what she would like to do. The ideas remain unexpressed within incoherent relationships where she experiences being ignored. Adaptation takes place on one level (the function of her role) and not that of another (interpersonal relationships).

R: Has it been possible to be congruent about what you believe in or have you felt isolated because you can't sacrifice what is important to you for the sake of fitting?

3: There are relationships I've had to withdraw from. I like people around me but its been heavy to be with people who don't have the same values.

R: In the withdrawal process, where did you go?

3: I think I went home to my husband although he doesn't always tolerate social work. I had to make these adjustments early in our marriage.

Comment: The respondent describes a lack of coherence in relationships where a diversity of values are experienced. She seeks out a personal relationship where a measure of coherence exists concerning her work.

R: Has anything specific happened to you recently that has discouraged you terribly about doing social work and being in this agency?

4: Yes, you have to make a lot of sacrifices like going to the community on Sundays and there are no incentives for doing this. I can't say being in a Christian organization makes me trust people. We also bring ourselves as human beings into our work. People behave in ways you don't expect.

Comment: A sense of misfit is described by the respondent as created by having to make unrewarded sacrifices to reach professional objectives and being in relationship with colleagues who behave contrary to her expectations.

R: It seems as if you've had to compromise a lot on your identity and what you believe in within certain relationships but that you've now had to clarify for yourself what your vision is because of this emphasis that you're on your own .

6: I think I've been confronted with surprising aspects about myself like having to stand up for my rights which was scary. I'd rather withdraw. My common sense is telling me it won't help to go and talk to management. I've had plans I've wanted to discuss but their attitude at meetings has been so negative.

Comment: The respondent's withdrawal from the perceived opportunity to 'stand up for her rights' in relation to management arises from her perception of a negative interpersonal environment. Her plans remain unexpressed.

R: So the adjustments you've been making in terms of your skills fit with what community development is all about?

9: Yes, because that which I thought I could mean to people I see that I can't. At least not within these prescribed procedures that we had to follow in case work.

R: Where did you become disillusioned?

9: I questioned my skills. I don't feel my university training prepared me sufficiently for the reality of social work. The policy, structures, rules and regulations within which we have to work mean nothing to our client's. It doesn't help them. It limits you to really help them. It's actually squashed me so much I don't want anything to do with it.

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R: So getting to know the technology and process of community development has assisted you to reposition your whole life, does this create a future scenario for you? It sounds as if you can't go back to what you had and that you can continue creating options for yourself with these new perceptions and values? Could these new ideas influence the way in which you do case work?

9: Yes, especially being free from the law. I feel free not being so rigid, walking around with blinkers on. I like boundaries and a job description. But I don't want to take responsibility for something that's not mine. I don't want to be held accountable for things that happen in peoples' lives that I have no control over. That pressure doesn't fit with who I am.

R: It gives you more control than you feel is necessary.

9: And I don't want to have so much control. It makes me anxious. People become resistant and I can't build a relationship with them.

R: It has an ambivalent affect on you that at times you'll fight for it and at other times you want to give it away because it's too much to handle.

9: It sounds ambivalent. Freedom implies that you are free to decide for yourself, free to dominate, free to take responsibility but on the other hand it makes me afraid. I want to be able to dominate in my own territory. Social work has given me freedom in places I haven't wanted to be.

Comment: The respondent articulates her sense of limitation in working within the legal prescriptions of case work which isolates her from relationship with clients due to their resistance to these very same legal prescriptions. She identifies with the freedom that she experiences in doing community work which releases her from a rigid approach to all people. Despite this sense of coherence the respondent expresses ambivalence as to how to deal with her new found freedom and whether to view it as an opportunity or threat. Her sense of self is struggling to adapt to a dichotomous or ambivalent context.

R: Did you reach a point where you asked yourself, 'what is my role, my work?'

8: I asked that often but didn't come up with any answers. I can't say what I'm doing anymore. I studied to be able to do what I want to do not to do what I'm supposed to be doing now.

R: **Within this ambivalence, you're not really seeing a place for yourself**

8: No. Community development is not me. Even though things should be negotiated I will still want to leave. It's just not me.

R: **What is 'you'? How would you describe yourself as a social worker?**

8: I enjoy case work and group work. I'd like to specialise later and feel I can do something well.

R: **Don't you feel that you're doing case work or group work well?**

8: No, I want to have a name as a specialist.

R: **If you have to be really honest and open about what you think, what do you think will happen?**

8: I think people have some different perceptions. I feel I've always been disqualified that my opinions were regarded as irrelevant and that people thought I was hiding away behind being a 'sissy'.

R: **So what did you do?**

8: I started speaking to only those who I know heard me, who I could stir up and who could stir me up.

R: **Did you ever think of doing anything radical to make yourself heard?**

8: That's not really my style. I'd rather go about doing things in silence.

R: Did you suffer this way?

8: Yes, it was tough. But at least ... (colleague) and I could get angry together.

R: What were you hoping for? What is the ideal situation?

8: An idea that came up during one of our meetings with head office. That some of us would do white work and black work in the city, and the rest to do community work in the township. I was happy with that.

R: Will you leave if this doesn't happen?

8: It's not really possible for us financially speaking. I can't be impulsive. I will seriously begin to look for work though. I don't know, I'm confused. It feels as if you just have to go along with the flow. The management are the boss and you don't have a choice no matter what you say. I've worked for four years and it seems I don't mean anything to them. You can't even negotiate about the four years you have worked here.

R: So nothing happens with your ideas? So what are the limits for you? Are the limits that management are announcing an important new policy and you are trying to fit your life plan in with this?

8: Well, it's actually 'just too bad about your own plans and ideas'. What they want is pursued even if it means we have to resign. Every man for himself.

R: Perhaps if every man was for himself one could negotiate for your own personal vision?

8: I don't think negotiating is relevant. You adapt or die.

R: Is it as autocratic as that?

8: Yes, I really feel that way. Negotiating is just about making one feel better. Wiping up your tears but nothing in effect happens. They pretend they hear you.

Comment: The respondent describes a polarised context as one to which she either adapts or vice versa. The process of feeling disqualified and unheard when expressing her opinions then responding by remaining silent appears to have left her with one perceived choice, that of ending the working relationship. The greater her perception of the rigidity in her environment the greater her decision to conserve her autonomy outside of the work place. The incongruence in this social worker-in-work context relationship is a mutually disqualifying one.

R: If you could negotiate for the ideal post what would it be?

7: Individual work, more specifically divorce mediation. I would like to arrange things like camps as part of community work.

R: Short projects? I think that's very creative. I guess we all have a need to be creative so if you can create a future for yourself then that's ideal.

7: I don't see a future for myself in this context. So I'm spending time trying to think up new ideas that will motivate me.

R: Have you ever communicated your ideas with others?

7: No, especially at this time, it will be inappropriate.

R: **What do you hear from others are the changes?**

7: To do community development which I don't fit with. I'm not comfortable to work with black people. There are many obstacles. You have to decide, do you fit or do you leave?

R: **Do you feel you can be honest about your feelings?**

7: You have to think before you speak. I tried to communicate but stopped after I felt no one was noticing me. I'm like that, I withdraw after a while.

R: **What actually happens when everyone gets together at office meetings?**

7: I've felt too angry for too long to want to get together with others. We haven't always felt the same.

R: **Different issues drive people to their limits at different times.**

7: Yes, my husband has often tried to persuade me to resign so I'm eventually doing it. My whole family have supported me in my decision ever since I came back from holiday.

R: **Everything in your life fits?**

7: When I began to look for work, my whole family started looking as well.

R: **There aren't many losses for you in this process?**

7: It's difficult. Last week was probably the worst time of my life. I had all these plans and suddenly they're not happening. I don't know if it was a shock. My work means a lot to me. I didn't study for four years for

nothing. Even though there have been a lot of negative things it still means a lot to me. Even having one person say thank you is enough. It's difficult for me to leave.

Comment: The potential loss of perceived value in this respondents work has evoked two responses from her, one to withdraw from relationships so as to conserve her ideas and two to create new scenarios for herself which she apparently perceives as coherent with her family network and as 'different' in her work context. She is congruent about her discomfort with doing community work and defines herself outside of this hence a lack of congruence exists in the social worker-in-work context relationship.

R: What opportunities do you see for yourself?

14: In the absence of a given structure and solutions this system allows and in fact demands creativity from us all. I think individuals here want to be told what to do . They don't want that freedom to create, to take the responsibility to think out things. I think people are totally passive.

R: What effect does this have on you?

14: I become aggressive. I can't believe people don't want to take responsibility for themselves and they keep transferring responsibility to management. I think this change process demands maximum participation from everyone. I think people will automatically be sifted out.

R: Yes, I hear a lot of people feeling that their work is meaningless. They don't see what contribution they can make to create value for themselves. People seem to be very unaccepting of each other's needs.

14: Sometimes I think its about a generation that expects and blames when they don't get what they want. I see it this way that should an individual decide he fits with the organization (policy, vision etc) then a logical result will be his commitment. The door is open to build relationship. Such a person has no need to defend himself. He can see other's needs and the relationship is healthy. He can decide what he wants to give. He is accountable for himself and has taken the responsibility for his own thoughts and feelings.

R: Do you find yourself becoming isolated as well as you try to reach out but find that everyone is so preoccupied with themselves?

14: Exactly. Despite this I still do what I know I should be doing and I believe that people can benefit from this. No one here supports me. I'm supported because of my own external resources.

Comment: The respondent expresses her perception of responsibility as an individuals decision on what personal contribution he/she can make to the work context within the parameters of his/her own values. Within these expectations the respondent defines her own contributions as responsible and consistent with her sense of self and the demands of the work context.

R: What you do feel you need to satisfy yourself in your life? What would make you feel free to work?

11: I like having structure to be able to know what I'm supposed to be doing. I also like having the scope to take initiative at times.

R: Is that possible for you here?

11: I think in development you do have that opportunity. I find case work too overwhelming. I'm used to case work although I feel I don't have enough experience in it and would like to do more counselling. There is however too little time and too many cases to really get involved. I feel I'd rather break away from it and do something new that I can train myself in and feel good at it.

R: Do your colleagues know that this is what you want? Can you be open about it?

11: I can't actually plan for it. We are dependent on higher structures to decide whether our case loads can be closed so that we have more time to do community work. We're still tied to an old structure.

R: Do you feel you have no influence in this process?

11: I suppose if you say you'll resign unless things change?

R: Are management aware of what you'd like?

11: I don't think I've been very direct about it. I accept that this is the way we'll work until they inform us. I believe they're busy trying to change it.

R: What will happen if these changes aren't implemented?

11: My position is a bit different. My health is not great. I'm sleeping very poorly. We're planning to leave the country. I don't know how this will work out. If I'm to begin negotiating it may not be for a very long time so I'm just carrying on with this at the moment.

Comment: *The respondent's expressed need to break away from a limiting form of practice to a form of practice she perceives as having potential to enhance her sense of self is inconsistent with other important areas of her life, namely her physical strength and potential departure. Her response to this is to bide time and conserve personal energy over and above responding to work context opportunities.*

R: **What would the possible advantages be should you initiate a getting together with colleagues because you don't know what to do?**

I: I don't know. I don't have any specific project that's mine to talk about.

R: **There isn't really opportunity for you and it would be nice to have such opportunity.**

I: I feel my potential is under utilised.

R: **That's sad. So advertise! Do they know about you and what you can do? Don't they hear you when you expose it?**

I: Who are 'they'?

R: **Who do you feel should take notice of you?**

I: Let me explain it like this. Firstly I feel I have reached a place in my career and my life where I don't need the recognition of my supervisor. I would like more financial recognition but I'm dependent on the state. I feel I have to make work enjoyable for myself. A person is limited by the organization and the state.

R: **So your whole perception of social work in a state funded agency is a limited one.**

I: Yes. Is that ambiguous?

R: The vision you have of social work is one where you are doing more than what you are at the moment, so to use a term someone else uses, that's your future scenario. Do you see possibilities on a practical level of how you can live that out or do you feel stuck because leaving the agency could be premature because you still see opportunities for yourself here? You're a bit curious.

I: I think promotion would be nice. But that's not an option. But there are other incentives within doing social work for example I enjoy placing children back with their biological parents. If I look back over the past 10 years and think I've been doing the same thing all the time I'm embarrassed and depressed. Our profession is like that though, isn't it?

Comment: The respondent describes her sense of self as congruent with a work context that provides incentives for her. She mentions a few and concludes that none are really sufficient in her present work context. She happens to view this as a definition of the profession and thereby views her career as limited and limiting to her need for recognition. No apparent sense of congruence is described.

3.5.3 Window 3: Sense of community and sense of self

This window moves beyond descriptions of individual self interest to the individual's sense of mutual co-operation and partnership. Individuals mattering to each other and tolerating each other's differences facilitates harmony in the work context and encourages freedom of creative self expression. The following descriptions reflect on individuals perceptions of each others needs and sense of self and the responses to these:

R: Have you withdrawn from everyone? Where did it begin?

7: Yes, I felt that I communicated my feelings so often in supervision but I was told there was nothing that could be done. Our office was also divided so we saw things differently. The fact that a few of us felt differently about things was always labelled as us being resistant. I've never felt understood.

R: Everyone clings to their individuality here. No one builds bridges or tries to understand each other, nor tries to produce a product which reflects everyone's individuality.

7: I think we've all been through tough times so we couldn't even talk about day to day things after a while.

R: Can you at all anticipate how others around you have been experiencing things lately? Do you know what other people's process has been?

7: It's a bit blank for me. I've been so caught up with my own things. I just know my supervisor has been very anxious for a long time. I think we've all been anxious about waiting for news of more changes. After a while you wonder what's going to happen next.

R: Do you feel that you've always had to wait for ... (supervisor) by way of respecting the hierarchy or that you could approach anyone else?

7: No, I felt you have to go up the ladder via the supervisor or it could be viewed as being a traitor.

R: May be that path of always going to one person limited people from just going to each other (vertically) to resolve problems.

Comment: The respondent perceives her own struggles as all encompassing and misunderstood by others warranting her withdrawal from efforts at understanding others struggles. Her loyalty to the hierarchy of problem-solving relationships and a shared feeling of anxiety with others connects her to colleagues.

R: Are you aware of other struggles and feelings, and do you feel there is anything you can do to support them?

4: I know that they are mostly afraid of another culture. Its not an attitude problem, its fear. I think I can help them by accompanying them to the community.

R: They might be wondering if black communities will accept them.

4: Yes and the community can't always communicate with them.

R: So you see yourself as a resource. You don't feel used.

4: No.

R: Useful?

4: Yes.

Comment: The respondent anticipates the fears of colleagues and volunteers her autonomous contribution to supporting them and thereby facilitates cooperation as opposed to rejection.

R: The struggles of the immediate people around you, is there anything you can do about it?

- 5: I feel powerless. My own demotivation disempowers me. My husband told me to do something - either move or stay. I feel I've been here too long.

Comment: The respondent perceives herself as paralysed to respond to the needs of others amidst her own perceived sense of paralysis. Her sense of self contributes to her response to relationships.

- R: If you have to consider management's situation and put yourself in their shoes?**

- 6: They're fighting for their own individual posts and their existence as the management of this organization. I also get the impression they want to replace us with black social workers which ensures their future. I'm not a racist but I think white social workers are in excess. If they needed me as much as they needed black social workers they would have called me in a long time ago.

Comment: Could this respondent contribute to helping management fight for their posts, thereby indirectly fighting for her own post? Her sense of self in relation to others is described as being 'in excess' and excluded from the fight for survival by the fight for survival.

- R: What are some of the struggles you see that people battle with in trying to find a connection between the changing vision and individual life purposes?**

- 15: Two things. One is they're apprehensive because they don't know where it's going yet. What they see and what they perceive, is not what they thought is going to be. Secondly, the type of training at universities is very different to where we want to go as an organization.

R: It sounds as if you don't see present social work skills as transferable to community work?

15: Well I think most of the people in social work are frustrated therapists.

R: What impact have the changes here had on social workers?

15: Frightening. We had to ask what our options are. From zero meaning closing down to expanding the department. Social services are very expensive. We've had to make financial choices. I don't think any one could have realised a year ago the tremendous impact of the changes. Somewhere along the way it starts to filter down from management to the last social worker.

Comment: The respondent describes interpersonal organizational relationships as confronted on all levels with unexpected realities, the relevance of skills, therapeutic roles and funding of services by way of describing the shared sense of community.

R: What I'm thinking about is that some people are feeling community development fits in with their personal vision - others not. How do you feel, do you feel forced into it?

1: I feel ambivalent. I'm not satisfied but I don't hold the organization responsible for this. I don't think we have a choice. I think I doubt my ability to do community work. I don't have any experience in it but then no one really seems to know.

R: Are you seen as someone who has a contribution to make then?

1: My clients see it.

R: Your colleagues and management?

1: New workers do, but its seen as a threat to some colleagues.

Comment: The respondent's sense of self questions her skills which are none the less perceived by her as meaningful, hence connecting her to some people but threatening to and disconnecting her from others.

R: I get the idea you are internally aware of your own responses to change. If you look around at others you are connected to in the organization, what struggles do you see they have and have you been able to do anything about it?

3: I feel powerless and yet sometimes it seems so uncomplicated. It seems you can be hi-jacked anywhere, in a township or on the street corner. I think so differently from others.

R: And what happens to those different ideas?

3: I feel very isolated - I'm on another planet. Nothing I do will convince the other person.

R: All your alternatives and plans have begun to flop.

3: Yes, I withdraw because of feeling powerless. I'm not always motivated to try and influence others - some peoples' ideas are so fixed. I am very protective about my political views wherever I go. I feel the people here are generally politically conservative - colleagues and also in other organizations. Also strong relationships are capable of accommodating different views.

R: Do you feel none the less that there is a measure of isolation between people because of these differences?

3: Yes, we're not really in this together. Individuals support and carry each other but not the whole organization.

Comment: The respondent is protective of her political values and describes herself as isolated in this and feeling frustrated in her efforts to convince others of her values. The respondent doesn't describe herself as open to being influenced by others' values. This could have been a potential question to ask, namely, 'What would make it impossible for you to be influenced by others' values?'

R: It sounds as if you're speaking about people and their vision with whom you can't identify?

8: People here don't feel a thing for others and everyone follows their own heads.

R: Do you know what is going on in their heads to be able to explain your vision to them and to find a possible connection between the two?

8: I wonder if its got to do with everyone just struggling in his own way and you don't have the energy to stretch out a hand to someone else. I know what's going on in their heads. Everything is about community development and money. I don't think anyone really cares. They say they understand but I think its just to maintain good relationships - because when they leave your office they don't understand anymore.

R: Were you aware of the struggles of the people around you, or did you feel you were alone?

8: I felt there were some moving along with the stream and they seemed to be alright. Head office appeared to be like a cat on a hot tin roof even though they said they've been preparing us for 3 years they keep changing their minds about what that is that they've been preparing us for.

R: Did you ever wonder about anyone else?

8: No. It looked as if everyone else was coping except me.

R: If you did notice anyone else struggling, did you feel you could do anything to assist them and what stopped you?

8: I thought everyone thought I was crazy and just left me alone to carry on struggling and doing my own thing. It was a shock to discover we are all in the same boat now. I'm a bit angry because it's too late now.

Comment: The respondent describes her struggle for survival as tiresome and that she is unconcerned to respond to others. Likewise she perceives others as uncaring and superficial in their efforts to support her. The respondent describes an escalating relationship of indifference which she resents and attempts to conserve herself by reciprocating with indifference.

R: Do you anticipate dilemmas where people may struggle to work together?

13: I don't think the process is that advanced yet. Again I think the more independent you can remain the better.

R: Can you see what others are struggling with?

13: Well I don't think people want to get involved in communities. It's too foreign. They need a lot of time. I don't know how they're going to make those changes without the exposure.

R: Are you as a group productive in solving problems?

13: Well we listen to each other, share solutions but some people will just hold back. They have to work it out on their own. Everyone's needs are so different we don't always accommodate each other. I think it's important to get to know the people in communities first and find your feet before you do anything. Also, I think everyone is at the place where they have to decide what they think about community work and how they fit in with it. It frustrates me to see how others view development.

R: So as an organization, it's difficult to know how to respond to other organizations if we all differ in our perceptions and how to do development. Not everyone has clarity yet, do you?

13: Yes, I feel I know what I'm doing and it's meaningful to me but people here are very ambivalent. It's tiring.

Comment: The respondent advocates a style of independence in relationships where each person is expected to define his/her own approach to community development practice independently from each other. Any differences in perspective that are expressed are described as frustrating by the respondent. It appears to be an ambivalent connection where independent contribution is required yet disqualified if it appears to be 'too different' to her own.

R: Were you aware of what people were going through?

9: I'm very aware of others. I'm hypersensitive about how everyone is and that placed me in the role of running in between people trying to mean something to someone. It made me very tired.

R: So how have you been affected by all of this?

9: I think I've lost a lot of spontaneity and my sense of humour. The weight of the responsibility of our work and our lives has made me pessimistic and burdened and quiet sceptical of people.

R: Do you have as much hope in your future?

9: I think it's fatalistic but I believe the world is going one way and that is down. I think things are going to get worse but as Christians we can get stronger. My global view says the future is bleak. I don't even have a picture in my mind of my own personal future.

R: Who else believes this?

9: My colleagues here ... they have no hope.

Comment: The respondent describes her participation as a self defeating attempt to stimulate interaction amidst a bleak picture of her and others' future. To create a defeated mutual reality in her relationships would require a mutually pessimistic response.

R: What helps you to cope?

14: I'm still convinced everyone has to take responsibility for themselves. So I don't feel responsible for their processes. It's not a burden.

R: Are you a team player or a solo flyer?

14: I don't demand relationship or partnership from anyone. I let people be. If I see I can contribute something then I do.

R: Do you think other people in this organization are also very individualistic?

14: The people I admire are those that do things with conviction and enthusiasm and who are autonomous.

R: **There might be a discrepancy in need among people here. Those that are autonomous can agree but in other places people disintegrate without some form of structure.**

14: Yes, I think it can be disadvantageous. Perhaps we don't communicate enough. We may not notice those that are dependant. Although I think that is the task of supervisors to watch out for people's needs and to deal with them individually.

R: **How do your colleagues react to you?**

14: They see I'm effective. I think that the process of change is too confronting and far reaching for people, so it does not matter how much clarity I have and share that, it doesn't seem to last long. I think people don't have the strength to assimilate their thoughts. If people can just look away from themselves to the broader context they will be able to cope with themselves better.

Comment: The respondent makes sense out of relationships with others who are as autonomous as she and who take the broader context into consideration when making decisions. She appears to describe the relationship context as highly compatible and sensitive to such people.

R: **Do you feel there are people following your initiatives?**

11: Not really, there's no time.

R: **So the opportunities are decreasing?**

11: I can't say that. I suppose I could suggest things. I just don't know when to fit it all in.

R: Do you feel it would be too difficult to sacrifice one thing for the benefit of another? It is a painful process.

11: I'm not even getting to do what's expected of me. I feel incompetent, even at home. The minute you have to leave one thing for the sake of another you feel even more so that you can't do anything, that you can't complete things successfully.

Comment: The respondent describes herself as incompetent to contribute to others needs due to time constraints yet others are also seen as bound by the same time constraints to participate in relationships with her thereby protecting her from relationships.

3.5.4 Window 4: Autonomy and sense of we-ness

The following descriptions illustrate how individuals perceive a greater sense of cohesion, or lack thereof within their relevant network of relationships and how individual autonomy corresponds to or is incongruent with the shared purpose or feeling of belonging in these relationships.

R: Have you taken all of your feelings home so that your (marriage) relationship has had to carry them?

7: Yes, I don't really like talking to anyone else. They don't really understand, like my parents don't. I communicate a lot. My husband has also had a difficult time at work. We've both felt the changes very closely. We could plan together. I know that someone understands me. There have been a lot of demands on our relationship.

R: If this important support system is so important to you then I suppose if it is challenged your whole life feels the effect? You have to sacrifice a lot for the sake of keeping that support system a priority.

7: Our interests are very similar so we do a lot of things together and escape that way.

R: Even if you did have the opportunity to share your individual vision and needs with others you wouldn't do this?

7: Well ... (colleague) and I talk a lot. We support each other a lot. We feel the same way about things. We've come a long way.

R: People have become very isolated.

7: Yes, everyone does their own thing.

R: You don't really need a lot of intimacy in work relations?

7: No, just reassurance now and then. I like being able to do things in my own way. My ideal is to be my own boss. I know I can do it. I like doing it.

Comment: *The respondent expresses her comfort with sharing work issues with her husband but keeping these issues from people whom she feels misunderstood by. Despite her expressed need for reassurance from others she chooses to do things in her own way to maintain her autonomy and with people who feel the same way about things. In this instance she withdraws from people who differ in opinion from her and in so doing participates in her own perception of the workplace as being a place where no one understands her.*

R: Have you heard any of the other social workers in the agency speak about their feelings and thoughts about the direction we are going in amidst some of the changes?

4: Yes, I hear a lot.

R: How does that affect you?

4: Well it's a reality that resources have been centralized in certain areas and we have to share now, not everyone agrees.

R: How does that affect you, that not everyone agrees with you?

4: In fact I haven't met many social workers in this organization yet who disagree. There is no dissatisfaction about development but people are afraid of going into black townships ... it is natural, not only white but black people fear this too. We are all concerned about our safety. But if we want to do something for our communities we have to come up with a way as social workers of dealing with those fears.

Comment: The respondent describes a sense of shared perspective among social workers in the organization who are supportive of her ideas about community development as a sharing of resources and a sharing of fears about the context for community development.

R: Where are you heard/recognized?

3: At home. My husband has brought me into a different social group where qualified people seem to overcome their differences. My changes took place long before it started happening here. I've always felt 3 steps ahead and unable to get others to be where I'm at .

R: Your colleagues can't see what you see or want to hear what you see either?

3: Yes, it is very sensitive.

Comment: The respondent describes the sense of shared values in her home context with which she identifies as being incongruent with those of her work colleagues.

R: What or who supports you in trying to reach this goal you envisage?

8: My husband and family. Also ... (colleague) and I scheme a lot. I feel we can do things together.

R: Is she the only colleague who understands you and your vision?

8: Yes, perhaps because as friends you tend to look past other things and only see what you want to see.

R: One is more tolerant. I guess it helps to know you can trust each other and be flexible. May be that's what helps to build a joint vision. To scheme together as you said.

8: Definitely. When she was away I felt paralysed.

R: How do you juggle your relationships? What can you take home and what not?

8: Yes, I only speak to certain people about what I know they want to hear. I'm getting clever.

Comment: Various people are excluded from this respondent's description of where she experiences a sense of shared purpose. The act of exclusion brings about a threat to her autonomy with the sense of feeling paralysed. Her choice to, none the less communicate selective information to people in her relationship network maintains her connection to those relationships as a way of adapting in the social worker-in-work context relationship.

R: Are the relationships here supportive enough for you to work together on creative ideas?

12: Yes, we're very supportive of each other. I think all social workers are going through the same things now. Not everyone has advice. I keep quiet a lot and pretend I'm okay. I know it's bad. I sleep weekends just to be okay for a Monday.

R: What about other people in your life?

12: I don't really talk to anyone. I have one friend who is also a social worker, she at least understands how we think. Our secretary is very supportive. Everyone here actually . We're all going through the same thing.

Comment: The respondent describes a shared sense of supportiveness amongst colleagues who she apparently views as sharing the same response to the changes in the organization despite her lack of communication with others.

R: Do you speak about work issues at home?

11: No, there's no time. Every now and then I do. I like to work things out on my own.

R: I'm interested in how you manage to adapt to all these changes. It sounds as if you experience your work as not contributing to your stress nor to your enrichment.

I1: For me it's stressful. I don't feel in control at work nor at home. I need a break.

R: So you can't take work issues home nor bring personal issues to work? You're in a grey area?

I1: No, there's no time.

R: It's surprising you don't have grey hair? I suppose if you're so busy trying to survive you may not want to get involved in anything new, it may swallow up more time?

I1: Yes, I take things as they come. It's not fulfilling. I'm not achieving anything. I don't even have a friendship circle anymore.

Comment: The respondent's perception of not having enough time to draw strength from family, colleagues or a friendship circle nor to participate in any new social work practice ideas, creates a sense of isolation and incompetence for her which in turn contributes to her growing idea that she is not supported by any group of people in her life.

R: I'm interested in how you've made these adjustments. What has supported you in this process of making the decision to leave?

9: My husband and I are in the unfortunate position where we have a lot of people around us but they look up to us. We don't receive a lot. Even our families are like this. I think it's very sad. People don't reach out to us and do things for us. My husband is like a calm, flowing stream. He's very

consistent especially when I come home screaming. But I need to spare him from the burden. ... (colleague) sees things so different to me I find it refreshing. I begin to see things differently then too.

R: It brings new information.

9: Yes. Fortunately I see things in context. I believe my life has purpose and all that happens to me is merely part of a process to get there. I really believe that.

Comment: The respondent describes a personal relationship network from which she cannot draw support. Her feeling of purpose, value and sense of autonomy is created by her own values and one colleague in which a meaningful relationship exists despite differences. These differences are viewed as refreshing and not threatening to her values.

3.5.5 Window 5: Diversity and sense of we-ness

This window describes the harmony or disharmony in interpersonal relationships as being complementary or symmetrical and either adding to or detracting from the integration of human resources in these relationships.

R: Do you like to work alone or together with others?

13: I prefer working in a team. I think organizations should form teams as well.

R: In your work context are you able to create that type of environment where you can be part of a team and maintain your own identity?

13: I feel a bit frustrated with the job description of case work, group work, community work. Sometimes the things I want to do don't fit within these definitions. I think you can also get into a rut and not want to do things differently.

R: Are you suggesting we need to streamline some of our ideas?

13: Yes, we need to be a lot more constructive when we get together at in-service training. Perhaps form work groups and discuss issues about community development.

R: Isn't that just another way of prescribing to people what they must do?

13: Well, I don't think you need to lose your own identity. You can work together and still be yourself. It's supposed to give you more freedom where you can develop your own thing.

Comment: The value of working together with other colleagues for this respondent lies in not getting into a rut in her way of working. Her perception of team work is not threatening to her sense of identity nor her freedom thereby complementary.

R: So what you're saying is that despite all the tremendous amount of planning going on there hasn't been any constructive problem solving with a collaboration of ideas. What I mean is that, 'my contribution is necessary to help create your job description, yours is necessary to help re-write mine.' You feel it is more a matter of being competitive and politically correct.

16: Yes, everyone is working on their own. I don't see how it can work. I think it's management who wants it this way. Well, when I took the gap to do my own thing, I stood on a land mine.

Comment: The respondent perceives that there is a perception in the organization of maintaining individual autonomy which when overstepped is apparently dangerous. Working together with colleagues is viewed as a way of confronting that value thereby avoiding complementary relationships.

R: If you could change something you've done, something you would like to do differently, looking back now, is there anything you would want to change?

7: Yes, our office relationships. We could have made more of an effort to sort things out. I don't actually know what happened. I think we didn't want to hurt each other's feelings. It's very exposing also to talk about some of these things.

Comment: The respondent describes the difficulty of colleagues dealing with differences as painful and best left unspoken about. This perception could be seen as contributing to the entrenchment of the perception that individual ideas are undervalued as opposed to group ideas which when shared enhance and utilise individual ideas in a complimentary way.

R: So what has happened to your relationship network within this organization especially since you've said that you don't take all your concerns home?

6: At this stage I've tried to withdraw. We talk so negatively here at this office. I'm also pressurized outside of work. My mother and sisters can't understand why I even want to negotiate anymore.

R: They don't see your loss?

6: No, I'm not really supported. Everyone is painting such a bleak picture about rape, murder, shootings in townships. It stirs me up even more.

R: **The team hasn't been a strong problem-solving team who shares problems with each other?**

5: Even now when everyone has the same problem, all of our needs are different and the ways in which we want to negotiate are different.

Comment: *The respondent describes her relationship networks as polarised where shared problems are unnoticed. The respondent's choice to withdraw adds to the polarization by not creating coherence between her individual interests and opportunities in these relationships thereby contributing to these. A cycle of escalating incongruence in relationships implies maladaptation.*

R: **Defining who you are and what's important to you is now clear. You know what you don't like about social work and you're congruent about it. Who have you been able to relate to in your network of relationships at work that have been able to understand your development.**

9: ... (a colleague) understands my spirit. My supervisor doesn't hear me. My words fall to the ground. I can't speak to my colleagues because we're so different.

R: **Do you think you can accept other's different values and perceptions?**

9: I haven't really been tuned into their frame of reference. I don't think it is possible to be close colleagues. I create too much discomfort for them in our relationship.

R: **What happened for you to say this?**

9: I think I've felt for a long time that what I've had to say has been rejected by them so I've kept quiet. I don't like confrontations.

R: **It sounds impossible to find common ground with your colleagues?**

9: Yes, it's about being unwilling to be flexible enough to at least show interest in another point of view. After a while it felt as if everyone was only talking about themselves.

Comment: The respondent's description of a lack of sensitivity to understand and incorporate each colleagues individuality in this work group is an example of the problem of 'gesellschaft' where individual welfare takes priority over the rights of the collectivity.

R: **You've said you've felt disqualified for your opinions and that which is valuable to you. How did you view the people who where pro-community development? Did they look crazy to you? Did community development look like an unworthy thing to be involved in? Do you see any commonalities or links between yourself and those supporting community development?**

8: I believe there is a place for community development but others can do it, not me. I don't think they are silly but from the beginning I've known we are different, we think differently, we take different things seriously. I'm more traditional, I've grown up that way, with many prejudices I believe. That's what's made it so difficult for me.

R: **So, there should have been a boundary between the two because it must be equally difficult for either to move across to the other side?**

8: Well, the gap is big and it is difficult to move across to the other side because one's ideas are so fixed. There are still some links, I'm not sure what, but we don't have to be angry with each other. It's actually tough to listen to the others really. I think they were pro-community work and probably thought I was crazy making issues out of everything. I think that is where the difference came in.

R: Were these differences ever discussed? It sounds if everyone experienced so much without saying what was bugging them that the problems remained unsolved.

8: Yes, it's bad that we did not try to find a compromise with each other. I don't think it was our responsibility to do so. It's our supervisors' job.

R: You have very specific expectations of her. What prevented you from sharing your concerns and expectations with her so that you could work on finding a place for yourself within these changes?

8: Yes and I have a lot of baggage. I've kept record in my mind of all the things she has done wrong. I was so disappointed. I was really mean. I've had expectations of her in my heart which I kept from her because I knew she wouldn't be able to meet them.

Comment: The respondent suggests that colleagues don't have to feel angry at each other despite their differences yet abdicates from the responsibility to contribute to finding this compromise between them. Her further decision to keep record of how a mentor of the work group has offended her disables her to listen to other colleagues contributions and increases the gap which she already perceives as being between people.

R: Are there others in your office you identify with?

1: No. I don't speak to anyone really about how I feel. We have new personnel as well which makes the people I can talk to less.

R: **There's been a change in the emotional environment?**

1: Yes, I don't really feel connected to anyone.

R: **So you've not really been able to share with anyone amidst the whole transition?**

1: No, because I don't trust anybody.

R: **Why? We're you always mistrusting?**

1: Well, I don't think it always has had something to do with the processes of change, I think it has to do with the office relationships which existed before. I feel I'm not recognised for my experience, that I am regarded as inferior to carry certain responsibilities, I feel checked on.

R: **Its interesting that you stay, what makes it possible?**

1: I'm not permanently unhappy. ... I'd rather sit here and cope with this than sit at home with demanding children.

R: **You have to decide which is the most comfortable world to live in. The stresses and strains at work are less than at home. If your home looked different you may not tolerate some of these things at work.**

1: Either no relationships than conflict

R: **Or either passive conflict than outspoken conflict?**

1: Its actually sick, hey?

R: Well, one is more peaceful, the other is more violent

1: It seems we've spoken about a lot of deep things.

Comments: The respondent describes her contributions as devalued in the process of being checked upon yet perseveres with this amidst demanding domestic relationships. Her relationship networks are apparently symmetrical and conflicting.

R: It seems there may be a lot of diverse perceptions, opinions, ideas and plans in our organization. Does this create a wider picture for you and more opportunities because everyone is interpreting things in a different way and has a lot to contribute or do you feel things are becoming a bit chaotic?

5: I see it as a learning opportunity even if there are limitations.

R: You feel you can express your difference of opinion too - is it heard?

5: We need more opportunity to express our grievances and solve our problems. You also may go through a bad patch at the same time and have no energy to get yourself out of it. It's hard to make plans amidst the uncertainty of possible personnel changes (people leaving, posts that haven't been filled, new social workers). We have more than just our jobs to do - we have to deal with this too.

Comment: The respondent describes her work relationships as potentially complementary in that she views colleagues differences as offering a learning experience and opportunity for support and problem solving.

The diversity arising due to personnel changes is viewed as contributing to the challenge of the complexity in relationships.

R: Are you alone in this process of learning?

12: My supervisor and I have done some things together.

R: I get the idea that you are very aware of your own process of orientation and that you're aware of how this changing context affects you. It doesn't seem you feel limited, that you can easily transcend boundaries.

12: I can cross my own boundaries. I feel you have to do this. You have to challenge yourself. I remember starting to pray at one time that God would help me to learn. It's not so bad going into black communities now. I'm curious.

R: With whom could you relate to while going through these changes?

12: There wasn't really anyone. I think the fact that we've heard so much about doing community work has become part of me. It's actually a very positive thing. I never thought I would do something like this. There's also a measure of competition. You don't want to lag behind. I think we can also mean a lot to each other. We can teach each other.

R: I think that's very important. I think if we feel free to learn and to make mistakes, we create a really nice environment to work in.

12: Yes, we're (colleagues) actually quite close. We help each other a lot although we're not intensely involved in each others lives. The most important support is yourself. If you understand yourself you can reach out to others more easily.

Comment: The respondent's perception of her sense of autonomy as capable to support herself and cross relationship boundaries contributes to the sense of belonging she describes in her work relationships where colleagues differences are described as creating meaningful competition encouraging each other to move ahead.

R: So you create a working environment for yourself that gives you the freedom and scope to develop relationships. Anything else would frustrate you terribly?

10: What really helps a lot is that people stay a long time in the agency because they don't have any limitations. I always have this saying ... 'I don't care how you do something, just do it'. Our relationship with head office is like that. We don't really have a relationship with them. They don't place limitations on us.

R: Do you like that amount of freedom?

10: In the beginning it was quite frightening. My first words were 'protect me' and my supervisor said, 'I can't.' That was frightening. I felt out on my own, out in the open. That was a push, now I'm on my own. Now I'm more comfortable with responsibility. I think it's the way you use the freedom. One person finds it too much, another demands it.

Comment: The respondent describes an ambivalence between the value of independence or freedom from limitations in the organization which creates opportunity to be self-responsible for ones work yet isolates one from relationship or shares responsibility with colleagues.

3.5.6 Window 6: Sense of community and sense of we-ness

This window describes the coherence between individuals, in a work group for example, and their efforts to adapt to the changes within the relationship context within which they function in a coherent way.

R: So if you don't draw support here where do you go?

16: Outside. I feel relevant when I see the gratefulness of the communities I go to.

Comment: The respondent perceives the broader community outside of the organization, namely the client base as being in coherence with her own sense of relevance than with work colleagues.

R: Do you think people don't have a sense of purpose and don't understand your sense of purpose either?

14: I don't think that everyone makes an effort to think very far ahead. It's all very small and immediate.

R: May be people have lost even that small amount of vision?

14: I think it is about coping with change and positioning yourself accordingly. May be people don't have the ability. Everyone is too preoccupied with survival.

Comment: The respondent perceives demands arising from changing circumstances as requiring adaptation. She describes colleagues as conserving their autonomy by way of survival as opposed to surviving by way of responding to contextual demands.

R: What made you feel more free to do the social work you imagined within community development?

9: I think the fact that I don't have to be so responsible.

R: That you can share responsibility with the client?

9: Yes, there's more co-responsibility. There's so much pressure from clients and the welfare system to have to solve peoples' problems in case work. You just can't do it.

R: Has community work given you more opportunity to participate, to contribute more?

9: There's more freedom in it. I'm part of a team.

R: You are closer to people?

9: Yes, I'm networking with people. I'm not solely responsible for what happens yet I play a definite role. I'm not just one of the crowd, I do have a role and place.

R: It makes me think that this way you also have the opportunity to acknowledge the creativity of others and their contributions. You prefer to give credit than control.

Comment: The respondent describes her sense of belonging in a team where responsibility is shared yet individual contributions are valued. The respondent describes this relationship existing in work relationships and in her relationship with the client system or community. The description illustrates the coherence in the relationship network of the respondent with the client community.

R: Is it part of your vision as a social worker to be doing community development?

12: I like case work quiet a lot. Doing development work won't be negative, it's a new thing. Our clients are unmotivated anyway - You don't achieve a lot.

R: Do you feel others feel the same way or do you feel isolated?

12: There really are people you can learn from. I've met someone at the city council who I really like. Some social workers I've met at other organizations are really negative. I think we're ahead because we hear about community development every day.

R: What are the risks for you?

12: I'd like to know more about black cultures. I feel afraid because I think black and white people are so different. The more you get to know people the less afraid you feel.

Comment: The respondent illustrates the possibilities of creating coherence between herself and the client community by learning from or adapting to the differences between people of colour.

R: If you come up with creative solutions or ideas about, say community work, what happens; are you listened to, are your ideas rejected, are you seen as a rebel, do you have to be careful before you make suggestions?

1: Yes, I don't do it because I feel I don't want to expose myself. I don't have enough experience.

R: It sounds complicated because it's the one area everyone is on the same level, they're all asking questions? But how do you ask questions when you feel like a minor or you may embarrass someone and show up their ignorance, or you'll show your ignorance because you are expected to know the answers from your experience.

I: We asked for office meetings to share ideas but nothing ever happens, ... not even around the tea table.

R: Are you also a solo-flyer in your work?

I: Yes, I work on my own but with community work I think I do need support because I'm uncertain. To maintain the status quo is always first choice isn't it?

R: Are there other relationships where you don't have to maintain the status-quo, where you can receive support and pick up the phone or are you isolated?

I: We are isolated from other offices but people talk to each other so if I call X she'll tell Y in casual conversation and Z will hear.

R: So you don't have the choice to build relationships?

I: No. I get blamed for speaking on behalf of people, so if people get upset about small issues how can I share more personal issues with them. If I withdraw from people it at least appears that I'm coping when it isn't actually that way. No one can really cope without support. I can't tell my supervisor because then she would enjoy taking control of the situation. I don't want to sacrifice that bit of autonomy I have left.

R: The whole thing about doing community work for you calls for more collaboration so there is a possible dilemma. It calls for participation, sharing ideas, building something together, sharing values, acknowledging we're different. It's easier to ignore it than to have to build because then we have to cope with each other. Is that a reflection of what you're trying to say?

I: Yes, I think so.

Comment: The respondent describes the difficulties in collaboration in work groups as being threatening to her individual sense of competence where self-control is abdicated to shared control and implies exposure in relationships. The respondent is confronted by this in contrast to her need to overcome her uncertainty relating to social work practice.

3.5.7 Window 7: Autonomy and ecology

This window illustrates the idea of a 'consensual domain of conduct' by describing the individuals perception of and participation in the construction of a shared domain of meaning.

R: Do you feel that you are working for someone else's vision?

16: No, it's my own as well and what I believe management's strategic plan is.

Comment: The respondent gives a simple statement expressing her perception of the broader vision of the management of the organization as coherent with her own.

R: If you could create a post for yourself what would you do, within the parameters of the organization?

12: I would like to work in a community context but in a specific direction like child abuse.

R: If the organization announced that we were becoming a specialist organization, say in community development what would you do?

12: I'd be fine - it's a very broad concept really. You could fit anywhere. If they said build a house, I'd build it.

Comment: The respondent describes a flexibility in her perceptions as to where and how she could connect with the organization's vision.

R: Is this organization's mission, policy and values clear to you or do you have some questions about things that are unclear to you?

4: Yes it's quite clear except its too vague on gender and racial issues that have not been addressed sufficiently although I understand the transformation has just begun.

R: Who in this organization represents or is the spokesperson of the changes, that represent the policy of this organization?

4: I think everyone here are stakeholders, even the social workers.

R: Do you think they think so as well?

4: I don't think so, but that is the way I think it should be.

Comment: The respondent describes and perceives all employees as role players in the creation of organizational vision and policy with a shared responsibility thereof.

R: What has been your description of yourself as a social worker. A person who does what or who likes to do what?

6: With the new stuff?

R: No perhaps in the past as well.

6: In the past I grew irritated with the ordinary type of supervision in my post; All the case work and administration. I asked management to give me something else to do. The answer came in community development. I saw a door opening up. It's something new and I could get involved. I began to build on it. What was good was being able to do part supervision with its controlling function, and part community involvement which I found very enriching. That's how I saw my role.

Comment: The respondent finds fit with the diversity of tasks in her changing role.

R: Have the difficulties been around people not being able to accommodate each other's difficulties or because the vision has been unclear that no one can actually write around it?

3: The vision is clear, but how to reach it is unclear. There are serious differences about what structures are appropriate and what paths to follow to achieve this vision.

Comment: The respondent reflects on a shared vision in the organization but describes the disparities in method that exists among employees.

R: How has the changing policy of this agency affected you? How do you experience yourself amidst this? What do you understand by these changes - are they clear to you?

8: No it is not clear to me. I understand community development is our future in social work but why only this? Why can't you balance the scale a bit. It's double -minded. The emphasis is on development yet we still have to carry the load of case work in the name of so-called generic social work. I don't understand how all of this is connected to each other. So much has changed so radically one feels totally lost in the process.

Comment: The respondent aligns herself with the idea of community development in practice yet struggles to find fit with the organizations vision and her ideas of case work as being incongruent with organizations ideas of case work as method within community work.

R: **Do you feel free here? Is there too much freedom, you can do anything you like here. You are free to respond to the changes anyway you like.**

5: Yes, I like this. Except I feel stuck because of political issues.

R: **This is probably what the agency asks as well - how do we respond to these political realities? What about spiritual issues?**

5: I like working for a Christian organization, except it seems as if we have become influenced by political more than spiritual issues, our decisions now have to be based on this. In the process people are being neglected.

R: **So you don't hear the organization's policy expressed in spiritual terms but in political terms. What spiritual values are you committed to amidst these political changes? Values that you aren't prepared to compromise on no matter what the political changes. What spiritual values would you like to see the agency adopt?**

5: That's a new perception for me. I'm not racist and I can justify that spiritually. I just don't understand how we can throw people back into poverty when we have been working with them because we now have to work with other more poor people. In 10/20 years time then we have to catch up with our original clients.

R: Are there spiritual values you apply as a social worker which affect your vision for your career?

5: One is that people need to be dealt with equally and with respect. To do therapy within a Christian framework.

R: I wonder what the spiritual values of community development would be. Are development theories congruent with Christian values? What are this organization's spiritual values which justify their politically correct policy changes?

Comment: The discussion generated a possibility for the respondent to consider the relationship between her spiritual values and that of the organization's in opting to advocate community development practice. Such a consideration could facilitate a possible shared vision for social work practice in the social worker-in-work context relationship.

R: Having the need to be free can also frustrate other needs like becoming too independent which frustrates your need to be close to people for examples

9: Yes, I sometimes feel unprotected despite the fact that I hate being confined to the parameters of case work.

R: I guess we do need some form of structure?

9: Yes, I need a job description. I don't know what to do at work when I arrive here in the mornings.

Comment: The respondent expresses confusion in her description of not knowing what role she can play in the organization. Amidst this she describes an unprotectedness as opposed to being confined by a job description. No consensus is described.

R: What is your response to the changes in the organization?

14: I'm convinced that community development is the future of the social work profession. I think case work will be a waste of time and our cultural differences will be even more difficult to handle in this way.

R: Is this in line with what you visualise yourself as doing?

14: I realise it is a situation of deciding whether you fit. I think social workers are trained incorrectly. We're not trained for a third world context but for a first world clinical environment. The reality in our country is not going to change.

R: I suppose this challenges your perspective on how you see yourself as a social worker?

14: It's not easy. I've always thought of myself as doing clinical work which has now fallen away without there being new job descriptions to replace this. When I think about it on my own I believe that this route will be challenging with quite a few discoveries. I believe in this organization so I know that this must be a solution. There is potential.

Comment: *The respondent describes the challenges in her changing work environment as opportunities to be effective in dealing with current South African community realities as a social worker. Her sense of trust and belonging in the organization appear to facilitate her coherence with these changes despite a sense of herself as a clinical social worker.*

R: My research is about the big picture of this organization. How do you view what's going on in the organization in terms of people's individuality and shared vision, is there any connection around a vision? Is there a sense of community in this place?

15: Let me answer it in several ways. There is a whole lot more identity in the organization than when we knew where we were going.

R: So what do you think are happening to individuals?

15: I think people have to make an informed decision.

R: Does it fit with their life goal, do they trust colleagues?

15: Unfortunately there are new and young social workers who aren't particularly committed to this organization. As painful as it is, new people are going to come on board because we're going to lose some.

R: So in your mind, there is a re-negotiation around a vision. What is your individual connection with this new vision?

15: There are facets of the vision which are clear. We are church forming social upliftment strategies as a way of extending the kingdom of God. Our reason for existence is the fact that we are church, the salt of the earth. What's clouded that vision was that in the past we had great vision but the government paid.

R: And they fitted with that vision?

15: Yes, now the funding from the government which was about 50% is threatened. It's dangerous to lose that and still stay loyal to your vision. Now we have to negotiate and find out what the state's priorities are. As a church I don't think we can disagree with the changing values in the state welfare system. As a church we have to re-think our traditional role.

Comment: The respondent describes the discrepancy in the relationship between church values and state values as influencing organizational vision. Part of the church values would apparently threaten state funding and part of the church values could be reconsidered to fit with state funding criteria. Within this discrepancy the loyalty of employees would be threatened as the identity and values of the organization were re-aligning.

3.5.8 Window 8: Diversity and ecology

This window illustrates the broad range of descriptions of individuals interaction and connection with their work context to create or disrupt the forming of an interlocked system.

R: What do you anticipate are the difficulties that management have with the employees? What contribution could you make to address some of these possible struggles?

6: I think they have made some decisions in too much of a hurry. I understand their motivation has been to dig ourselves in so that we're guaranteed of being subsidized. But a decision was made without consideration for the implications. If I put myself in the shoes of management I know now how my workers must have experienced me saying, 'pull yourself together'. I'm in the same position now and experience management as indifferent.

Comment: The respondent describes the relationship between management and social work employees as unsynchronised in that the needs of management are inconsistent with the implications these have for employees. To respect the assumptions of ecology the opposite would have to apply namely that the needs of employees are inconsistent with the implications of these needs for management.

R: Are you saying we need to streamline some of our ideas?

13: Yes, we need to be a lot more constructive when we get together at in-service training. Perhaps form work groups and discuss issues about community development.

R: Isn't that just another way of prescribing to people what they must do?

13: Well, I don't think you need to lose your own identity. You can work together and still be yourself. It's supposed to give you more freedom where you can develop your own thing.

R: I suppose that way different ideas are useful not confusing or controlling?

Comment: The respondent perceives work groups as constructive places where joint programme planning can take place and still respect not threaten individual differences.

R: So the only way to get people involved in your work is if you were to falter?

14: Yes, it would be more rewarding if it weren't that way. It's an unfulfilled need. I don't sulk about it though. I keep myself emotionally fulfilled so that I don't bring that expectation to work.

R: If you had to create a solution around this issue of relationships in our organization what would you suggest?

14: A democratic management team which encourages more mutual participation.

Comment: The respondent suggests a social worker-in-work context interaction which facilitates greater mutual participation as opposed to an interaction where people go unnoticed and are only punished for mistakes. Mistakes are not viewed as opportunities for growth but rather threats.

R: How are you doing under the circumstances?

16: Well there is a lot of confusing information going around about what we can do. I want to protect my community from all the confusion going on in the organization. I think it's an old mentality to just use a community as a way of securing your funding. I have tried to do some things but got a fright when I saw people's reactions at the organization. I guess not everyone is ready to hear certain things. It seems also that the supervisors don't really agree on what to be feeding through to social workers. There is also no working relationship between the different offices and departments here.

Comment: The respondent describes a lack of coherence between employees within the organization which affects her relationship with the client thereby creating greater coherence between herself and the community and greater disparity in her relationship with other colleagues.

R: Who is the mouthpiece reflecting the change?

- 15: We've tried to draw various people into various things so that they can hear and see and experience the change and know that it's not only coming from management. I think contributing factors are that people protect themselves and say "It will never happen to me". Another aspect is that not everyone in the welfare community is reacting to the times by making such sweeping changes.

Comment: The respondent describes the possible lack of congruence in the social worker-in-work context relationship as existing in organizations and individuals conserving of their own autonomy despite the organizations efforts to embrace changes and create opportunity for sharing of experiences.

3.5.9 Window 9: Sense of community and ecology

This window illustrates the coherence, or lack thereof, of systems within systems within systems for example, the individual social worker within a work group in relationship with a broader client base and the resultant, or lack thereof, sense of community.

R: Do you talk to other social workers, perhaps at this office where you can hear from them if you will have the opportunity to do social work you envisage?

4: I think so, but the most frustrating part is trying to reach out to people and not having the resources to do anything about their needs.

R: You see a lot of opportunities and you get excited then you are discouraged by this.

4: Yes, sometimes the community loses trust in you in the process, they feel you've done a needs assessment but now nothing is happening.

R: They are expectant but disappointed because they have to wait so long. Do you think your colleagues understand your dilemma?

4: Yes, I have discussed this with my manager and made some suggestions.

R: So you've come up with some ideas that can bridge the gap.

4: Yes, because if you have to wait for sponsors you can wait for ages and feel as if you're doing nothing.

Comment: The respondent describes the relationship between herself and that of the broader client community as requiring contributions from her that she is unable to provide thereby suggesting a possible lack of coherence. Although it is unclear what she feels will bridge this gap she describes herself as having designed alternative approaches in conjunction with her manager to address this need to create a sense of ecology .

R: Do you feel that the future in development is limiting for you?

6: No, but I wonder what will happen because social work in our country is not highly respected. I hear that government subsidies are allocated on a sliding scale from 0 - 75%, which means the state decides who gets how much of the funding. So what is the future of a social worker? Housing gets most of the funds. Gauteng is also over catered for. There are too many social workers in our area. Our role is coming to an end, in spite of the fact that Kwazulu has less resources. I don't see a future for myself in the profession.

R: The context. Is it the context?

6: Yes, its the context. You know, I made the paradigm shift a long time ago. It's not an issue to walk around between shacks. There are other

implications now, to sit in townships full time and to do generic social work. I can't do this. I'm not prepared to expose myself to the risks. How can you as a white woman work there if black social workers say they are afraid. A further issue for me is hijacking. If a hijacker sees me what will he do? His first motive was to hijack my car then he sees me as a white woman.

Comment: The relationship between this respondent and the broader client base is perceived by her as dangerous and futile since funding for social services is insecure. The respondent describes a lack of congruence between her perceived role as a social worker and the demands of the work context.

R: How are you affected by the changing policy?

12: At this stage I feel very uncertain. The idea of doing community development is strange.

R: What about it is strange for you?

12: The fact that we haven't done it before.

R: It creates more of a dilemma than an opportunity for you? How do you reach the same goals as those that the organization wants to?

12: The pressure from the state on our organization to do community development is quite heavy. Yet we have so many practical problems to solve first.

Comment: The respondent's description reflects on the discrepancy she perceives between meeting the demands of the state and being limited in skill in doing this.

R: Based on the value you give to a developmental approach what advice could you give the management of this organization to implement the development that you envisage and bearing in mind the people that work here.

9: Well, because I believe everyone has a purpose in this creation, I would do development but other colleagues who believe in other ways of helping people need to do that which they believe in. I think we have a problem here in accommodating different views.

R: Do you think you still have a role in this organization?

9: Well I don't know. I think black social workers are more capable of doing development in their own communities. Also, the agency is so divided I don't know where I fit in. I've also expected a lot from the director to give us more guidance seeing that he is such as high profile person.

Comment: The respondent perceives a coherence in applying employees to the areas of work that make sense to them. She describes her view as inconsistent with that of the organizations which she perceives as ambiguous. Furthermore her perception of herself as incapable in the practice of community development describes a lack of congruence between herself and her client base.

R: What do you think is happening on a relationship level so as to accommodate the diverse range of reactions to the changes in this organization?

14: Well, initial loyalty, commitment and obedience is being replaced by scepticism and conditions. People also seem to be unable to negotiate for rights. There is a lot of polarization and people find others who feel like them. Then its a process of blaming someone without recognising the

context within which we work. People feel victimised and they group themselves accordingly. I relate to people who aren't defensive but who are aware of the broader contextual changes. I see that people don't know how to sort out what they feel. They don't seem to want to sort it out and then they begin to defend themselves and nothing is dealt with.

R: Little mutual participation, where people put heads together - not react against each other's opinions?

14: Yes, individuals need to internalize their feelings and then make a decision on that.

Comment: The respondent perceives her colleagues as conserving their own values and thereby unable to negotiate a connection between themselves and the demands of the changing broader business environment. In the process of conservation of individual ideas employees would become isolated from each other or polarized.

R: What is your individual vision and purpose for social work?

16: I've always had a vision for development and to serve the church. I think the lack of unity in the church has made this difficult on a local level. There's enough knowledge in our organization to create a limited vision, but we're isolated from each other. I think there's a bigger picture here. What happens in this welfare organization is influenced by the church. How successful our management is depends on if they have a say in church politics.

R: I suppose that's the thing about ecology, we're all dependant on each other.

16: Yes, there's a broader context. This organization is just a vehicle to meet those demands. I don't think the social workers in this organization see that. We were forced to change because of government, church and economics. There wouldn't have been any change otherwise.

Comment: The respondent describes the broader business environment as impacting the organization and demanding employees to adapt to the changes which she perceives that colleagues are unaware of.

R: Are the ways in which the changes are being introduced and implemented creating opportunity or limitations for you?

5: I was very interested in community development but was threatened by posts created but filled by black social workers - it felt as if I would have to spend the rest of my life doing case work because I wasn't black, which is very frustrating. So by implication I would have to look for alternative employment.

R: What are others saying about you, do your ideas fit here?

5: When I first began to work here, yes. But lately there is so much pressure from head office to perform and to do community development - any ideas contrary to this are rejected. Now I just don't think up anything anymore.

R: Do you think it was a sacrifice to just let your ideas go or that you have begun to realise that the social work context is placing a limitation on your ideas?

5: Most ideas are shot down because of politics.

R: This is the context which the organization functions in. If you could change the strategy of this organization to include your ideas and vision, what contribution do you have to make?

5: Yes easily. White social workers with white clients and black social workers with black clients. Also specialized community development posts in appropriate areas. Each office has a black and white post.

R: Would there be place for all of us?

5: I think so. If we could share our hours we should all have work. We need to get money from churches to subsidise work. Perhaps use white churches to subsidise white posts because they are so politically conservative and use government subsidy for black social workers. We need to market this idea.

R: There seems to be a discrepancy in loyalty from the churches towards social work. The churches feel more compelled to support social work than understand what our use is.

5: We once had a pastor's breakfast in our area to thank them for their work. We were shocked they didn't know what we really do.

R: What have you done to try and gain access to this work you want to do? What has worked, what has not worked? What have been the limits in trying to gain access?

5: We tried for a long time to get community development off the ground but kept hitting our heads.

R: Was this within or outside of the organization?

- 5: Outside
- poor co-operation with Black pastors
 - you'd wait for weeks for appointments
 - politics in the churches, some are ANC, some IFP; therefore the pastors won't work together,
 - language is a problem. Very few pastors speak English, we didn't feel understood.

R: Do you feel disillusioned because the very thing you believe in, namely community development, you're discovering some harsh realities about the difficulties of doing this? You may be wondering where you're supposed to be doing community development that it can be fun and not such a difficult thing.

5: Not always, it feels as if it's difficult because of the obstacles we've had to confront but, other colleagues and students are doing it successfully, so there is opportunity.

Comment: The respondent's description reflects on the discrepancies she perceives between her role as a community developer and the context within which she works. If she works in white communities she experiences the political and language issues in her relationship with them as threatening the creation of a coherent relationship.

R: Amidst the variety of responses from the church, what effect has this had on the management of this organization? What has happened in the process of trying to develop consensus?

15: The struggle continues to try to understand each other. The place where some of us really understand each other is around development. We had to decide what to call ourselves, are we a welfare forum or a development

forum. We decided we still need to be a welfare forum to fit with the states perception about what an organization like ours does. We have enough social work expertise. We need more development expertise. There is the danger that while we're turning amidst this tremendous change that a lot of people are going to fall off the bus.

R: Does it fit with the black church to have white social workers in their environment?

15: It is such a new realm, it's hard to tell. So far we've had nothing but admiration and a desire to make the relationship work. The whole time you have to consider what it's going to cost in terms of money, personnel and major role players. There's also a total apathy from the white church towards the social work department. They can't care less what's happening to us. The black church esteems us which confirms that we should move in this direction along with my own interpretation of the white paper. It fits.

Comment: The respondent describes her perception of coherence existing between the black church, the principles of the white paper (welfare policy document) and the vision of the organization as a development forum. The respondent describes incongruence existing with the white church and the idea of the organization as a welfare forum in relation to the aforementioned. The respondent's description illustrates a polarized relationship and thereby a lack of ecology exists.

3.6 Summary

In this chapter the researcher has extracted a variety of descriptions from the respondents involved in the study containing their perceptions of life in the organization and how they perceived themselves amidst a changing work context.

The researcher's reconstructions on the respondent's original descriptions are used to illustrate how an observer can view the interrelationships in a organization as mutually defining the whole system or ecology of that system.

Both congruence and incongruence in the social worker-in-work context relationship is described and creates a description of an emerging sense of ecology in the organization-in-business environment relationship as well as an emerging description of incongruence and polarity in this relationship.

The following chapter focuses on various concluding descriptions extracted from this study as well as recommendations for social work management practice.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Conclusions

This study describes the ecological relationship system in an organization as a way of constructing a perspective on mental health in social work practice by:

- providing a literature study which suggests a view of mental health as one which regards the maintenance of the ecology of the persons-in-environment relationship as fundamental;
- illustrating how organizational interrelationships can be described within this framework as being congruent or incongruent and thereby promoting or detracting from organizational mental health.

The researcher's descriptions made in this study are informed by an ecological epistemology and are not the only descriptions possible but are considered as punctuations of a more inclusive description. Any other researcher informed by the same or an alternative epistemology would then be able to construe a different set of descriptions.

The following concluding descriptions are suggested by the researcher as illustrated in the following two figures based on the nine windows of the Open Organization Model of Mink et al (1994) as follows:

<p style="text-align: right;">1.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * I like community development because I can keep active and give of myself. * My heart and soul is in social work so I'm determined to find a meaningful way of practice amidst these changes. * I work here because it makes sense to me spiritually. * My work is sustainable when I do community development. * Community development provides a way in which I can consolidate my knowledge. * I can design any programme I visualize within community development. * Community development provides me with the opportunity to work independently as opposed to being controlled by the laws of case work. * I find community development personally enriching. 	<p style="text-align: right;">2.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * I need the money so I'll make any changes to be able to stay here. * The organization needs me as a supervisor. * Community development gives me the freedom to share responsibility with the client as opposed to case work which isolated me from them by giving me so much control. 	<p style="text-align: right;">3.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * I see others fears and share that with them. * We share the challenge of having to face the threat to our funds, defining the relevance of our skills and our therapeutic role in this changing context. * This organization creates room for those who can think for themselves and are aware of the broader business environment. * I think I can help to interpret cultural issues to my colleagues.
<p style="text-align: right;">4.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Even though I keep quiet a lot of the time I feel people understand and support each other. * Despite the lack of support in my personal network I have purpose and value in my work. * My relationship with a colleague helps me to see things in a new light. 	<p style="text-align: right;">5.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * I'm in a rut and can benefit from working together with others. * Complexity in our working relationships creates opportunity to learn from each other. * I feel safe enough here that we can compete with each other to promote productivity. * There are no limitations here, you can do anything. 	<p style="text-align: right;">6.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * I see my work as relevant to the client community. * I share responsibility with my client community. * I need to learn from other people of colour. * I'm part of team.
<p style="text-align: right;">7.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Development is such a broad idea that I can fit anywhere. * We are all stakeholders in bringing about change here. * I want to be effective as a social worker in the new South Africa so I trust the direction that the organization is moving in. * We agree on what to do. * Is there a link between my spiritual values for doing social work and those of the organization for doing community development? * Which church values are coherent with state funding principles? 	<p style="text-align: right;">8.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * We can plan and work together at in-service training without threatening each others values. 	<p style="text-align: right;">9.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * The demands of my client community are challenging me to consider alternative ways of meeting them. * Let employees contribute to the services of this organization in the way that makes sense to them and where their skills can be best applied.

Figure 5 Descriptions of the emerging sense of ecology in the organizational interrelationships.

<p style="text-align: right;">1.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * I can't do my own thing as I'm dependant on state funding but I would rather be self-employed. * I feel unsafe as a community developer so I won't be able to tithe my time to the church anymore. * I need to rest as a new mother. Development is too dynamic. * People are conserving dysfunctional values by opposing community development. * I don't view cross-cultural work as part of my spiritual purpose. * The organization is being disloyal to me by expecting me to be so independent. 	<p style="text-align: right;">2.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * The problems I have as a developer are confronting to management values. * My contributions are not rewarded. Social work provides no incentives. * Management are negative towards us so I keep quiet. * My opinions are disqualified because people here are rigid about their opinions. * Christians don't behave the way I thought they would. * I'm too tired to do something new even though I need to. 	<p style="text-align: right;">3.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * I'm paralysed so I can't help others. * The organization sees me as excessive so what role can I play? * My skills are threatening to others. * I'm protective of my political values. * Others ideas about development frustrate me. * I feel hopeless and don't have hope for relationships with colleagues. * We don't have time for relationships in this place.
<p style="text-align: right;">4.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * I don't understand others opinions and don't feel anyone understands mine. * My values clash with the values in this politically conservative environment. * I feel threatened by most colleagues ideas. * I feel incompetent and isolated from family, friends and new social work ideas. 	<p style="text-align: right;">5.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Work on your own to prove your strength and competence. * Team work is threatening because you have to deny your individuality. * Dealing with differences is painful. * My interests are not viewed as possible contributions to solving problems we share. * I'm angry and keep a record of your wrongs. * I'm isolated from others if I have to be so independent as a developer. 	<p style="text-align: right;">6.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * My colleagues don't view my contribution to my client community as relevant. * I feel exposed, incompetent and threatened when I have to share control with colleagues and learn to do community development.
<p style="text-align: right;">7.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * We can't agree on how to do things. * Social workers are either community workers or case workers. * The principles of state funding is opposed to church values. * Case work skills aren't transferable to community development. 	<p style="text-align: right;">8.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * Management needs and employee needs are inconsistent with each other. * Mistakes are punishable. * The organization is divided so I protect my client community from them. * We're making sweeping changes in response to the business environment and try to get colleagues involved but they resist. 	<p style="text-align: right;">9.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> * The business community is a dangerous environment. * As funding for social work services is threatened I don't see a role for myself in the profession anymore. * The white church is disloyal to social workers and the black church is fraught with differences and a language barrier separates us from each other. * We have to decide what we want to be; a development forum which fits with the black church and ideas in the white paper or a welfare forum which fits with the white church.

Figure 6 Descriptions of incongruence in the social worker-in-work context relationships.

By implication, the following concluding descriptions can be made relating to this study:

- the organization consisting of autonomous individuals in interaction with each other can be described as a living system created by the unity of interactions between those individuals;
- the individuals as living systems themselves, are autonomous in determining how to respond to perturbations or information from outside as a way of self-regulation or conservation of the individual sense of self;
- the way in which individuals mutually adapt to each other within the threshold of their autonomy creates a sense of coherence or constantly evolving mutual linguistic reality;
- mental health in this study is viewed as the constant striving of individuals to find the balance between self-expression and a sense of belongingness where neither receive priority over the other but are viewed as complementary parts of the whole;
- where a diverse range of autonomous experiences and interaction and characteristics are harmoniously connected to each other a sense of ecology can be described.

The following concluding descriptions on the emerging sense of organizational ecology can be made:

- individual employees who perceive themselves as being able to make meaningful professional contributions to the practice of community development are also described as viewing the work place as productive (autonomy); where

- interpersonal relationships are described as mutually beneficial and providing opportunity for shared learning where professional contributions are not described as threatening to colleagues or organizational values; (diversity.)
- a sense of awareness exists among employees of others autonomy and needs as well as the demands of the broader business environment (namely: church, state, client community, other welfare service providers) on the organization. (sense of community.)

The following concluding descriptions on the incongruence in the social worker-in-work context relationships can be made:

- individual employees who describe themselves as protecting their values and ideas by way of conserving their autonomy describe their professional contributions to social work practice as threatened by extinction, unnoticed, disrespected, un-useful, incompetent, disqualified and unrewarded; (autonomy.)
- amidst such perceptions interpersonal relationships are described as confronting, undesirable, painful, frustrating and unpredictable. A sense of isolation is described and resented and is not viewed as an incentive for autonomous contribution but rather as a necessary conservation strategy; (diversity.)
- a pattern of conservation of individual autonomy is precipitated by employees descriptions of the business environment as dangerous, disloyal and ambivalent. Amidst these perceptions an emerging polarised relationship is illustrated in the following dichotomous descriptions, namely:

- case work practice versus community development practice,
- black church values versus white church values,
- management needs versus employee needs,
- state values versus church values,
- organization as development forum versus organization as welfare forum.

In summary, the following concluding descriptions are discussed:

- the organization emerged as a network of interconnected human relationships where most employees experienced a strong sense of disqualification of their autonomy and mutually participated in this process predominantly by choosing to protect themselves from alternative ideas and collaboration of ideas;
- a pattern of deconstruction, polarization and imbalance or pathology emerged as opposed to co-construction, alignment and diversity or congruence in interpersonal relationships;
- a sense of coherence which emerged among some employees was perceived by others as the polar opposite to their sense of isolation and mutually precipitated the escalating act of threatening each other and creating an environment of mistrust.

4.2 Discussion of the usefulness of an ecological description of mental health in social work practice

Despite the broadly accepted notion that the profession of social work concerns itself with interventions at the interface of people in relation to their environment, professionals are often trapped in dichotomous descriptions where either one side or the other side of a

description are selected as causes to behaviour. In such a process a view of the broader context in which behaviour occurs diminishes and so do the many people who align themselves with the side of the dichotomous description which is excluded. In the act of exclusion much valued diverse contribution is lost.

The ideas implicit in an ecological epistemology strive to overcome this and although never entirely possible, more inclusive, whole perceptions emerge on the functioning of a system where individual ideas are valued and used as a way of co-constructing mutually beneficial solutions.

In any relationship where polarization occurs a sense of escalating frustration and a break in the ecology of that relationship system emerges and is the focus of social work intervention. Social work practitioners, as therapists, developers or managers whose epistemology encourages dichotomous descriptions of behaviour will mutually precipitate the break in the ecological relationship network which they are observing by the descriptions they make.

4.3 Recommendations

1. **The following recommendations concerning research design are suggested:**

- To increase the credibility of the researcher's reconstructions of respondent's original constructions, future research can include persistent involvement with respondents to build trust and create depth to descriptions, double-checking of data with different sources of data or different methods of data collection can be used and the verification of research conclusions with respondents to ascertain whether they are adequate representations of their own perceptions.

By implication, this study although limited in this way did,

- Continually clarify with respondents on their perceptions during interviews;
- A total of 16 interviews created a sense of exhaustive information despite the loss of 2 interview recordings;
- The researcher, although being fluent in both English and Afrikaans accepts that certain meaning may remain implicit in the process of translation as most interviews were conducted in Afrikaans and translated to English for the writing of this dissertation.
- The researcher, being employed by the organization used in this study at the time of research accepts that certain valuable meaning may remain unused and masked due to the researcher's acknowledged awareness of the respondents need to maintain confidentiality. In this way a broader description of the ecology of the organizational interrelationships remains conserved and limits the current descriptions made in this study.
- An alternative process of data abstraction could be to describe each of the 16 respondents-in-work context relationship separately by way of creating an alternative view on the ecology of organizational interrelationships.

2. The following recommendations concerning social work management practice are suggested:

- The following questions emerged during this study and may usefully be applied by social work managers in their efforts to promote employee-in-work context congruence, namely:
 - * What problems are we living out on a daily basis? What is the communication process in the organization which keeps these problems alive?
 - * Is there a connection between the employee's personal, political or spiritual values for doing social work and those of the work context (colleagues, management, church, state)? This could facilitate a shared sense of purpose and maintain respect for the individual thereby creating balance between individuality and a sense of belonging.
 - * Which organizational values are coherent with the values of the broader business environment?
- Consensus building activities (implied in the above questions) which create opportunity for the articulation of individual autonomy in the absence of mistrust and the aligning or restructuring of organizational structure as informed by a shared sense of community are suggested as useful management strategies to promote organizational development.
- The interrelationships of ideas used in this study and illustrated in Figure 3 are suggested as a useful window for managers to view organizational mental health and to evolve ideas for co-creating a greater sense of coherence in disrupted organizations.

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APPENDIX 1

APPENDIX 1

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW - SCHEDULE

A. General questions

1. How long have you been working for the agency? Below 2 years? More than 2 years?
2. Have you experienced any personal trauma within the last two years?
3. This agency has made a decision to emphasize community development as strategy to adapt to changes within the profession in our country at this time.
 - (a) what do you understand of this decision?
 - (b) how do you feel about the decision?
 - (c) would you like to stay in this agency despite this decision? What are the consequences of your decision?

B. Focus: Autonomy

4. Is this change in line with what you value, plan, aspire to do?
 - * if not, what is?
 - * can you see any opportunity for fulfilling these plans here?
 - * what is stopping you?
 - * what can help you to do what you want?

(Window 1)

5. Do you feel other people in your life share your values/vision?

This refers to the following people:

- * home environment/significant others
 - * colleagues
 - * supervisor
 - * management
-
- in such a way that you can work with them on a project?
 - If not, why?

(Window 4)

6. Is the organization's vision clear/unclear to you?

Is the organization's vision real/unattainable to you?

- what else do you hear/perceive is changing here?
- who are the stakeholders who represent this changing vision and can you establish a relationship with them?

(Window 7)

C. Focus: Diversity

7. Do you see opportunities for yourself to practice the kind of social work you envisage amidst these changes?

Can you be open about what you really want to do?

- with yourself and significant others
- with colleagues

- with your supervisor
- with management

What is limiting you from becoming congruent about this?

(Window 2)

8. Can you trust colleagues and do you think people can trust you in working together?
(Either sharing an office or working on a project together?)

Are your plans/ideas/needs encouraged and respected here? (What do people say doesn't fit? How could you compensate/adapt to these suggestions?)

(Window 5)

9. If you had to co-write the strategy and vision of this agency (your idea of how it should be in the future) what would you propose?

- what about this fits better with your life than the agency's current ideas?
- what would be asking too much from you if they didn't accept your proposal?

(Window 8)

D. Focus: Sense of community

10. What is your role in this agency? Is it still needed or valued and how does it affect others?

What are other people struggling with? Can you help them?

Who do you think your client is? (the agency says its the broader community and the church)

(Window 3)

11. How do you let other people know what you need?

How do you solve problems regarding:

- clients?
- colleagues?
- supervisors?
- management?
- personal?

(Window 6)

12. What contribution could you make at this time to the life of this organization regarding the following:

- the client
- your life
- colleagues
- management

(Window 9)