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THE EMERGENCE OF AN ORGANIZATIONAL AND  
AN ORGANIZATION SET: A STUDY OF AN  
INTER-FAITH DISASTER RECOVERY GROUP\*

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The study of emergent groups and organizations presents the researcher with a rather frustrating paradox. Although new groups and organizations are constantly created and are therefore actually quite plentiful, for the social scientist who wishes to observe them forming and developing they appear to be rather scarce, since an emergent group by definition is a non-traditional, non-routine phenomenon. Researchers frequently learn of the existence of such groups only when they have ceased to exist and are therefore forced to rely upon at best selective retrospective accounts and documentary residues.

However, we recently had occasion to study an emergent group, not right at the time of its formation, but still while it was in existence and where initial participants were available for direct interviewing and minutes of meetings and other documents could be specifically sought and obtained. The possibility for this study arose in the aftermath of a massive flood which occurred recently in the Eastern United States. As a result of the disaster, major relief and recovery efforts had to be undertaken, including the sheltering and housing of over 20,000 evacuees. Heavily involved in such efforts were traditional and established organizations and agencies such as the Metropolitan Luthern Council, the Jewish Community Center, the Methodist and the Roman Catholic churches. Although these various groups were often quite effective in their activities, most found that the end of the summer dried up a major source of volunteers, i.e., students, which made continuation of their programs very difficult. In addition, some of the denominational organizations had spent as much money on their current flood recovery activities as they felt they could justify.

Out of this background emerged the religiously-based Inter-Faith Recovery (IFR) group. It developed out of meetings in late August which had been held

to see if an on-going ecumenical recovery effort could be attempted. The emergence of this group became a focus of research attention of field teams of the Disaster Research Center (DRC) which were studying several other aspects of the response to the disaster. DRC personnel obtained in-depth interviews with almost all persons involved in the initial meetings leading to the emergence of the Inter-Faith Flood Recovery group. Some key individuals were interviewed more than once. In addition, minutes of meetings and other documents were tracked down and newspaper accounts about the group were collected.

The in-depth interviews were guided by ideas developed in earlier DRC studies, especially by Thomas Forrest's research on the emergence of an Interfaith Emergency Center (IEC) in the aftermath of the 1967 civil disturbances in Detroit, Michigan. Forrest's study, entitled Emergent Organization: A New Approach for Study (1968), is concerned with understanding the processes involved in organizational emergence and institutionalization, and a considerable part of the work involves the development of an analytical framework with which to look at these two processes. The basic explanatory framework is provided by the presentation of a "synthesis" of two divergent theoretical approaches, the emergent norm perspective developed primarily by Ralph Turner (1964), and a feedback model advanced by Walter Buckley (1967). To some extent, the flood situation was seen by us as an opportunity to test, or at least to examine in a different context, some of the ideas set forth by Forrest.

Our effort, despite some imperfect data, proved successful. We found that Forrest's ideas about the emergent process held up very well when applied to the emergence of the Inter-Faith Flood Recovery group in the flood situation. Our data did not suggest any major revisions of his model insofar as the

emergent process was concerned. However, our study did suggest some substantial revisions of his ideas concerning the institutionalization process. In this paper we will first illustrate how our data support Forrest's ideas about emergence, and then advance a somewhat different model of institutionalization indicated by our data and some of the more recent organizational literature.

#### Emergence of the Organization

Forrest conceptualizes the emergence process in terms of a series of developmental stages. Figure 1 summarizes this series.

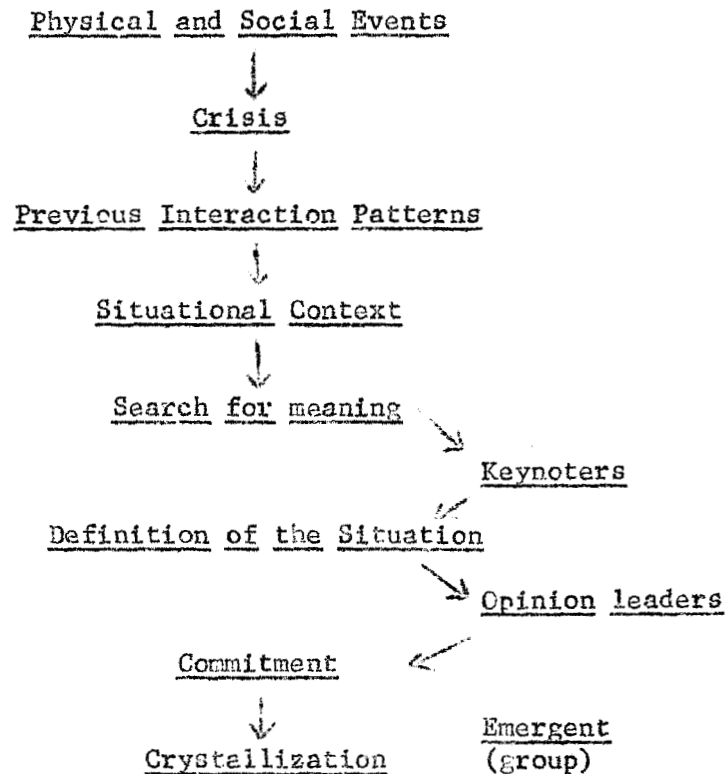


Figure 1. Stages of development in the emergence process (Forrest, 1968)

There appears to be a minor lack of clarity in Forrest's model in relation to the difference between developmental stages and conditions. The third and

fourth "stages," "previous interaction patterns" and "situational context," are obviously not stages in the emergence process but more closely approximate conditions which affect this process. The problem is not especially serious, however, and we shall assume in this context that these two factors are conditions while retaining the same order that Forrest followed in his own specification of the model.

In his treatment of the Detroit civil disturbance, the empirical case on which his analysis is based, Forrest chooses to start with the "crisis" rather than the "physical and social events" for he feels that the physical and social events which lead to a civil disturbance "are far too complicated for this discussion (1968: 39)." Therefore, moving immediately into his discussion of the crisis, Forrest states that "a crisis is merely a label to define a social system in which people are not acting according to institutionalized norms (1968: 39-40)." In spite of the differences from a civil disturbance, the flood situation we studied can quite definitely be labeled a crisis.

Forrest states that it is around interaction patterns present prior to the crisis that individuals tend to gather in order to restructure the situation (1968: 40). The case of Inter-Faith Recovery is somewhat different in this respect for there was a relative absence of such patterns among IFR participants prior to the crisis.

Within the flooded areas there were instead factors that had long worked against the formation of stable interaction patterns among leaders of the religious community. For example, the major ecumenical body, the Council of Churches, was perceived as an inactive body and received little support from the major denominations and almost no participation by the smaller denominations. As a result the Council of Churches provided no basis for the

foundation of IFR. Secondly, there was a major split between the Protestant and the large ethnic Catholic populations, especially the Orthodox Catholic groups. This split was made explicit later when there was a movement by Protestant groups to support a Catholic as director of the board in order to bring the two groups closer together. Finally, there had been a history of poor relations between the communities on opposite sides of the river. Following the flood there were claims that one of the communities, which was hit harder by the flood, was receiving less aid than the other. These and other more subtle problems may have served to limit the development of interaction patterns prior to the flood.

Of the interaction patterns that did exist prior to the flood, most tended to be more formal than those which Forrest describes. By more formal we mean a greater specificity of relations as opposed to the more diffuse quality Forrest infers. Most contacts, in other words, appeared to be based primarily on previous official contact among individuals as representatives of their respective denominations rather than informal, diffuse relationships.

In part, the difference described above may be accounted for by the fact that the original meetings of what was to be Inter-Faith were arranged and chaired by two persons who were in many ways external to the situations of the other participants; that is, they were representatives of a non-religious organization, VISTA. Thus, the gathering to seek a restructuring of the situation, as Forrest describes it, did not, in the case of IFR, emerge as much from within as one would suppose from Forrest's model.

Also the different contexts of the two cases cannot be discounted, for the fact that the IEC emerged in the midst of a civil disturbance may have required a faster, more responsive reaction than was required in the flood

situation. Related to this is the fact that IFR emerged approximately two months after the flood, lessening, to some degree, the immediacy of the recovery problem.

More important, however, is the fact that Inter-Faith was to a large extent an outgrowth of organizations rather than individuals. The VISTA workers mentioned above made an effort to contact several of the existing recovery organizations in order to set up the original IFR meetings. As such, the persons who participated in these meetings participated not only as individuals but as representatives of their organizations, a factor which accounts in part for the more formal character of the previous interaction patterns that did exist.

The situational context is, in Forrest's scheme, quite simply the place (and the time) at which the members meet to restructure the situation (1968: 41). The first meeting of what was to become IFR took place in a church in late August, nearly two months after the flood. As already noted, it was arranged by two VISTA workers who, having previously contacted several local voluntary organizations, had decided that the churches were the only organizations which promised to be really helpful in meeting many of the still remaining needs. Although these two VISTA workers did chair the meeting, they endeavored to let the other participants determine as much as practical its direction. That is, they had drawn up a rather sketchy agenda specifying various introductory remarks and supporting figures, but they wanted the other participants to "carry the ball."

"The search for meaning occurs," says Forrest, "when individuals...come together to discuss the crisis event and exchange information gathered from a number of perspectives," (1968: 41-42). Although the flood had occurred some

time before, the participants in the early IFR meetings were nevertheless searching for a more adequate means of dealing with the situation, for the previously tried methods had proven to be unsatisfactory or at least inadequate for many of them. Virtually all these participants had played some part already in flood recovery and were all aware of how much more needed to be done. For these reasons these persons were willing to meet in hopes of finding what to them was a better course of action.

Keynoters occupy an important place in Forrest's delineation of the emergence process. They are "usually individuals that, by virtue of their previous positions of status, are naturally looked to for leadership.... Keynoters act as catalysts in determining and legitimating a definition of the situation," (1968: 43). This function is well illustrated by the observation of one respondent that during the third or fourth meeting a judicatory representative who was attending the meetings rose and made a plea for some sort of "commitment." It is apparent that it may at times be difficult to differentiate Forrest's keynoter from his opinion leader, the latter being instrumental in the group's actual commitment to a course of action. The example above, on the other hand, was action directed to achieving some sort of consensus about where they were, rather than where they were going. It is obvious, though, that the keynoter and the opinion leader serve similar sorts of functions.

Forrest states that "in order for the collective body to act, a consensus must be reached as to what would be appropriate behavior," (1968: 44). There must, in other words, be a commitment to a general course of action; they must decide not only that they are going to do something about it but also what they are going to do about it. This is the commitment or action commitment



stage (Forrest, 1973: 42) of Forrest's formulation. It relies to a great extent on the opinion leaders referred to above. In the case of IFR this stage is probably best indicated by the agreement on the part of the participants in the early part of September to organize into an on-going organization devoted to flood recovery. This decision was rapidly followed by such activities as the election of officers, the appointment of a sub-committee on personnel, etc., activities which tended to formalize the previously informal status of various keynoters and opinion leaders. These leaders, or core-group, as Forrest calls them, give direction to the commitment of the group providing "leadership for a co-ordinated group response," (Forrest, 1968: 45), which is a necessary condition of the final stage of Forrest's emergence process, crystallization.

It appears then that besides the relative absence of previous interaction patterns and the more formal basis of those that did exist, factors which we have attempted to account for above, Forrest's model of group emergence seems to provide an adequate framework with which to approach the emergence of Inter-Faith Recovery.

#### Emergence of the Organization Set

In presenting the second portion of his paper, Forrest specifies the institutionalization process of the emergent organization; that is, the process by which the organization begins interaction with other organizations in its environment and "enters the system." Forrest's treatment of this process in terms of a feed-back model is interesting as far as it goes. However, it is our belief that a different model would be more fruitful in this context as well as approaching more closely Forrest's desire to provide a "synthesis" of the emergence process and the institutionalization of the organization.

Therefore, rather than follow Forrést's approach to the institution-alization process in terms of a system model, we shall utilize a framework that has more recently gained favor among organizational sociologists, the inter-organizational network or organization set (Evan, 1972). Although very little of the literature devoted to the organization concerns itself with the emergence of that organization, even less of the literature on the organization set attempts to grapple with the process of the emergence of that organization set. It may at times be forgotten that although obviously the organization goes through some sort of emergence process, the emergence of the organization set is just as real. That is, certain patterned and recurrent relationships are manifest as the organization set emerges just as certain patterned, recurrent relationships were manifest upon the emergence of the organization itself. It may be valuable then to approach the emergence of the organization set in a somewhat similar framework as we approached the emergence of the organization.

However, the organization set is quite different from the organization in that it does not exhibit a collective identity; it is, in other words, viewed as an entity only in terms of the perspective of the focal organization. With this in mind, we shall define the organization set as consisting of a number of organizations which interact in some fashion with a given focal organization which is itself the point of reference for our analysis (Evan, 1972: 329).

The relations or linkages between the focal organization and its organization set can be characterized in a number of ways. Litwak, for example, has characterized them in terms of adjudicative versus communicative linkages (Litwak, 1970: 161-162). Much of the "institution-building" literature has

been built around enabling, functional, normative, and diffuse linkages (Blase, 1973). However, Litwak's scheme does not appear applicable here and the linkages referred to in the literature on institution-building represent mainly a convenient conceptual apparatus which we believe promise little or no theoretical value. In the case of Inter-Faith, if any scheme differentiating types of interorganizational linkages was operative among the participants, it appeared to be in terms of the distinction between linkages or contacts involving resources and those involving recognition.

We shall return to this distinction further on, but a more immediate question should probably concern us first, namely, how are the linkages established and through what process is the organization set formed?

In an attempt to integrate the treatment of the emergence of the organization set with Forrest's treatment of the emergence of the organization, we will suggest, as did Forrest, a series of phases for analytically approaching the emergence process of the organization set. Figure 2 represents a summary of these phases.

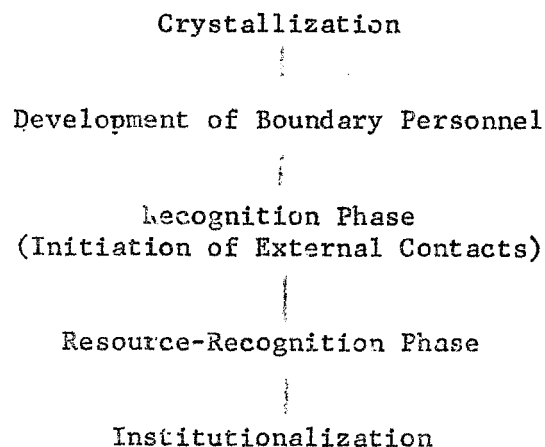


Figure 2. Phases in the Development of the Emergent Organization Set

The first phase, crystallization, provides a link between the emergence of the organization and the emergence of the organization set in that it is the final phase of Forrest's model. Crystallization indicates that the organization in question (the focal organization) is more or less committed to a course of action and "has distinct identifiable characteristics not previously recognized" (Forrest, 1973: 423). This appears to be an obvious prerequisite to the emergence of the organization set.

The second phase is the development of boundary personnel or the structural delineation of responsibility for external contacts. In the case of Inter-Faith, two key individuals emerged as the primary representatives for development of interorganizational contacts. The specification of these individuals, rather than an arbitrary assignment, appeared to emerge in the early meetings from a consensus among the members that the given individuals were the obvious choices for this function. Although one of the two had a more developed reputation in that he had been associated with a previously established church-based recovery effort, both were known as "good businessmen" and were therefore perceived as capable of the job.

The development of boundary personnel also occurred at a lower level in the organization as well. There were situations in which lower level staff personnel first established contact with other groups and organizations, but this initial contact was usually followed up by interaction between the newly contacted group and higher level personnel of IFR. After the establishment of a relationship, contact through lower level personnel became more common and it seems probable that in the later phases of the emergence of the organization set these same personnel would take on more of the tasks of external contact.

The third phase is the actual initiation of external contacts which we call the recognition phase. As noted earlier, it appears that although there are a number of possible classificatory schemes relevant to interorganizational linkages, the scheme most appropriate here seems to be based on two primary tasks facing the organization: a) establishing recognition and b) obtaining and/or depositing resources. Although other externally-directed tasks are certainly important for the organization, e.g., obtaining authorization, etc., the above tasks appeared to be of primary importance in the early operating scheme of IFR.

The first task, that of establishing recognition, consists of both the establishment of visibility and the acquisition of legitimacy. Although the former term is self-explanatory the latter should be defined. Following Perrow, we shall define legitimacy as the acceptance by a relevant population (be they organizations, groups or individuals) of both the goods and services provided by an organization and its means of "production" (Perrow, 1970: 98-99). This acceptance is similar to the concept of domain consensus discussed in the literature. Without some consensus regarding the specific goals it wishes to pursue and the functions it undertakes in order to implement its goals, Levine and White (1961) state that there can be no exchange among organizations. Thompson (1967: 28) points out that the establishment of domain is neither arbitrary nor unilateral since it involves recognition by those who provide support in the task environment and by those for which the focal organization provides some desirable output. In short, the development of recognition by an organization set consisting of both suppliers of inputs and consumers of outputs is a prerequisite to organizational functioning.

The second task is that of obtaining and/or depositing resources. Resources is taken in a rather broad sense in this context to include not only material, financial and personnel resources, but information as well.

Returning now to the third phase of the process of emergence of the organization set, the initiation of external contacts, we find that although both tasks are important in this phase, the establishment of recognition is given primacy by the focal organization. At this point IFR, through its director, initiated contacts with the office of the U.S. President's representative in the area as well as various disaster-relevant organizations such as the Red Cross.

As mentioned above, previous interaction patterns play an important role in Forrest's discussion of the emergence of the organization. It is mainly in this third phase of the emergence of the organization set that they also appear important. The director of IFR, for instance, utilized several of his prior contacts while developing linkages with other organizations for IFR. The treasurer, the other primary boundary personnel, also had close contacts with national governmental and religious funding organizations.

The third phase shades off into the fourth, which we have chosen to call the resource-recognition phase. It is in this phase that the interrelation between the recognition and resource tasks is most pronounced. That is, recognition may lead to some sort of an exchange of resources, or a request or offer of resources may lead to increased recognition. For instance, during the early part of Inter-Faith's existence, the Department of Housing and Urban Development requested that Inter-Faith distribute approximately 60,000 blankets for them. In what was "the key to our total relationship with the government," in the words of one key participant, IFR managed to successfully carry out the request, thereby establishing a firm recognition with the government.

IFR's contacts with the Family Service Association, the United Way and Central Information Service (CIS) are also examples of linkages characteristic of this phase. The last organization, CIS, was contacted through an informal

channel and proceeded to divert volunteers and material resources into IFR while at the same time helping to establish recognition of the organization.

It is especially in this fourth phase that we note the focal organization making use of its power attained in earlier phases to effect the successful emergence of its organization set. It must, in other words, gain some degree of power relative to competing organizations for it to attain any control over scarce organizational resources (Rosengren, 1970: 126; Dynes, 1969: 216-217). However, because Inter-Faith emerged in a disaster situation, a situation in which there were many gaps which a service organization could fill, competition over domain was not as apparent as might be the case in a non-disaster situation.

The final stage of the process of the emergence of the organization set consists of the institutionalization of the emergent organization and its emergent organization set. This institutionalization can best be described as a more or less stable state of exchange between the focal organization and its organization set.

It was not until this final phase of the organization set emergence (a phase that we can locate at about two months after the first meetings of Inter-Faith) that IFR acquired linkages with several private business firms. Often such private firms, involved mainly in concerns not directly relevant to disasters, seem to exhibit a kind of conservatism or "wait-and-see" attitude in disaster situations. That such organizations entered IFR's organization set only at this last phase seems consistent with this characterization of conservatism.

#### Discussion

Of course, the organization set may fail to materialize at all. Whether for such general reasons as the lack of sufficient legitimacy or the inability

to supply or consume appropriate resources, the organization may fail during any of the phases, thereby precluding the emergence of its organization set and thereby its own survival. In reference to this we wish to point out that the model outlined herein could prove useful in delineating the various factors which may contribute to failure in organization set emergence by providing a meaningful framework by which to isolate these very factors. It is possible, for example, that the factors contributing to failure at one phase may, at another phase, contribute to successful emergence. For instance Rosengren suggests that as a service organization matures it tends to change its orientation to its clients from one characterized by a "broad lateral basis" to a more specific, long-term ("longitudinal") focus. In terms of our model, the "lateral" orientation would be likely to exist primarily during the recognition phase outlined above. To continue such a broad basis, however, can be "potentially a divisive pattern," in Rosengren's words, for it tends to increase the focal organization's reliance on other organizations, making it more vulnerable to manipulation (1970: 124). Therefore, while the lateral basis may be more effective during the recognition phase of the emergence of the focal organization's organization set, it is likely to be a liability upon the entrance into the institutionalization phase where a more "longitudinal" orientation would be appropriate. The model may thus serve to delineate under what conditions various factors can influence the emergence process.

A difficulty facing every new organization is what Stinchcombe describes as the "liability of newness" (Stinchcombe, 1965). Essentially this concept centers around the idea that a new organization must in some fashion either possess or create a new market. Closely related to our previously defined use



of the term legitimacy, the "liability of newness" is likely to be less of a problem in the case of a rare disaster situation since the radically altered conditions are likely to open up and expose several gaps to be filled by various organizational services. This is, of course, only a relative difference and the degree of liability of newness would vary with such factors as the extent of previous community disaster experience, the services offered by the new organization, etc. It would also be imperative to keep in mind that as conditions return or approximate the pre-disaster situation, the market which had supported the emergent organization might disappear (Perry, Gillespie and Mileti, 1974: 117).

Such a return to pre-disaster conditions would likely require a renegotiation of the process of organization set emergence. That is, to some extent the organization might be forced to return to an earlier phase in order to develop a new or modified organization set relevant to the new market situation. A renegotiation of the phases is, then, similar to the process of "goal succession" discussed so often in the literature, although the former term focuses on external relationships of the organization rather than internal structure.

Unlike the original emergence in the midst of a crisis situation, renegotiation is likely to be much more gradual. The changing market for the organization's product will shift relatively slowly permitting the organization more time in which to initiate external contacts.

#### Conclusion

It is useful to note that although this paper has been directed toward the emergence processes in a disaster situation, such processes are obviously important concerns in non-disaster situations as well. It appears likely that

because of greater time constraints in a disaster, the emergence of both the organization and the organization set are likely to be more rapid and to exhibit different patterns than would be the case under more normal circumstances. It would therefore be important to attempt to locate and specify the emergence process in varying settings in order to indicate the generalizability of the models above.

Although study of a disaster situation may sometimes make generalization to other situations difficult, the disaster context does provide us with numerous advantages which have been discussed elsewhere (Barton, 1969; Dynes, 1969). Most relevant here, however, appears to be the fact that the rapidly changing disaster environment provides an excellent opportunity to view the more fluid aspects of complex organizations. In such a context the elimination of the barrier between the study of collective behavior and the study of complex organizations becomes possible (Dynes and Quarantelli, 1968). It has, in fact, been an explicit concern in this paper to attempt a synthesis of these two general perspectives. For although such syntheses have been championed mainly by those in the area of collective behavior (Quarantelli and Weller, 1973) the advantages accrue to both orientations.

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