The Family Organization

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Families have organizational elements that sort of sprout up or grow in a planned way over the years, much like a government bureaucracy. This organization may be an effective one, or it can represent a diffusion of authority among numerous people. It may adhere to inflexible rules of operation . . . and the complexity of various procedures may impede effective action.

An effective organization will formulate and implement a family philosophy. It will arrange and structure independent parts of itself into a coherent functioning whole by systematic processes. Once started, an organization tends to perpetuate itself and its very complexity makes it difficult to change. Every member of the family tends to have a vested interest in personal security and what "I want." The family organization is composed of many people, generations and operating systems, different perspectives on time, fixed or conflicting positions and rules, homeostasis and limited vision.

The Family Philosophy

The first step in the evolution of an organization is the development of a family philosophy. A business organization sells a product or service to make money. The philosophy of a family involves the development of a purpose, (a product or service), an analysis of the fundamental beliefs of the family, a theory underlying the sphere of family thinking, feeling and activity. It is concerned with the beliefs, concepts and attitudes of the individual members, and the family as a group. Such a family philosophy is important because most,

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if not all, of the difficulties in a family organization can be traced back to problems in, or lack of such a philosophy. Common definitions of family philosophy include: companionship . . . bringing up the children to have a better standard of living or a better education than we had ... love ... sharing ... to be different from or similar to the family I grew up in ... doing things together . . . having someone to care for ... happiness ... sex ... no one is going to tell me what to do. Philosophies vary widely — from those who believe they have one, to those who never gave it a thought, to varying philosophies within the same family. The purpose of the philosophy is to provide a common ground for systems beliefs within the family. A marriage philosophy that husband and wife are most important may come in conflict with a child philosophy that children are Number One. Such families may never develop a coherent philosophy. Splits, divisions and conflicts ensue. An integrated family philosophy must take into account all the people and relationships in the nuclear and extended family.

On the surface, people with the same fundamental beliefs marry each other. This is the common ground of the relationship. They may not know what their beliefs are but they think and feel they know. After problems develop, they generally present themselves as holding opposite truths or viewpoints. As people work on themselves in the context of the family, striking observations are made. They find they are all peas in a pod — that opposites are alike, that like levels of maturity marry each other; that inside every distancer is a pursuer, and *vice versa*. Emotionally, people in a family tend to deserve each other, for better or worse.

Policies that are seemingly opposite often center around the same issue. To drink or join the temperance league. Sex is the greatest event in the world; sex is meaningless. The common ground of the issue is often the same but people have opposite viewpoints around it. The common philosophical ground becomes a battleground of reactive differences, neither representing a true philosophy. One is for and the other against, not from some conviction but because of the position of the other. "I hate you because you like your parents more than me." This explains why reversals work in the family. Negative reactivity makes the other say the opposite of what I say. Unfortunately, reversals have a short half-life since they are a manipulation. While reversals of previously held philosophies never solve problems they do open people up to new experiences — they do demonstrate that a system can be modified by a change in self, and they do show that all change occurs in self.

Individual values based on the self-centeredness of what "I want" can destroy the common ground of a family philosophy and result in extreme disorganization. Everyone becomes uncomfortable but not equally so. In financial disputes, for example, the spending position is less uncomfortable than the saving position since the saver worries about paying the bills. The pursuing position is ordinarily more uncomfortable than the distancing position. As intense feelings are aroused, viewpoints become fixed and preclude discussion, investigative fact-finding and negotiations. The family philosophy deteriorates into conflict, anger, fusion and distance.

People who have fundamental differences in philosophies may not know it until they try to implement the beliefs with concrete policies. They may believe that there is a common ground based on sexual attraction, physical appearance or the romance of being in love. The values may be the same but the policy about dealing with these values may be different. "We are equal, but man is the head of the house." Policy about money, education, housekeeping, relatives, etc. may come from the same value but lead to a different plan or course of action. A value in itself is useless if it cannot be moved into the family system by an effective policy. Failure to move a belief into the system is followed by attack or withdrawal into self-centered positions, a stagnation in the flow of movement, and closure. Creeping disorganization leads to even further deterioration and paralysis of policy. The family fragments as values become increasingly emotional and less reasonable, and policies become more individual. "I make rules for others but not for myself."

Ordering

The definition of values must proceed to the ordering of values — which ones come first and which second. In figuring out a budget, people may not be able to arrive at mutually acceptable figures. One figure may be right for self but different than the one arrived at by others. As emotional heat and sensitivities are activated, other issues — such as being right, being in control or having my way — preclude a reasonable discussion. The ordering of values has gone astray. Issues are being placed into a sour personal relationship. Being right precedes connectedness between members of the family. It is for this reason that personal relationships and the maintenance of connectedness must assume top priority in the family. Otherwise, almost any issue episode can lead to conflict. One of the biggest mistakes families make is to put episodes before the relationship, leaving people with nothing to work with.

Families often try to resolve difficulties in the presence of triangles, not realizing that people cannot go one-on-one until triangles are eliminated. With the proper ordering of priorities, functional decisions are more apt to occur, differences are respected and consequences super-cede justification. In most situations, family systems values assume higher priority than internal self values. Once systems values are established, one works backwards in the vast majority of cases to a different set of internal values which must be consistent with the system. What is good for my family and what I believe in must be integrated in that order. Individual thinking goes in reverse. The difference is crucial.

Individual and system values must search for some kind of balance. The family is such a fundamental organization that any philosophy which leads to dysfunction in one member, or in a relationship, cannot be seen as useful. All values and their order of priority are subjected to testing. It is possible to set up a billing department in a business, but only by placing it between a group of salesmen and a set of customers can one test its effectiveness systematically. In this fashion, the family philosophy becomes a complex compilation of multiple beliefs with one be-

lief interrelating with and being modified by others. These beliefs are not what people say they believe in. They are beliefs that are defined by working policy. One may state that he believes in staying out of triangles — and then triangle as a matter of policy. The real belief is "being right" rather than staying out of triangles. Many conflictual families that are difficult to understand are perfectly understandable if one sees that they have individual philosophies, individual values above system values. There may even be common ground but different policies. Two fearful people may marry, and one handle the fear by being angry and attacking, while the other handles it by withdrawal. This partly explains why opposites being the same is not a paradox but a difference in policy around the same issue.

Product and Purpose

Values and policy in the family must be integrated with the product and purpose of the family. This lends coherence to family philosophy and is inherent in the concept of a system. Individual values have coherence only for the individual. The purpose, which lies outside the individual, is more understandable than the motivation, which lies inside the person. A family therapist will tell a pursuer not to chase a distancer since the purpose will not be fulfilled. An Analyst will ask why the pursuer is pursuing. Systems people are keenly interested in the purpose and the product.

As the emotional tension in the family rises over any issue, purpose is lost and consequences ignored. Anger and closeness placed together can become purposeless. "To be happy" can produce no product and can defeat the very purpose it sets out to attain. The product can never produce a direct feeling state inside a person. There must be a goal, a result, a situation, a state of being, an accomplishment, and then the feeling might begin to follow. Too many families and people place the cart before the horse — I will have a certain feeling and then I will move. Movement never occurs. The purpose must be profitable emotionally or in some other way. Is it better to give than to receive? The manner in which one defines personal responsibility will determine what is profit and what is loss. This becomes such an overwhelming task that one has little time or patience to be responsible for others.

Is the goal in being, becoming, the selection of a direction, never getting there, always improving self? Time imposes its limitations so one must have long and short range goals, individual and systems values. Time speaks to learning from the past, to make change in the present so the future can be different. Those who focus on the present will lose their sense of goals and purpose and fall into helplessness and problems without solutions. Endless therapy. To organize a family, to prevent drifting, one must subject short range goals to longer objectives. Families that neglect this time factor tend to fall into immaturity, impulsive behavior, and disorganization. Eventually, one must define the goal, the purpose of his own life and of his family. To do that with other members of his family, he must connect with them emotionally.

Basis of Values

One must have a scale, or a set of criteria, to discover a value. This scale must include the moral, intellectual, feeling, emotional, physical, creative and delusional elements. These sets are largely programmed into a person through his extended family — "I will be like them or different from them. I will be for something or against something." But selection depends on perception, and perception is selective. We tend to find evidence inside or outside the family which confirms what we already believe. A woman who wants to believe that all men are no good or that marriage is impossible will tell you that all her friends are divorced or want to be divorced. We all tend to generalize from a small selective experience.

Change is difficult because it demands a modification and investigation of beliefs built up over a lifetime and sometimes programmed by the generations that lived before our birth. The repetition of the belief later becomes the proof of its validity. As long as a philosophy is fixed, there is no empty space in the mind for a useful, uncomfortable confusion — the first stage of knowledge and change. The basis of all values must be questioned. Blind faith reveals a weakness in that particular value, as if one cannot afford to challenge it. The basis of values, the theory that families live by, tell us much about that particular family. If families have physical theories, their values and solutions will tend toward seeing members as sick, toward the use of medication as a solution, toward the development of symptoms such as drug or alcohol abuse, or psychosomatic problems.

The basis for these values will often be found more in the family than in the person.

Normal Family Philosophy

There probably is no normal or right family philosophy. Certainly there is no complete picture. To a large extent, each family must define its own set of values. Each family must test out its own set of values. Some generalities do exist. Every family should provide the context for a unique experiment in living and the evolution of extremely close thinking, feeling and operating systems. Families are not merely sub-sets of societies since the emotional climate is much more intense in the family. Families are much more than the sum of their individual parts. A common example used to illustrate this point is that of sodium, a metal, and chlorine, a toxic gas. When combined, they form NaCI, salt, a common kitchen seasoning. Salt has qualities that no one could imagine by investigating sodium and chlorine.

Another generality is that only in the family can one get high levels of closeness, trust, acceptance, caring about, honesty, sincerity and sensitivity. In business or society it is much easier to fire someone, or avoid them, than work to develop these qualities. The purpose of all families is to foster systematic values which lead to personal, one-on-one relationships. At the same time, the family must be designed to allow every member to grow and develop. If we concede that every individual is unique to some extent, differences must not be just tolerated, but encouraged. Families must teach connectedness without fusion or distance and that closeness and hurt are handmaidens. Families must teach their members to work backwards from system values to individual ones, and to adapt to change over time and space. Families must fight the philosophy of solipsism which holds that self can know only its own modifications and states, that self is the only existing thing. Families must value connectedness and realize the destructiveness of emotional cutoffs. Families must absorb birth and death, hurt and joy.

Form

The first pragmatic step in the establishment of an organization and policy is deciding the form it will take. The form defines the shape, structure or essential nature of an organization as distinguished from its components. It is a model or arrangement that defines authority, decision making, responsibilities, supervision, leadership and the position of each person. It will reflect the family philosophy which gives unity to the whole.

There are three basic family forms which can be used or abused in different areas at different times. The first form is a proprietorship which is directed by a single owner. The second is a partnership which has two or more owners. The third is a corporation in which people participate in ownership and various degrees of management. The proprietorship has the advantage of simplicity and the clear investment of all authority in one person. Partnerships have the advantage of being less one sided, of increasing the number of viewpoints, and providing more people for management. The corporation form has the advantage of providing indefinite continuity since the family survives independent of any individual. The family corporation consists of management and stockholders who may be voting or non-voting.

The man who is "the head of the house" tries to run a proprietorship. All authority comes from him and the other parent becomes a satellite. This form is generally dysfunctional because the boss cannot be present all the time and his spouse is helpless when he is away. If he leaves her with orders, he separates authority and responsibility. The helpless one is often left in charge of enforcing orders she does not believe in. Or, the apparent boss may be a figurehead. Frequently, all decions go to mother, she passes the "No" ones on to father and he automatically stamps them "No." This gives him the appearance of being the boss. Or, father's potentially angry, upset mood may govern the family, and mother will make decisions based on keeping father calm. A distant father may be seen as a proprietor when he makes two strong stands every five years. He is really an absentee landlord. The single parent family is most often a proprietorship. A proprietorship represents individual values. It is a useful form when one is detriangling a dysfunctional process. One parent takes over the situation and the other stays out so there will be no parental conflict and parent and child can go one-on-one.

If the family organization assumes the form of a partnership, each parent is heard and there is no problem when they agree. An effective system must be evolved for dealing with differences in philosophy or policy. Partnerships are generally functional, especially when children are young. However, they are likely to become a sure source of conflict and triangles and confusion when diff-

erent policies and values are applied to the same situation. A child cannot watch TV till 10 p.m. and 2 a.m. at the same time.

If differences are not resolved, partnerships tend to dissolve into proprietorships via divorce. If a partnership is to work, differences cannot be denied, triangles must be avoided, areas must be staked out between each twosome in the family when there are management differences and in other areas, the first parent on the scene assumes authority and responsibility. Function must assume a higher priority of order than "being right, winning, blame and I want." When partnerships become disorganized, authority and decision making may drift outside the family into the community, into welfare, social services and the police. Such drifting represents increasing dysfunction and disorganization within the family.

Corporation

As the family grows in size and age and complexity, partnerships drift into corporations. The family corporation is run under the management of the parents, with other members being voting or non-voting stockholders depending on their age, position of influence within the family and their emotional connectedness to the management. A sixteen-year-old may have much to say and a distant grandfather very little. Difficulties include what matters management should decide, what issues should be submitted to a vote, who should vote about what, and what significance each voter should have. It is the duty of the management to maintain family philosophy and policy.

The corporate family form is subject to proxy fights for control. One parent may solicit the vote of a child against the other parent. A child may solicit the vote of an overdose parent to get support for his individual policy. Mother may want mother-in-law excluded from voting privileges. Triangles form very easily in family corporations, and these triangles are disruptive to the continuity and integrity of the organization. This time permanence — a functional base in the past and present until something more effective can be found in the future — is one of the great advantages of a corporation. Proxy fights lead to emotional cutoffs and destroy continuity and integrity. Family corporations do not simply evolve but must be planned and worked on to be orderly and cohesive. Systems values such as long range planning, common ground and connectedness must supersede the differing expectations of each person in the family.

So families start as partnerships which at times become proprietorships to eliminate triangles and eventually evolve into corporations in which authority is more diffuse but connectedness and continuity persist over the generations. The road is not smooth and can be marred by proxy fights, divorce or separation, the isolation of members by labels such as mental illness, or emotional cutoffs. Any of these can lead to emotional bankruptcy in the family and disorganization moving into the next generation.

Arrangements

In business there are three forms of arrangements: line, staff and committee. In a line arrangement the thinking and doing are in one person and he relates to the thinking and doing in the other person depending on their level of management. In a staff arrangement, one has all the authority and responsibility for the doing, and the other functions as an advisor and oversees the thinking. Staff has a clear separation between thinking and doing, while line does not. Committee arrangements are set up to disseminate information, reconcile viewpoints, use collective judgments, advise and form policy. In the family, line arrangements are useful to encourage people to define and live up to personal responsibility and to encourage them to go one-on-one since each person is responsible for his own position. This helps people to avoid triangles. Staff arrangements, with the separation of thinking and doing, tend to lead to irresponsibility and fragmented functioning since each person must ultimately tend to think for himself and do for himself in order to function. Staff arrangements lead to triangles, such as one making the rules and the other enforcing them. One parent thinks and does nothing. The other parent does everything and never thinks. The one who thinks becomes distant and the one who does everything becomes over-involved. Multiple line arrangements would then appear to be best for the family.

As the family matures, committee arrangements form a useful supplement to line arrangements. It encourages growth since each specialist in the family devotes time to his area of interest and self differentiates best by relating to many and different others. Committees can lead to paralysis if they do not arrive at the practical move of going in one direction at one particular time. Different directions can be tried in sequence but not simultaneously. As children in a family grow older, there is an inbuilt conflict between authority

and the creative differentiation of self. Commmittee and line arrangements must take this into account.

The Formation of Policy

Policy is a set of guiding principles which reflect the family philosophy. It involves the management of affairs and the outline of a definite course of action to determine present decisions. Policies are simple operating principles which guide individual members of the family in living every day life. They are not formed to justify that which exists but to express a value and make it effective and workable in the present. Policy tries to attain the purposes of the family and lead directly to formulation of operating principles which define the "how" of the movement. Fundamental differences in family philosophy will be reflected in conflicting operating principles. "I am right" will conflict with "no one wins in a family if anyone loses." Policy tries to define principles which guide each member of the family in his responsibilities and duties and the clarity of this definition will reflect the degree of self differentiation in the family. The clearer the operating principles in the family, the more differentiated the family is.

Change may occur in the family if new operating principles are introduced at the policy level, but all too often this is an adaptation. Change can be introduced at the policy level but permanent change demands a re-evaluation of family philosophy and purpose, a change in attitude and value. This will lead to the natural change of policy principles. Too many families have multiple policies in the same area, policies that vary according to the emotional situation, superficial philosophies of togetherness and support, or conflicting individual policies and values. If functional systems values are not present in the family, the result will be individual policies that are contradictory, inconsistent and vague, purposeless and dysfunctional, rather than effective. These individual policies tend to multiply toward infinity and move to action before consequences are projected.

Intervention in a family problem on a policy level is done by taking specific episodes of dysfunction in the family and introducing different, more effective operating principles. This can calm things down so that everybody can take a deep breath. It also gives the family some realization that family therapy might be of benefit. An experienced family therapist should know, literally, thousands of such principles. Such moves should proceed from the general to the specific, starting from an overview of the family to the specific problem. Such policy changes have to be carefully thought out and formed in a calm moment, not in the midst of an intense emotional crisis. The shifts are based on the notion of function and not "normality" or other generalizations. Such policy changes lead to new experience in the here and now so that the future can be different. Each policy change should eventually be consistent with others so that they are consistent with a functioning family philosophy. They should be introduced as soon as possible. One does not wait for feelings to change before introducing new operating principles. If one waits for fear to disappear before he flies, he will never fly. Shifts in policy must be open enough so that they can be continually revised and polished and modified in the light of new knowledge or understanding. Agreement from all members of the family is neither necessary nor always desirable at the onset. "I" positions, once stated can be negotiated and families can learn to disagree from the start.

Personnel

In business, the formation of policy leads to the hiring of people to implement it and produce a product. In a family, the personnel, the people, are the product. The purpose is to produce well defined and differentiated people who can have personal relationships without triangles, fusion or distance. This must take into account changes caused by birth, death, enlargement by marriage, extended families, and intrusions from external systems including psychiatry, welfare, courts, schools, probation, police, neighbors and peer groups. Any group in the network might try to assume functions properly handled by the family. Such intrusions often represent an infusion of self into a disorganized and deteriorating family unit. They often add to the disorganization. Eliminating these personnel from the family does not necessarily mean distancing from them. It does mean that people in the family must define themselves and use the network for what it is worth. Other problems include one parent who wants to expand by having children and one who does not want children. Whether to adopt a child or not can be a problem. Having grandparents live in a nursing home, or with children can be a source of conflict and strain.

Design

Over time, families evolve into corporations. Corporations provide continuity. This evolution requires a continuous analysis for diversification and opportunities and change. A planned structure must take this inevitable growth into account. There will be mergers and marriages with members of different families to form new units. Families are not self-sufficient and must change as the context surrounding them changes. Continuity with the past, with the extended family, is necessary to give the family some permanence, to avoid emotional cutoffs.

This planned structure is called design. Whereas policy is directed at effectiveness in the present, design is oriented toward function and modifications necessary to attain projected goals. It projects the family philosophy into the future. It is a drawing, a pattern, a mental scheme to take into account the changes of membership, context, life and death. A nuclear family is born to die but to maintain links between the past and the future. Preliminary designs will show the broad feature of something to be accomplished. Definitive designs are more detailed and should be so clear that they could be put in writing. To accomplish this, people have to discuss with each other, feelings, emotions and thoughts, values and hopes. Everybody must participate because the design is planned in terms of *all* the people in the nuclear and extended family. Design tries to re-vamp and re-evaluate operating principles periodically to prevent stagnation or stunting. It projects the present into the future and the more visual. It can be better.

Time

If designs are bogged down in the immutability of the past, policy cannot take adequate care of the present, and the future is hopeless. If designs are projected into the future by ignoring the policy in the present, they are an exercise in futility. Effective policy precedes design in time. In the presence of family dysfunction, efforts ordinarily spent in planning future design are diverted into maintaining a tenuous homeostatic policy in the present. This is one of the reasons dysfunctional families seem to resist change. They are preoccupied with balancing the present. Homeostasis leads to distance, pursuit, triangles, reactive movement, accentuation of unworkable policy, labeling, and no design for the future. The future becomes lost in a direct, present attempt to remove symptoms in a person or a relationship.

Forgetting is not a design since old memories do not go away. Motivational concepts destroy design by focusing on the "Why?" of the past. Individual concepts lead to explanations without change in policy. The past can then be used to avoid change and movement. There is never enough time for everything.. Systems analysis has to establish effective systems activity over time but this is not an end in itself. It remains a means to an end. The end is the effective reproduction of the family philosophy, the differentiation and identification of self in the family, using the family as the experimental, experiential context. The end is not the solution to a problem but the pursuit of a goal. This includes people long dead and people not yet born.

Quality Control

Every family needs supervision and management. Functions may overlap or be duplicated leading to confusion and friction. Vital operations must be confined within the family, focus on the overview must be maintained and the part must not be used for the whole. Each person must take care of his own person and one person must communicate with the other. New ideas must be brought forth by the appropriate individual to keep up with change. Principles and designs must be tested out. Functioning systems in the family require adequate feedback, an early radar system to detect problems. Standards have to be developed to detect an increase or decrease in function and to make sure that productive moves are recognized and implemented rather than mistaken for dysfunction. A distancer, learning to pursue, will not do it gracefully. Family quality control must recognize that his angry move into the family is better than his distance. The change in direction is more important and precedes the change in the nature of his move.

By its nature, quality control is intimately associated with the development of standards. To be objective, these standards have to lie outside the family and make the family aware of errors in past and present programming. This remains one of the large unknown areas in the field of family research. We are not even close to the development of such knowledge. At present, to evaluate our family, we almost have to wait for our children to have children — three generations. Perhaps even that would not be enough.

People talk about the standards of diagnosis but families run through every diagnosis in the book during their lifetime. We have to avoid the standard of normality except at the extremes of deviation. Normality often rewards mediocrity and often means that those who agree with me are normal. Some standards do exist. Is there connectedness in the family without emotional cutoffs? Is there a minimum of triangles, fusion and distance? Would every member of the family over time say, "This is a pretty good family to live with?" Beyond that we must evaluate every family individually and relatively. If one member of the family says there is a problem, then by definition there is a problem. Perhaps we should say simply that all people and all families have problems? Such deficits in quality control lead to late recognition, acknowledgement and efforts to modify a system. People under stress tend to do more of the same and exhaust their remedies before looking for change in attitudes and philosophy. The resulting disorganization only complicates matters.