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The governance of women's organisations

Towards better practice

Jane W Grant



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Centre for Institutional Studies
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Note

This Commentary is published as one of a series of reports on women's organisations in the UK Voluntary Sector. The series provides a statistical and qualitative overview of women's leadership and participation in public life and civil society.

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Jane W Grant

1 INTRODUCTION

This research grows out of a very active involvement in the organised women's movement.¹ It is rooted as much in my work as a practitioner with women's organisations over many years as in my formal PhD thesis on *Governance, Continuity and Change in the Organised Women's Movement* for the Centre for Women Studies at the University of Kent (January 2001).

In 1996 Siobhan Riordan, Margaret Page and I started to meet in a small informal research group on women's organisations. This was born out of a strong commitment to the power of women organising, coupled with an almost total dearth of in-depth research or analysis on how they organise (a notice we placed in the newsletter of the Women's Studies Newsletter seeking fellow researchers got a nil response). In my case it was borne out of the often marked imbalance between the ideals of the women's movement (and I use the term broadly to encompass the organisations which came out of both first and second wave feminism) and its potential to literally change the world for women - and what often happens in reality when governance², in particular, proves inadequate to this task. Organisations which do achieve their aims and develop their governance to fit these aims illustrate just what a potent force for change - both in specialist areas like health, violence, domestic abuse, childcare, education and in the wider area of women's equality - women's organisations can be.

Such organisations can and do provide models of excellent and even transformational leadership and management. However, women's organisations seem to face even greater challenges than the voluntary sector as a whole. Structures and procedures which worked well when organisations were first set up can become positively **disabling** when they fail to adapt to changing circumstances. At the worst, organisations established to address injustice in the world outside can find themselves riven with power disputes; founder directors who had set up dynamic, innovative organisations stay on too long and can turn into difficult autocrats; complex organisations in urgent need of good management seem to find it very difficult to be good employers of high calibre staff so that chief executives find themselves in a 'no win' situation where the better they perform, the

¹ Between 1984 and 1994 I helped to develop and then ran the National Alliance of Women's Organisations (NAWO), an umbrella body of around 220 women's groups large and small. Since 1994 I have worked as a researcher and consultant with a range of women's groups, as well as being a trustee, member or adviser to several others. I have been very involved in international efforts to promote women's equality - both at UN level (I was an active participant in the NGO Forum at the 4th UN World Conference on Women in Beijing in 1995 and at the Special Session of the UN General Assembly in New York on Beijing + 5 in June 2000), as a member of the International Women's Group of the Women's National Commission, through Project Parity ('50/50 Building Democracy, Training World Leaders') and as an adviser to the Global Fund for Women.

² There are many different definitions of the currently very popular term 'governance'. Billis and Harris (1996), for instance, define it as 'relationships between staff and management committees and between chief executives and chairpersons and between national headquarters and local associations' (p.8). I prefer a broader definition like that of Cornforth and Edwards (1998, p.5) as 'the way organisations are governed'.

more they are resented; relationships between volunteers and staff - and between staff and management committees - are frequently uneasy.

Siobhan Riordan's (1999) research developed into a major research programme with Andri Soteri (2001, 2002a, b) on the funding of women's organisations (which is often the most difficult challenge of all that they face) and the links between funding problems and capacity building indicators, in a partnership of the Centre for Institutional Studies (CIS) at the University of East London and the Women's Resource Centre (WRC). I am delighted this report is published in parallel with reports on this work and Margaret Page's (2002) pioneering study on feminist collaboration and partnerships across political, business and intersubjective worlds. But, although the situation is improving, the ways in which women organise is still massively underresearched. This report is intended both as a stimulus to further research (since in many ways it constitutes a scoping study, concentrating more on breadth than depth, which begins to map out the territory for myself and others to build on and expand) and a small contribution to the better governance - the development of **enabling** rather than **disabling** structures - of a sector to which I am wholly committed.

The aims of my research were fourfold:

- To develop a methodology for the analysis of the governance of women's organisations.
- By drawing on both archival and contemporary material, to make an original contribution to the understanding and knowledge of the organised women's movement, the challenges which it faces and its ability to adapt its governance in the face of rapid change.
- To draw on the case studies, other examples examined and other expertise within the sector, to draw up guidelines for the good governance of organisations as a contribution to the development of good practice in the organised women's movement.
- To begin to redress the research deficit on women organising and stimulate further relevant research both within the sector and within the academy.

Unlike the CIS/WRC research, my own research is mainly qualitative, using a combination of feminist and organisational theory, voluntary sector governance and grounded theory. It draws on extensive desk research (all the annual reports, newsletters, committee minutes etc and other publications which proliferate in every women's organisation - some publicly available but much of it internal documentation generously made available to me by the organisations). There has been the material gathered as a participant observer in AGMs, meetings, conferences, seminars, workshops, on the board and in the offices of a range of organisations; through a focus group of key figures in the women's movement which met in summer 1996; and, most importantly, as an interviewer, of in-depth, semi-structured, open-ended interviews (usually face to face but occasionally on the phone) of a range of key informants from the organisations with which I have been concerned or involved. At the core of this are case studies of 17

organisations - eight traditional organisations from 'first wave' feminism around the beginning of the 20th century, eight organisations from the women's movement in the 1970s and the Fawcett Society as a bridge between the two. The case studies were selected through a process of network sampling combined with a desire for balance in size, type and area of activity. They were examined through the lenses of a variety of research questions raised by the various literatures which impinge on this research.

Chapter 2 gives a brief overview of these literatures; Chapter 3 a synopsis of the results of the research on the different organisations while the final section, Chapter 4, draws out conclusions and recommendations for the organised women's movement arising from this research. My research was always intended to be as much action as inquiry orientated and I am as much, if not more, concerned that it should be helpful to my partners in the women's movement than to fellow academics.

2. WHAT DOES THE LITERATURE TELL US?

2.1 Research methodology

In devising my research methodology I was very influenced by the wider feminist research ethic expounded by such writers as Acker, Barry and Esseveld (1983) who argue for 'methods of gaining knowledge which are not oppressive' (p.423), for a 'sociology *for* women, one that is in the interests of women, rather than only about women' (p.424) and for the way in which they were 'committed to bring our subjects into the research process as active participants' (p.434). Susan Clegg argues (1975) that 'no one methodology exists as a protocol for feminists', although she cites Oakley's (1982) illustration of the need to 'accept one's position as a sharer rather than just a taker of information' (Clegg, 1975: p.92), the concept of 'collaborative interviewing' (p.93) and ends with the diverse strategies of 'complete participation, modified and an "interventionist" semiparticipant observation' (p.94). I found Stanley and Wise's (1983) concept of 'multiple standpoint', Reason and Rowan's (1997) explanation of 'co-operative enquiry' and Sheriff and Campbell's (1981) definition of the 'case study' helpful. Everitt and Gibson (1994) were useful on 'network sampling'. I have been much influenced by books like Roberts (1981) (especially Oakley's chapter on 'Interviewing women: a contradiction in terms' (1981 pp.30-59), Lee and Renzetti (1993) and Maynard and Purvis (1994). Several contributors to the last argue, as I do, 'that the point of doing research is to create useful knowledge which can be used to "make a difference"' (p.28) and voice the concern that 'masculinist hierarchy between theory and practice is being reproduced in academic feminism' (p.8).

All these books helped me to define and refine my methodology and particularly my interviewing techniques, in the light of, for instance Kelly, Regan and Burton's views (1992 and 1994) and their claim:

it is nevertheless still the case that not just qualitative methods but the in-depth face-to-face interview has become the paradigmatic 'feminist method' (Kelly, Burton and Regan, 1994: p.34).

2.2 Appropriate organisational structure and governance

Mainstream literature

There is of course a copious mainstream literature on organisational structure and governance from Weber onwards almost all of which is written by men, relates to the 'malestream' corporate world and is characterised by a virtual total lack of gender awareness. Mintzberg's (1989) analysis of seven organisational types or cultures and his development of the concept of life cycle of organisations - through the four stages of formation, development, maturity and decline - did, however, have some relevance and I found his

examination of how: 'Demise can be avoided through organizational renewal, either through *gradual revitalization* or *dramatic turnaround*' (p.294) useful. The same was true of Robbins' (1990) examinations of bureaucracy and particularly 'adhocracy' which he defined as:

A rapidly changing, adaptive, usually temporary system organized around problems to be solved ...excellent for responding to change, facilitating innovation... (p.254).

Governance in the voluntary sector

This more specific literature may also display little gender awareness but, since most women's organisations are also located within the wider voluntary sector and have to operate within the regulations, changing conditions and funding constraints affecting the charitable and voluntary sector as a whole, an awareness of this framework and the growing literature of the sector is important and relevant. This literature also raises key questions not raised by other literatures such as what makes for a successful relationship between the narrower definition of governance (usually the responsibility of the chair and board of trustees) and management (usually the responsibility of staff, particularly the chief executive if one exists).

This literature, like that of 'women in management' discussed later, is positioned on a continuum between the practical, straightforward 'how-to' book intended for the practitioner - i.e. staff members or trustees of voluntary organisations large and small. Many of these are published by organisations like the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO), the London Voluntary Service Council (LVSC), the Directory for Social Change (DSC), the National Centre for Volunteering, the Association of Charitable Foundations (ACF), The Charities Aid Foundation (CAF) and the Association of Chief Executives of Voluntary Organisations (ACEVO) etc. At the other end of the continuum, there is also a growing list of more theoretical, academic articles, journals or books produced or inspired by institutions like the Centre for Civil Society at the London School of Economics or the Public Interest and Non-Profit Management Research Unit (PiN) at the Open University. All these organisations (and they are only a selection) run associated training courses, learning sets, seminars and conferences.

Useful texts from the more popular literature are Handy (1988), with its analysis of power and of the cultures, structures and systems of organisations, Sandy Adirondack's classic 'how to' text *Just About Managing* (1998) (which some organisations give their new trustees as part of their induction pack) and Mike Hudson's *Managing without Profit: the Art of Managing Third-Sector Organisations* (1995), grouped around the different concepts of Boards, Management, People, Organizations and The Future. The last is very useful on the 'life cycle of boards' (a concept found, of course, in Mintzberg and others in relation to organisations as a whole) and 'how to make Boards effective'. In the chapter on 'Managing Different Types of Organization', Hudson describes 'organization life cycles' from birth (informal, dominated by founders etc) to youth (new staff, attempts to systematise, muddled staff/ board roles etc), adulthood (strong leadership, systems in place, clear roles and accountability) and maturity (established, older staff, less entrepreneurial) to decline (membership and donations fall,

board members resign, board needs change and new purpose). This provided an extremely useful lens through which to look at many of the organisations I have researched.

At the more academic end of the scale the Centre for Voluntary Organisations at LSE, now Centre for Civil Society, produced a series of very useful generic Working Papers on governance (Harris, 1993; Dowsett and Harris, 1996) and stimulated important publications like Billis and Harris (1996) whose chapter on 'How do Voluntary Agencies Manage Organisation Change' by David Wilson is particularly useful. A particularly relevant publication is Cornforth and Edwards (1998), which examines in depth the role and effectiveness of different models of governance, and identifies three main models:

- **Agency model** which sees the main function of the board to make sure that the resources of the organisation are safeguarded and to monitor and, if necessary, 'control the behaviour of managers'. This can be seen as a 'traditional model' which 'appears to underpin much of the prescriptive literature on non-profit governance and it mirrors the historical form that many early charitable organisations took. (p.12)
- **Partnership model** where a governing body 'can be regarded as the apex of a management hierarchy' so that it is believed

board members should be selected on the basis of their expertise and contacts so that they are in a position to add value to the organisation's decisions rather than just select, monitor and control management; that boards, like managers, will require careful induction and training, that they will need to know how to operate effectively as a team. Ideas such as these are common in much prescriptive literature on non-profit boards (p.12-13).

- **Political model** which suggests that the 'role of the board is to represent the interests of one or more stakeholder groups in the organisation'. Many membership organisations see their governance in this light. Central to this view is that anyone can put themselves forward for election as a board members. Expertise is not a central requirement, as it is in the managerial perspective' (p.13).

Cornforth and Edwards also emphasised the 'second important idea' of contingency:

How boards are structured and behave will be influenced by the circumstances they face, for example the size of the organisation, its history and culture and the regulatory regime that it faces. Of particular importance is the influence of the state...(p.11).

Finally, for our purposes, Cornforth and Edwards are particularly interesting because one of their four case studies, the local voluntary organisation (LVO), is clearly a women's aid type organisation 'set up in 1975 by a group of volunteers concerned by the lack of support for victims of domestic violence in the area' (p.20) which has moved from being a collectively run organisation in the 1980s to a more conventional organisational structure. Although it now had a conventional board, there was a lack of 'initial induction or training' (p.29) for this, and a CEO who 'did little to encourage

the development of the board as a whole; indeed she seemed to perceive their working closely together as a threat. The authors explore the issue of 'patterns of power' in board-management relationships (alongside the conduct of board meetings and the level of information the board needs) and concludes that in the case of the LVO there was

a recognition among most board members that the CEO had a great deal of power. This stemmed from her expertise, knowledge of what was going on in the organisation and control of information (p.37).

For women's organisations this move into the voluntary sector has, as we shall see, had a profound effect. It has allowed small feminist groups run as collectives to transform into complex voluntary organisations providing a sophisticated range of services. It has turned workers into co-ordinators and then into directors and the infrastructure organisations which support the sector - NCVO, ACEVO and more recently The Women's Resource Centre for women's groups in London - have been there to provide the new managers with support and model guidelines of good management. This has not so much diluted feminist models of leadership as opened the organised women's movement to a wider, more mainstream managerial model and meant that to a large extent the whole sector has been affected by the new managerialism, with access to wide-ranging management training and support.

Gender and Organisation

While the two literatures above are largely 'ungendered', the publication of a seminal paper in 1974 (Acker and Van Houten) opened the way for work like Kanter and Wolff (both 1977). Mills and Tancred (1992) give an extensive overview of how the 'emergent feminist organizational analyses of the 1980s focused attention upon a number of key aspects of the relationship between gender and organization', citing names like Burrell, Gutek, Hearn and Parkin, Lamphere, Ferguson, Grant and Tancred Sherriff (p.67). Hearn and Parkin's (1987) work on sexuality in organisations falls into much the same category. By the end of the 1980s, 'feminist organizational analysis had established a critical presence within organizational and management science - moving from critique, through a series of theoretical developments, to a range of empirical studies' (p.197). This was followed in 1990s by the work of such rigorous feminist organisational theorists as Coleman (1991), Berman Brown (1995), Calas and Smircich (1992a and b and 1996). It is a pity that, although these works no doubt contributed to the academic debate on postmodernism and feminism etc, they did so at a level of discourse so theoretical and so far removed from the experience and practice of actual women in actual organisations.

Most of the above writers were concerned with women in organisations generically, rather than women within their own autonomous organisations, but a literature on women's own organisations is emerging. Ryan (1992), Tobias (1997), Bordt (1998) give a broad picture of the women's movement in the US while Iannello (1992) and Riger (1994) give a more detailed analysis of organisational challenges. Iannello uses three case studies to look at, for instance, the dangers of people gaining power informally, with no procedural

means of removing them. Riger's article is titled 'Challenges of Success: Stages of Growth in Feminist Organizations' and examines just that, including an in depth analysis of what she succinctly calls 'founder's trap'. Fried (1994) uses the Sexual Assault Hotline of a Midwest state university as a case study and carefully analyses the ideological differences between what she defines as 'politicized organisations' and 'service organizations' and emphasises the importance of clarity of goals and their influence on organizational coherence and unity.

Back in the UK there is quite a rich history of the women's movement, probably led by Campbell and Cote (1987) and Rowbotham (1989) and including Bourchier (1983), Holland (1984), Williams (1988), Lovenduski and Randall (1993) - especially Chapter 4 on the Autonomous Women's Movement - and Griffin (1995). In more detail Martin (1990) defines the five essential characteristics of a feminist organisation (feminist ideology/ values/ goals/ outcomes and founding circumstances), Brown (1992) looks in great detail at the development of two women's centres in which she was a participant observer, Dobash and Dobash (1992) give a comprehensive overview of the rise of the battered women's movement in the US and Britain. Mary Stott's classic study of the Townswomen's Guild *Organization Woman* (Stott, 1978) remains highly relevant to the more traditional, hierarchical end of the organised women's movement, while Kent (1988) and Andrews (1997) and Gaffin and Thoms (1983 and 1993) trace and analyse respectively, the histories of the National Federation of Women's Institutes and the Co-operative Women's Guild.

Participatory Democracy

Absolutely central to the work of writers like Iannello, Riger, Martin and indeed anyone who examines the women's groups which came out of second wave feminism in the 1970s is the concept of participatory democracy or collective ways of working. This form (structure is perhaps too solid a word) is not unique to women's groups but part of a wider movement of participatory or 'unitary' democracy which swept Western Europe and North America from the late 1960s and included such diverse 'new left collectives' as:

...free schools, health clinics, and law communes to women's centers, underground papers and food co-ops ...almost without exception, these collectives assumed that their members had common rather than conflicting interests. Most adopted as well, either formally or informally, the unwritten rules of unitary democracy: face-to-face, consensual decision making and the elimination of all internal distinctions that could encourage or legitimate inequality among the members (Mansbridge, 1983: p.21).

But since so many women's organisations at least started with the ideal of participatory democracy (and its ideas at least have permeated the whole movement), a look at the wider literature gave important analytic tools with which to examine individual organisations.

One of the most significant examples of this literature has been Rothschild-

Whitt's examination of 'The Collectivist Organization: an Alternative to Rational Bureaucratic Models' (1979) where, probably for the first time, the collectivist organisation (or the 'fully collectivised democracy') is treated as a valid alternative to the bureaucratic hierarchy which had till then been considered virtually synonymous with the word 'organisation':

the ideal-type approach allows us to assess these organizations not as failures to achieve bureaucratic standards they do not share, but as efforts to realise wholly different values ... It is in the conceptualization of alternative forms of organization that organization theory has been weakest, and it is here that the experimentation of collectives can broaden our understanding. (Rothschild-Whitt, 1979: p.509).

She identifies the main characteristics of formal bureaucracy which can be summarised as follows:

- Authority resides in individuals by virtue of incumbency in office and/or expertise; hierarchical organization of offices
- Ideal of impersonality; relations are to be role-based, segmented and instrumental
- Differential rewards by office; hierarchy justifies inequality
- Maximal division of labour

and of 'fully collectivised democracy' as:

- Authority (is) resident in the collective as a whole; delegated, if at all, only temporarily and subject to recall
- Ideal of community; relations are to be holistic, of value in themselves
- No hierarchy of position
- Egalitarian; reward differentials, if any, limited by the collectivity
- Minimal division of labour; generalization of jobs and functions; demystification of expertise.

However, she also argued that in reality most organisations are hybrids of the two, a view fully endorsed by the recent study by Bordt (1998). Although Rothschild-Whitt's original analysis is not specific to collectives in the women's movement, by the early 1990s (under the name Joyce Rothschild) she is arguing that 'values and moral principles often lead women to prefer an organizational form ..., (which) she calls... 'the feminine model of organization'. This feminine model has six characteristics, summarised as:

1. Values members as individual human beings
2. Non-opportunistic
3. Careers are defined in terms of service to others
4. Commitment to employee growth
5. Creation of a caring community
6. Power sharing (information generously shared).

It 'may be more effective and the model of choice in organizations that are essentially managed by and for women' (Rothschild, 1993: p.537). The 'Feminine Model of Organization' is now open to debate with Riordan arguing that it can become part of the 'myth of power' (Riordan, 1999: p.33) and I examine both the ideal, and the difficulties in living up to the ideal which organisations encounter.

I found these analyses extremely useful when looking both at the bureaucratic, multi-tiered traditional women's organisations and the loose, fluid, collective groups which came out of the women's movement of the 1970s, although I argue that both have become increasingly hybrid and the distinctions between them much less pronounced. Bordt's recent study of women's non-profit organisations in New York showed only 8 per cent identified as pure collectivist organisations (and only 19 per cent as bureaucracies) with the vast majority categorised as the hybrid forms of 'professional organizations' (19 per cent) or 'pragmatic collectives' (45 per cent) (Bordt, 1997: p.38).

At the same time as Rothschild was evolving her theoretical models of fully collectivised democracy, Mansbridge (1983) was involved in a far more empirical study of the workings of one such participatory workplace, an urban crisis centre (Helpline) in a major American city. This study analyses the strengths of such an organisation as Helpline - the commitment to consensus and the search for common interest, the struggle to try and ensure there is no abuse of power, the search (after its early entrepreneurial stage dominated by its founder) 'for a mode of governance that would satisfy its staff' (p.142). But Mansbridge also illustrates very cogently the weaknesses as well as the strengths of trying to operate a pure unitary democracy: the endless time and repetition needed to reach consensus and how there are advantages and disadvantages to almost every aspect of the group's 'modus operandi':

Problems of deadlock, repeating decisions, 'wasted' time, and lack of clarity are all, in one sense, problems of efficiency. Such costs of a consensus rule must therefore be balanced against the gains in efficiency from ensuring co-ordination, individual commitment, and a more comprehensive, informed decision. Insofar as consensus helps to produce a more humane, more loving, less coercive environment, this too must be taken into account. But consensus can also have negative effects on the quality of life, endangering as well as protecting the liberty of minorities (p.169-170).

And Burrell and Morgan (1979), although not writing specifically about flatter organisations, give an interesting insight into the ambiguity of consensus, and its problematic relationship with coercion as a system legitimising the power structure (p.17).

One of the most ambiguous areas is in the treatment of conflict - how fear of conflict can lead to its suppression rather than to dealing with its causes, that removing many of the manifestations of power can lead to it re-emerging in other ways, e.g. the use of names, initials and jargons by the older participants, of how inequalities of gender, race and class can in fact be perpetuated. Mansbridge concludes:

Although in this book I have subjected only the problem of political equality to close scrutiny, freedom is also in jeopardy. When the assumption of common interest makes conflict illegitimate, a polity may no longer tolerate dissent (p.295).

This analysis will be extremely useful when we come to look at the problems which women's groups have had adapting from their early idealism and pure unitary democracy to the realities of facing conflict and dissent. I very much like Mansbridge's phrase of the need for both 'unitary trust and adversary watchfulness' (p230) and her aim:

To show that preserving unitary virtues requires a mixed polity - part adversary, part unitary - in which citizens understand their interests well enough to participate in both forms at once (p.302).

Another academic text which I have found illuminating is Oerton (1996). Although its field of research covers 'both women and men workers in flatter organizations' (p.7), it has a particular interest, as its title implies, in 'feminism and flatter organisations':

In the early days of second wave feminism, many women were also attracted to collective working, arguing that it was a desirable and radical way to end (male) power and hierarchy. Women-only collectives, often following in the traditions of women's action and consciousness-raising groups, saw themselves as accountable in terms of feminist principles and politics (p.5).

I have also found Ferguson's book on bureaucracy and feminism (1984) by extension extremely useful, both for its insights into how bureaucracies, with their proliferating rules and controls, function and in the different responses from feminists to the challenge they present:

The typically female values and experiences that the liberal feminists urge women to leave behind are precisely the ones that radical feminists seeks to preserve within their own organizations. Most nonliberal feminists, regardless of ideological differences amongst themselves, view the acceptance of bureaucratic values as synonymous with the abandonment of feminist values. They see their organizations as ends in themselves, not simply as means to an end ... Many of the most viable and active radical feminist projects - book stores, health collectives, newsletters and periodicals, battered women's shelters, rape crisis centers and so forth - are economically self-sufficient (if precarious) and minimize their ties with bureaucratic organizations. As the early manifestos of the radical feminists make clear, they are committed to an internal style of organization that is deliberately anti-bureaucratic: the groups are decentralized; they rely on personal, face-to-face regulations rather than formal rules; they are egalitarian rather than hierarchical. ... They are frequently more concerned with process rather than outcome (Ferguson,1984: p.189-90).

There are two other books which, although neither academic nor theoretical, give an interesting insight into the way 'flatter' organizations work. - Landry,

Morley, Southwood and Wright (1985) and Wajcman (1983). The first is certainly not gender specific to the women's movement. Indeed it explains how the 'particular set of notions about direct action, non-hierarchical organization, which became dominant' in the 1970s 'had nothing necessarily to do with feminism' but 'were compatible (in a way that other traditions of organized politics were not) with the political criteria established by feminism.' (p.8). But the book explores many of the generic issues raised by collective/ co-operative working which are highly applicable to women's movement groups, for instance, the need for 'management' in **any** organisation, whatever its structure (p.32) and the tensions which, it seems, almost inevitably develop within collectives:

The open collective's emphasis on integration and involvement of every member usually means that you can never go faster than the pace of the newest or slowest person in the group.

Further strain is placed on the system by the fact that members of such collectives are often volunteers. Few people have the necessary time to devote to the task in hand, so large parts of the effective work of the collective will tend to devolve on to a small, committed group. The same kind of structural conflict emerges in many projects between the paid workers and their management committee. ...

Such conflict frequently results in tension between those who know they will be doing the work and those who are there only for the generalized discussions of overall policy; between those who do most of the practical work and feel they have a better view of what is happening, and those who want political influence but are unable or unwilling to give a lot of time to the group's practical work. (p.38)

Finally, Wajcman maps the rise and fall of a women workers' cooperative, set up in Norfolk in 1972 to take over a small shoe factory. She both sets this in the wider context of the common ownership movement and new worker co-operatives in the 1960s and 1970s and the role played by the Industrial Common Ownership Movement (ICOM) and examines the day-to-day challenges the women face in the co-operative: the initial exhilaration, the resentment that develop around the concept of 'management' and the conflict and tears which lead to its demise - all very familiar territory in women's collectives.

2.3 Management, leadership and power

Alongside the key questions of structure and governance - and inextricably linked with them - is the issue of management, leadership and the use of power. Women's organisations may have had problems with these concepts, as we shall see, but this does not make them any less crucial.

Mainstream theory

Of the mainstream organisational theorists, Hales' (1993) detailed analysis of power resources and the links between power, authority and influence is interesting. He identifies four 'typical combinations of power, influence, legitimacy and response' - physical and normative power and economic and knowledge resources (p.32-33). As organisations traditionally rather short on material rewards but very 'value laden' and strong on moral commitment, women's organisations usually fit most closely into the second category of 'normative power. Hales also discusses the challenge of managing by consent (very close to the concept of consensus democracy discussed above) and, in words very relevant to the challenges many women's organisations face, concludes:

consensus cannot simply be assumed to exist but must somehow be created out of disparities of power, conflicts of interest and potential dissensus (p.44).

Leadership and women in management

The question of leadership and power in women's organisations is also influenced by a more obvious area of study. 'Women in Management' is a fast growing field, which covers both the popular 'how to' end of the scale and more theoretical analysis. It has remained as a discipline much closer to its subjects, to those women who actually manage, and a seminal article (Rosener, 1990) with its claim that 'The Command-and-control leadership style associated with men is not the only way to succeed' has been very influential and widely cited. Although it does not target women working in their own organisations, I have found its exploration of a participative, transformational type of management (with echoes of Carol Gilligan's 'morality of care' rather than 'morality of rights') very illuminating and relevant to women's style of management in their own organisations. Indeed I have found Gilligan's (1993) own ideas (located within the category of psychoanalytic feminist theory) of the psychological difference between men and women (already apparent amongst boys and girls in playground play) very interesting, even if they could be accused of essentialism:

these different perspectives are reflected in two different moral ideologies since separation is justified by an ethic of rights while attachment is supported by an ethic of care (Gilligan, 1993 p.167).

This offers an interesting light to play on the debate on the difference between men and women's management style.

An extremely valuable book in the empirical 'women in management' mould is Colgan and Ledwith (1996). Although none of its case studies (which range from women in publishing, retailing, personnel management, Customs and Excise, trade unions, teaching, the NHS and the Toronto public transport sector) relate directly to the women's voluntary sector (apart from the detailed analysis of the development of the group Women in Publishing in Chapter 2) many of its arguments, particularly those contained in the concluding chapter 'Movers and shakers: creating organisational change' are

highly relevant as women strive to be 'innovative change agents' in their own as well as wider organisations. In a similar empirical mould written by a man, Morgan (1986) analyses male and female stereotypes and strategies for the management of gender relations.

I have also been very influenced by the work of Judi Marshall. In her very personal book *Women Managers: Travellers in a Male World* (1984) Marshall draws closely on her own experience as a female academic. She identifies two contrasting patterns in the frameworks through which analysis is conducted in the field of women in management: the 'reform' feminist viewpoint, in which the values of the male world of activities and characteristics are not significantly challenged but tacitly used as a positive model to which women should aspire; and the 'radical' feminist viewpoint

which rejects using men as a model for women. It sought instead to understand women's inequality, the continuing low status in relation to men and to reaffirm women's own sense of being. It depicted women as oppressed with men, as the dominant force in society ... as their oppressors (p.8).

Marshall borrows from both viewpoints but steers a middle course, 'retaining the valuable elements in both of two apparently opposing positions ... and viewing them dialectically so that they can co-exist ... and be reconciled at a higher level' (p.8). Her account is unashamedly women centred:

I decided to focus without apology on women's experiences, in the belief that they are valuable in their own right. I particularly wanted to avoid merely adding women on to a world which has so far been interpreted through men's eyes (p.11).

The choice between a 'reform' (or liberal) and a 'radical' approach is one which faces not just individuals but women's groups as they adapt themselves to an increasingly competitive world and are often faced with the choice between being 'poor and pure' or funded and reformist.

There are also a growing number of journals, and hence articles, on women in management and organisations. These include the more theoretical *Gender, Work and Organization* and the more pragmatic *Women in Management Review*. These are overwhelmingly concerned with women in the public or private sector, rather than in their own organisations. An exception is Balka's article based on a computer project in a women's group from Canada (Balka, 1997) which argues:

Attempts to facilitate a participatory design process in women's organizations may be hampered by poorly defined roles within organizations, limited financial and human resource availability, rapid staff turnover (related to both reliance on volunteer labour and reliance on government job training programmes that limit the length of time a person can be employed) and a general environment of operation that often occurs in relation to crises, such as chronically unstable funding and budget cuts. It may be difficult to engage women's organizations in participatory design projects because relative to other areas of concern (such as developing and maintaining

egalitarian forms of decision making and providing clients with direct services, which are often perceived as much more pressing demands) women's organizations lack a commitment to organization building (p109).

It is true that women's organisations are often totally preoccupied with the immediate task of providing a much needed service on few resources - and cannot even spare the time to participate in wider forums - but my research demonstrates a considerable commitment to organisation building.

Women entrepreneurs

This literature clearly has relevance since organisations started by women are often run by and with, and sometimes for, other women. Goffee and Scase's study (1985) sees a continuum of response to subordination which runs through the collective strategies of the labour and women's movement 'to those of a more individual kind which are normally associated with career mobility and entrepreneurial success' (p.24) and links a description of the women's movement very closely into the reasons why women choose business entrepreneurship. Allen and Turner (1993) gives a very illuminating account of what Vokins calls 'The minerva matrix women entrepreneurs: their perceptions of their management style' (Chapter 4) with its strong emphasis on transformational leadership:

The style of management practised by women entrepreneurs may be summarised as: team-based with a strong 'family' feel; co-operative in nature; enabling' (i.e. developing potential in employees); dynamic and flexible in purpose; quickly reacting to variants internally and externally; rooted in desire for high standards and competitive products/ services; medium risk taking; using intuitive decision-making; innovative; one preferring *win:win* strategies which result in satisfaction for all parties as against a *win:lose* where only one party gains (p.53).

Many women managers in the organised women's movement would strive to be just such a manager and this ideal echoes closely Gilligan's relationships of care, as against relationships of rights or justice. Wilson (1995) is also illuminating on women's leadership and attitudes to power, arguing that: 'women are unable to become powerful in organizations because definitions of power are inappropriate to women's experience; woman are socialized into fearing power and using second-class power tactics to get what they want' (p.78).

Conflict and the abuse of power

A discussion of leadership and the use of power leads inevitably to an analysis of the abuse of power and the recurring theme of conflict in women's organisations. We have already looked at Riordan's rejection of Rothschild's idealised 'feminine mode of organisation' (see p.10 above) and Mansbridge's argument that the fear of conflict can lead to its suppression rather than dealing with its causes. Riger (1994) devotes a considerable

amount of time to the subject of conflict in feminist organisations. She argues that while:

Setting priorities among goals can force painful choices on an organization. Not making explicit decisions about which goals to emphasise, however, can leave an organisation's members in a continuing state of dissatisfaction and distrust (p.294).

She argues the case for conflict resolution techniques that 'permit opposing parties to articulate their differences and seek common ground'. Yet some differences may be irreconcilable or not amenable to collaborative solutions:

Developing ... an 'etiquette of conflicts' which permits differences to be negotiated while retaining connections between women, is a formidable task facing women's organisations today (p. 295).

Riger also identifies a challenge - what she calls 'founder's trap' - very common to the organised women's movement of the woman who founds an organisation in a blaze of passionate commitment and often publicity but is unable to adapt to the changing needs of the organisation as it develops:

Founders who are used to controlling their organizations may find a more rule-bound, less subjective style of management anathema. They may be reluctant to step aside because of a proprietary interest in the organisation. The reluctance of founders to institutionalize leadership by establishing procedures and policies which do not require their personal judgement has been labelled the 'founder's trap'. Ironically, just as the organization attracts more clients or external funding, the founder's personal style of management may become inappropriate because of the expansion in organizational size. Especially when they have taken risks or made sacrifices to get the organization off the ground, founders may resent their sudden obsolescence and resist change. A critical challenge in this situation is to loosen the founder's control of the organization. In many cases this means the founders will depart... (there is) a long list of social movement founders, feminist and otherwise, who chose to leave or were rejected from organizations that they had begun (p.285).

The situation described here is from the USA but it is substantially true of the UK also.

Riger concludes that:

organisational growing pains, not personal deficits, generate many of the tensions in feminist organisations ...Recognition that tensions can stem from systemic factors rather than members' lack of commitment to feminism reduces the guilt and blame that confound the already difficult process of conflict management (pp.295-296).

Fried (1994) also raises the subject of power. The whole issue of women and power and leadership, linked with the issue of how to deal with conflict, is one which recurs over and over again and has been quite crucial to my work (see Grant, 1999). It is an area which recurs in most of the books already

cited with attempts to explode the feminist myth that (1) power necessarily has a negative connotation and (2) that women do not abuse power. Morgan identifies the possibility of 'potential or transformative power (1986, p.186), Marshall identified the difference between 'power with' and 'power over' (Marshall,1984) and Kanter's picture of bossy women bosses:

It is a perfect picture of people who are powerless. Powerlessness tends to produce those very characteristics attributed to women bosses (Kanter, 1977, p.202).

Most of the literature on women in management deals inevitably with women's style of management and leadership. Freeman, in her various critiques of the shortcomings of collective structures - 'the tyranny of structurelessness' - wrote of the new recruits to the women's liberation movement in the 1970s:

Unfortunately, these newly recruited masses lacked the organizing skills of the initiators and, because the very idea of 'leadership' and 'organization' were in disrepute, they made no attempts to acquire them...(Freeman, 1975, p.454).

Phillips tellingly examines the internal disputes within the women's movement in her chapter on 'When Sisters Fall Out':

What gives class such intensity within women's politics is that we are all supposed to be sisters and when we fall out we do it with a vengeance. The very 'life-stylism' of the women's movement is partly the problem, for if it expresses a desire for homogeneity, it also implies an intolerance of difference. ... Women's groups convey an atmosphere of intimate engagement-and there must be few in or on the margins of the women's movement who have not felt left out in the cold. The strength of sisterhood is also its weakness: it's great if you belong, it's terrible if you don't ...Because sisterhood did not solve our problems ... we are inclined to turn on each other. The anger unleashed can be deeply depressing (Phillips, 1987, pp.139-40).

Nicholson, however, does not see this conflict as inevitable, explaining how:

It is women's oppression, isolation and lack of experience that enable the continuation of the belief that women cannot co-operate. If there were more women to choose from as allies, and if women did not take the quality of relationships as seriously as they do, then this myth would be assuaged (Nicholson, 1996: p.155).

A decade later, Riordan, who has worked extensively with women's groups in London, identifies what she calls 'power illiteracy' amongst such groups:

Women have the ability to abuse power just as much as men. I believe that the 'legacy of sisterhood' has created an unrealistic and unnatural expectation of women and their organisations ... (power-sharing) has become an expectation that because of their sex, women will automatically share power and decision-making ... This is not always the case. And when women don't live up to this expectation strong

feelings of betrayal, anger and resentment ensure (Riordan, 1996, p.56).

In her detailed study of two women's centres, Brown (1992) identifies the need for a 'shared set of core values' but 'does not presuppose that the enactment of these values is unproblematic or uncontentious' so that 'the potential for conflict on the basis of difference is maintained' and 'inequalities of power and influence may persist in spite of efforts to reduce them' (p.181). There was a particular problem in achieving equality of power and influence with a mixture of paid and voluntary workers and inequalities of power and influence were 'a persistent problem in the review of organising activity within the autonomous women's movement'(p186). The book ends: 'Women who are involved in organising as women are engaged in a creative struggle to build the future through their actions in the present' (p.192).

Another text which engages with this struggle, and comes out of the 'anger and frustration at the way in which power is sometimes abused and denied in feminist organisations' is Bewley (1996, p.161) Just because there is no obvious hierarchy, does not mean power does not exist. It can be gained 'through longevity in the organisation and its accompanying information, knowledge and wisdom' sometimes carried 'almost solely in someone's head':

The power conferred through 'wisdom' is also sometimes related to notions of 'charisma'. A popular image used to describe this ... was 'queen bee'. Sometimes this charisma comes from 'wisdom' and experience, knowing 'how we did it last time'. Sometimes it is the consequence of direct or indirect manipulation (Bewley, 1996:p.169).

Auckland (1999) examines these sorts of power struggles, and the way in which non-hierarchical structures *and processes* (my emphasis) are negotiated in the grassroots setting of feminist camps.

Conflict resolution and empowerment

The theme of conflict and conflict resolution is recurrent and is an area which needs much more work. But Cockburn's (1998) research on three women's organisations operating across deep divisions in areas of conflict (Northern Ireland, Palestine and Bosnia) offers very useful insights. All these groups operate through pain and struggle which provide no easy answers or comfort. But they do offer examples of hope in a bleak landscape and they do give relevant points for women's organisations to learn from - for instance, the emphasis on differences as well as commonalities; the shared experience on how to handle disagreement; how to build multiple bridges; the capacity to 'hold together' in the face of ethnic and every other sort of division.

In a challenging article Beres and Wilson (1997) follows the development of the Hungarian Feminist Network, born out of the hope and turmoil of post-communist Hungary in 1990. Having had no previous experience of

organising autonomously, the history of the Feminist Network, with no formal network or organisational structure' (p.174), mirrors very closely the development of feminist organisations in the UK fifteen years previously:

Members felt that a positional hierarchy was bound to be a potential source of political rivalry and jockeying for position. The preference for a nonhierarchical, consensual model of organization stemmed in part from members' own personal inclinations, beliefs and values, and in part from having learned of the existence of this type of grass-roots organization from previous networking with other, mainly Western, alternative organizations (p.175).

They illustrate how the 'emotional commitment to equality and nonhierarchical functioning' can lead to conflict:

Such an arrangement works well when there is trust and common values among members. Often what is seen as effective and informal when things are going well becomes problematic and divisive when they are not.... once the organization began to experience rivalry, jealousy, and mistrust among its members, this informal method of communication (word of mouth) compounded negative tendencies.... Calls for efficiency and responsibility ... gained regular currency. It never quite seemed clear who was in charge of what. Members volunteered to manage tasks and activities, and thenceforth the general assumption was that a particular task or activity in question would indeed be appropriately attended to. Frequently, however, that was not the case, and disappointment over inefficiency and irresponsibility triggered intense rounds of blamism. The culprits eventually came to be regarded as deficient human beings (pp.175-6).

They also face the pressure from the outside world resulting in:

a constant need to explain the group's lack of formal leadership.... Since the network did not appoint or elect its own leadership, the media and other organizations did that for the group, which led to considerable tensions, rivalry and interpersonal conflict within the group and, ultimately to a covert power struggle (p.177).

What rescues the group from seemingly insoluble conflict is the intervention, advice and training provided by a visiting American feminist and consultant, who acts as a change agent, allowing 'positive reframing':

The emotional shift from a passionate belief in the virtues of an unstructured nonhierarchical organization to an awareness of the drawbacks that become visible when such an organization might be restructured was only achieved with outside assistance.... The process offered a structured step in consciously linking emotions to the needs of the organization and its participants (pp.177-8).

They go on to argue that emotions in voluntary organisations can be considered positively (as 'glue') as well as negatively ('as explosives'). They are particularly difficult to handle in non-hierarchical organisations because 'the lack of a formal hierarchy means there is no hiding place for personal differences and these can become magnified as feelings intensify' (p.178).

The authors end with the enigma that emotions are both positive and negative - they may be 'subjective, chaotic and weak' but at the same time 'ignite creative energy and involvement' (p.181).

Finally there is a very illuminating analysis of power as *empowerment* rather than abuse in Sen and Crown (1988) which, came out of what Calas and Smircich (1996) call the Third World/ (Post) Colonial feminist approach to organizational studies, especially the chapter on 'Empowering ourselves through Organizations'. This identifies that:

Empowerment of organizations, individuals and movements has certain requisites. These include resources (finance, knowledge, technology), skills training, and leadership formation on the one side; and democratic processes, dialogue, participation in policy and decision making, and techniques for conflict resolution on the other. Flexibility of membership requirements can also be helpful (Sen and Crown, 1988, p.89)

It identifies five problems organisations must overcome if they are not to reinforce existing relationships of domination:

- Marginalisation of women's groups from public policy
- No enduring and open channels for acquiring representation to deal with complex and bureaucratized decision-making bodies
- Reluctance to delegate responsibility
- Difficulty in building alliances
- Our ability and willingness to share power within our own organisations - related to styles of conflict management and resolution.

The authors identify two ways of checking such tendencies:

First democratisation of organizations and widening of their membership base is essential since it distributes power and diffuses hierarchy. Secondly, explicit assertion and commitment to an ethic that rejects personal aggrandizement and a firm stance in that direction should be built into organization from the beginning (p.95).

Both the identified problems and solutions spring from a Third World setting but they have a universality which makes them very relevant to the organised women's movement in the UK.

2.4 External and internal contingency factors

A final raft of questions is concerned with the capacity of women's organisations to change in response to both the external and internal environment. A recurring concept is that of the life cycle of organisations: the four stages of formation, development, maturity and decline defined by Mintzberg (1989), Hudson's five stages (in the life of a voluntary organisation) of birth, youth, adulthood, maturity and decline and Riger's 'Stages of Growth in Feminist Organizations,' which proved a useful template

to apply to my case studies. Implicit within this was the supposition that all organisations eventually grow beyond their pure collective stage (a view which Bordt's (1998) research on women's non-profit organisations in New York seems to support), and I will be testing this against the groups from second wave feminism which I examine. Another key concept is that of the contingency model of organisational analysis, expounded at some length in Burrell and Morgan (1979): and developed by Mintzberg who discusses how far what happens to organisations is affected by 'contingency' or 'situational' factors such as:

The age and size of the organization; its technical system of production; various characteristics of its environment, such as stability and complexity; and its power systems, for example, whether or not it is tightly controlled by outside influences (Mintzberg, 1989, p.106).

Bordt's list of contingency or environmental factors (which she sees as predictors of organisational form) include ideology, tasks, environment, size, age, government funding, interaction with external agencies etc (see Bordt, 1998, p.55-59).

The importance of contingency factors was also, as we saw, emphasised by Cornforth and Edwards (1998), and I have found this concept as a whole useful in examining the capacity of organisations to respond to change.

2.5 Conclusion

As will be clear, I have had a very rich and varied range of literatures to draw on in approaching my own research and, , many of the case studies spawned reading lists of their own. Behind it all I have 'taken as read' the wider feminist canon of De Beauvoir (1949), Dworkin (1988), Friedan (1963, 1977), Greer (1971, 1984), Hite (1993), Millett (1970), Steinem (1984) etc. This literature, taken as a whole, has helped me frame my research questions for the case studies which include those on:

- appropriate structures for a women's organisation (and whether this varies at different stages of an organisation's life cycle)
- how far women's organisations are able to respond to change (and how far this is dependent on contingency factors)
- what constitutes good governance in the organised women's movement and how this can be best achieved
- the particular challenges of participatory democracy (and whether this can ever be sustained in a mature organisation)
- appropriate models of leadership, the challenge of conflict and the use and abuse of power.

And behind all these questions are the wider questions of:

- what is unique about the organised women's movement; whether

women's organisations still have an important role to play in the 21st century in meeting the needs of women - at a time when the question 'why women's organisations?' is frequently asked and there is a whole wider debate taking place about the relevance of gender (see Tibballs 2000).

However, this search also illustrates what I already guessed from my own experience - that the field of women's organisations was and remains a fairly empty piece of ground in empirical research terms.³ There may have been some theoretical analysis, particularly of non-hierarchical organisations, but there has been very little empirical research which looks in depth at how individual organisations work, concentrating in particular on their structure and governance. And yet these organisations have the power to change the world: what enables or disables them from doing so is to me both a valid and an important area of research which I hope will be useful to the sector.

So a large part of what I have learnt from the literature is a desire to give research on women's organisations - and women's organisations across the whole spectrum, not just those with non-hierarchical structures - the legitimacy and attention they deserve but has not always been accorded.

³ Gould (1979) talked about descriptive case studies being 'regrettably absent' and Martin (1990) of a 'dearth of empirical research'

3. SYNOPSIS OF RESEARCH FINDINGS ON THE STRUCTURE AND GOVERNANCE OF WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS

As I explained in the introduction, my major research project involved specifically 17 case studies of women's organisations - eight 'traditional' organisations from 'first wave' feminism, eight organisations which came out of the women's movement in the 1970s and the Fawcett Society as a bridge between the two - although it also looked in less detail at a range of other organisations.

3.1 'Organization Woman' - The structure, governance and management of traditional women's organisations

Introduction

The eight 'traditional' organisations I researched were all founded more than fifty years ago (and several more than a hundred) and most of could be said to have come out of 'first wave' feminism, the fight for the vote. They are all registered charities, apart from the Co-operative Women's Guild and the British Federation of Graduate Women (which has a separate charitable trust), and have become an established part of the wider voluntary as well as the women's sector in the UK. These organisations are (in chronological order of date of foundation):

Mothers' Union (MU)	1876
Co-operative Women's Guild (CWG)	1883
British Federation of Graduate Women (BFGW) (formerly British Federation of University Women)	1907
Guide Association (GA)	1910
National Federation of Women's Institutes (NFWI)	1915
Soroptimist International of Great Britain and Ireland (SIGBI)	1921
Townswomen's Guilds (TG)	1929
Standing Conference of Women's Organisations (SCWO)	1940

These were chosen to give a broad picture of the sector i.e. one youth, one overtly Christian, one overtly political, one rural, one umbrella group, one international, two professional, two generalist 'way of life' organisations, one international etc. All are membership organisations although one (SCWO)

has a membership of organisations, rather than individuals. They range in size from one very part-time paid employee working from home (SCWO) to a paid staff of around 168, supporting numerous volunteers, in the case of the GA, and the research revealed that size of membership - and whether it is rising or falling - is an important contingency factor in an organisation's governance. My own previous research (Grant, 1995) revealed that almost all 'traditional' women's organisations face a substantial drop in membership numbers, particularly amongst young women.

I conducted in depth semi-structured interviews with at least two people who were key players in each organisation chosen, whenever possible to give 'triangulation' - different standpoints (such as at least one from the board, ideally the chair, and at least one a member of staff, preferably the most senior), as well as something to say. I looked, wherever I could, for those who had a real interest in the solutions as well as challenges and thus become 'partners in the research process.' The interviews were semi-structured, with plenty of opportunity for individual expansion, and covered many of the same questions. For instance:

- What is the role of its governing body? Who is on it? How do they get there?
- What is the relationship between members as volunteers and paid staff? Does it bring out the best in both sides?
- What is the relationship between the chair and the chief executive? Does the latter, as well as the former, have an 'agency' role? (and is the whole package of 'governance' capable of evolving in response to changing needs?)
- Does the organisation encourage good leadership and have the mechanisms to deal with conflict?
- Is the structure appropriate for the organisation as this stage of its development?
- What external contingency factors affect the organisation's development?
- From where does the organisation derive its income? Is it financially stable and viable?
- Is the organisation still relevant to women of today, including young women? If not, is it capable of renewal?

Mary Stott's *Organization Woman* (1978) was written specifically about the TG but what it says is also highly relevant to a sector which has played a crucial part in the life of the nation throughout the twentieth century. At its height the WI had nearly half a million members and even today it is estimated half the female population in the UK has been involved in some way with the Guides, while women's organisations were absolutely crucial in the fight for the vote and indeed for all other progressive legislation affecting women since. Two histories of the women's movement (Smith, 1990 and Pugh, 1992) document the enduring and cyclical nature of the movement

and, echoing the life cycle theories of Mintzberg, Robbins and Hudson, and Riger's 'stages of growth' thesis (see chapter 2), show how organisations rise and fall, adapt or die.

Stott (1978) is admiring but clear-eyed about the strengths and weaknesses of 'organization woman' and the organisations in which she operates. She notes how 'these self-help, mutually supportive organizations gave their members confidence and assurance in a largely male-dominated world' (Stott, 1978: p.3). She writes about the importance of rules and structures: but also how rules for their own sake can also be dangerous so you could, for instance, end up with well run meetings with little or no content.

Stott identifies a challenge which is found in almost all voluntary organisations but it seems, particularly acutely in women's organisations, of the relationship between staff and volunteers: 'The relationship of paid and unpaid officials has always been tricky, as many a large women's organization has found' (p.116) ...' the old story, which seems to run through big organizations, that voluntary workers are apt to be suspicious of those who get a salary for doing very similar work' (p.127).

This relationship can be particularly problematic when it is that between the chief volunteer and the chief of the paid staff i.e. chairman (and even today most are still called **chairmen**, when not presidents) - 'Organization Woman' herself - and the chief executive (although she is more likely to be called something like national, general or organising secretary). These can be complex and demanding managerial jobs but often very unrewarding:

Not every woman elected to high office in an organization really thinks of even the top paid official as a 'colleague'... Many professional women working for voluntary associations will privately assert that ... even very experienced committees tend to treat their professional staff rather as middleclass Victorian housewives treated their maids, cooks and governesses. Almost inevitably the voluntary workers tend to think of themselves as slightly superior beings because they are doing for nothing but love what the paid staff do for a salary... (Stott, 1978: p.132-3).

Nearly a quarter of an century later both my research and wider experience particularly with the more traditional end of the organised women's movement indicate that such problems still exist. There is still evidence of vexed relationship between elected boards and paid staff and the way in which many boards are suspicious of evidence of leadership from women in paid positions, preferring senior staff to 'run' the organisation rather than in any way 'lead' it. This can be the case even when organisations are large and complex and urgently in need of skilled leadership and management. Evidence of good, high profile leadership can be met not with approbation but with remarks like: 'Who does she think she is?'

The relationship between the board and staff and particularly between the chair and the chief executive is, of course, one of the most discussed and most vexed debates in voluntary sector literature (see, for instance, Billis and Harris, 1996; Carver, 1990; Dowsett and Harris, 1996; Golensky, 1993). But my hypothesis is that, while women's organisations share many of the

characteristics of the voluntary sector as a whole, they also have characteristics, including the potential for a more than usually difficult relationship between chair and chief executive, which seems to be peculiarly their own. Conversely, there is the potential for a relationship which, if it is really worked on, can be transformational and very empowering for both parties and the organisation as a whole.

Part of the difficulty with this relationship may be the fact that, in the case of the more traditional organisations, many boards are still made up largely of women who have not been in recent paid employment and may thus be uneasy with professional staff, who may be the same age as their daughters or even granddaughters, and sometimes even resentful that such staff are being paid for services which they give free. It has also been suggested it may be an internalised inability to acknowledge success and excellence in other women because of an upbringing that discouraged it in oneself. Eichenbaum and Orbach explain how:

Envy is a common feeling for women because of their knowledge of the impossibility of getting recognition and acceptance for themselves, or of getting approval rather than punishment for self-development (Eichenbaum and Orbach, 1985: p.145)

But, of course power over staff is not problematic only in traditional organisations, and the whole question of power and leadership has been a crucial question for second wave feminism.

The case studies

Mothers' Union (MU)

MU is one of the oldest women's organisations in the UK which, in spite of falling membership, still has 140,000 members in this country and around 750,000 worldwide (which gives its work a strong international dimension). With its commitment to Christian marriage it has been affected more than most organisations by changes in the social climate, where 40 per cent of children are now born outside marriage

The MU is an overtly Christian organisation with strong links at all levels with the Church of England. It is led by an elected World Wide President and a Chief Executive (CEO) who manages a staff of about 40. It currently has a male Chief Executive but interviews with the previous CEO in 1998/9 revealed the careful development of a very positive working relationship and model of leadership between President and Chief Executive and a very affirming style of management and leadership (although even then not without some 'creative' tension). At the same time the MU was making dramatic moves towards more streamlined structures internally (including reducing its Central Council from 561 to 22) and towards a braver, more open approach to working and lobbying on behalf of its members, and other women whatever their marital status, both in the UK and overseas (their decision finally to admit divorced people to membership in the early 1970s, although traumatic at the time, seemed to free them to tackle other contemporary problems with similar courage and lack of sanctimoniousness).

This has resulted in very positive media coverage. Expansion of its work is, however, limited by falling membership and hence reduced subscription income, although this is partly offset by a vigorous and successful marketing policy.

Co-operative Women's Guild (CWG)

CWG, established in 1883, has a long and honourable history as a campaigning organisation on behalf of working class women and particularly the peace movement and one which inspired enormous loyalty in its members. Over the years it was to debate and campaign on virtually every piece of progressive social legislation - from maternity provision (where their moving *Maternity: Letters from Working Women*, published in 1915, very effectively boosted their campaign) to birth control, to child health, to divorce reform, to legalisation of abortion, to consumerism, to cost of living (their symbol, after all, being the woman with the basket), to employment and equal pay, to health and housing policy, to social security and pensions. And active involvement in their own Guilds, with their emphasis on training in public speaking, was also to encourage Guildswomen to get involved in public life more widely, with strong representation on co-operative committees, on public bodies and even in Parliament.

However the CWG was to begin to lose its purpose in the interwar years and its decline was accelerated by World War II (which made its famous 'white poppy' campaign decidedly unfashionable). Changing conditions, including a decline in the wider Co-operative Movement, competition from other organisations and lack of attention to its very top-heavy hierarchical structure and governance has led to a drastic fall in membership, from around 87,000 in 1939 to around 3,300 members in 1999, with 108 branches and one paid employee, and a consequent democratic deficit, with many elected positions unfilled. So although financial support from local Co-operative Societies allows remaining branches to carry on at a low level, it is felt by many that the CWG is now in terminal decline and it is time for it to wind up and allow more progressive contemporary structures for women to take its place in the Co-operative Movement. The fact that it seems now to have reached the 'decline' stage of its life cycle, beyond the ability to adapt its structure and governance or refocus its purpose, in no way diminishes the unique contribution it made to working class women over a century of distinguished activity.

British Federation of Women Graduates (formerly the British Federation of University Women) and the BFWG Charitable Trust

BFWG is an organisation for women graduates founded in 1907 with strong international links through the International Federation for University Women and the University Women in Europe. For years it occupied and ran the historic Crosby Hall Foundation on the Embankment in London, offering accommodation for women academics, but when this was no longer viable it decided to sell the lease and invested the money, not in alternative accommodation, but in the establishment of the BFWG Charitable Foundation to give urgently needed grants for living expenses based on need to women

post-graduates. This brave decision has not, however, halted BFWG's decline in membership, due, it seems, to a combination of external events, including the huge rise in women students, competition from other organisations and an over-bureaucratic structure. This membership is now down to about 1,500 from 8,000 in 1968 and this causes anxiety both financially (they are very dependent on subscriptions) and because it means the same people are 're-cycled' through a bureaucracy which is now much too elaborate for its size. BFWG has never employed professional staff and now relies on its own volunteer capacity plus 'only secretaries'. There are plans for a change of emphasis, building on its assets of international and UN access, but it seems quite radical changes in both structures and working practices will be needed if change is to be successful and revitalisation take place.

The Guide Association (GA)

The GA established in 1910, is still the leading youth organisation for girls with an overall membership of nearly 700,000 women and girls, ranging from the Rainbow Guides for girls from the age of 5 to the Trefoil Guild for older guiders. Away from HQ, the Guides are an overwhelmingly volunteer run organisation and they are responding with vigour and imagination to an almost universal challenge in the voluntary sector of the increasing difficulty in finding volunteers. At HQ there is a staff of 168 led by a Chief Executive. After some problems, there was by 1998/9 a very productive relationship between the Chief Guide and Chief Executive and imaginative work had been done on rights and responsibilities and on protocols (e.g. 'give and receive open and honest feedback', 'to be valued and thanked for their work' etc) to encourage good working relationships between staff and volunteers. These seem, like Riger's 'etiquette of conflicts' (Riger, 1994: p.295) to be born out of an informed understanding of how things can go wrong

The GA has also streamlined its governance and done much to modernise its image and promote its marketing side, demonstrating that it is possible for a traditional bureaucratic organisation to develop a very effective partnership model of governance. It thus appears to be an organisation which has done much to adapt its governance and to encourage good leadership at all levels, including the top, but which faces strong contingency challenges to its purpose in the face of so many alternative pressures and opportunities for young women and girls in the 21st century.

National Federation of Women's Institutes: (NFWI)

The WI was founded in 1915 to voice the concerns of rural women. It is still the largest women's organisation with, at least in the early days, what could be argued as a decidedly feminist mission since: 'It could provide a significant female controlled public space for women who had, in rural areas, previously had few such opportunities' (Andrews, 1997: p.67), although its membership is halved from its peak of 462,000 in 1956. Its governance is very hierarchical, with elected members working their way up from local institute level (with 8,000 local institutes) to federation level (70 county federations) to the National Executive Committee and various committees at national level. It has a central London headquarters with a General Secretary heading

a staff of around 40, and another office at Denman College, the WI's renowned adult education college founded in 1948, but is largely run by volunteers at all other levels. The WI has been a strong campaigner on behalf of rural women since it began, with rural housing a particular concern. Following some quite public organisational problems at headquarters in the 1990s, it has recently had a much more positive press for brave campaigning against genetically modified crops and other issues (and, at its AGM in 2000, for slow clapping the Prime Minister) - and for its hugely successful fundraising 'Alternative (nude) WI calendar' (although this emanated from a local Yorkshire branch rather than headquarters).

But, possibly because of its unique position in rural areas⁴, the WI does not seem to have felt the need to adapt its governance in the same way that other traditional women's organisations have done perhaps because strong contingency factors - concern about the countryside in the face of the collapse of many other aspects of civil life there - seem to override, at least for the moment, the pressing need most comparable traditional organisations face to update their structure and governance.

Soroptimist International of Great Britain and Ireland (SIGBI)

SIGBI, founded in 1934, is one of the four federations in Soroptimist International, a worldwide organisation of classified service clubs for women, founded in 1921 with a strong emphasis on service, human rights, the status of women, international understanding and universal friendship. It has a complex administration structure - with local clubs (made up of invited members from different professions), regional, federal and international structures, all with different layers of officers and committees. Parallel with this is its programme structure with six programme areas - economic and social development, education, environment and health, human rights and the status of women, international goodwill and understanding - administered by a programme action committee and programme co-ordinators and advisers.

SIGBI has a strong international dimension, contributing generously to quadrennial projects and appeals, mainly for work overseas, and to SI's work at UN level. It is much less generous in contributing to the cost of its own club or development and is still run from a small office with only administrative staff with much of the 'hands on' work done by elected officers. The fact that it is suffering a significant drop in membership (down to 13,825 in the UK) has not yet precipitated significant changes in governance or management but it could well do so although for the moment the idea of the appointment of a paid director to lead the organisation would be, for many members, a step too far. This is perhaps surprising coming from an organisation of mainly high-flying professional women.

⁴ A report on the WI's 1999 survey on rural deprivation *The Changing Village* showed that where 'Village life grinds to a halt as banks, shops and buses vanish' (with schools and playgroups following fast behind) the WI can be almost the only example of civil society that remains. This makes it very powerful and puts it into a category all its own (see report on *The Changing Village* in the *Guardian* 6.7.99. The report was also widely reported on radio and television.)

Townswomen's Guilds (TG)

TG was established in 1928 to help women in towns take advantage of women's suffrage by providing 'a common meeting ground for women irrespective of creed and party, for their wider education, including social activities. Although never lobbyists, TG resolutions have covered most of the issues of the day (including, in 1997 taking up the issue of full labelling of genetically modified food before it became an area of such urgent public concern) and they have played a crucial part in giving women the confidence and skills to take part in public life. Although not formally linked to an international body, they have a strong international interest. TG has retained a strong educational role (led by its Public Affairs Department) but this is balanced by an equally strong emphasis on sports and creative leisure, with its own department.

TG is led by a Chairman, two Vice-Chairmen and an Executive Committee of twelve, supported in Birmingham by a team of nine staff led by a Chief Executive/National Secretary (the first title to be used externally, the second internally). At its peak in the late 1960s it had a membership of around 250,000 women in 2,700 local Guilds. However it now faces the contingency factors facing many generalist 'way of life' organisations, particularly that there are now so many alternative opportunities in the community for potential members and, in spite of concerted efforts to boost membership recruitment, this has now fallen to around 80,000 in 104 Federations and 1,600 Guilds, with most members middle-aged or older. TG is almost entirely dependent on membership subscriptions and, recognising the necessity for change, has considered drastic measures for survival although as yet no really radical changes have been made.

Standing Conference of Women's Organisations (SCWO)

SCWO was established in 1942 as a vehicle for mobilising wartime women nationwide, particularly in response to the challenge of mass evacuation of women and children. It has continued as an umbrella organisation, with local 'conferences' in various areas made up of local branches of national women's and other voluntary organisations. Its activities include co-ordinating campaigning on issues of concern for women, conducting surveys, liaising with local authorities etc. It has an elaborate hierarchical structure which leads from local conferences to seven regional committees with representatives from each of these serving, with Honorary officers, on the National Council.

SCWO was run till 1981 from the National Council for Voluntary Organisations and since then has been run on a shoestring with a very part-time National Secretary. SCWO shares all the problems of an ageing membership with other organisations, including difficulty in filling officer posts at different levels. But there are recent indications that it is working, under new leadership including a much younger National Secretary who has been allowed to develop and implement new ideas, to streamline its governance, becoming more of an 'ad hoc' and thus becoming more relevant to younger women by, for instance, running very successful Health

Days funded by the Department of Health, and introducing its members to the internet.

The Wider Picture

One of the distinguishing characteristics of the organisations above is their willingness and capacity to change in response to external and internal forces although change itself is hard to effect, particularly in the field of diversity, and most traditional organisations remain overwhelmingly white and middle-aged (or older). Arguably the oldest established women's organisation of all - the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) founded in 1855 (and part of a worldwide movement which encompasses national associations in over 90 countries) - has faced many of the problems we have examined - massive drop in membership, particularly amongst the age group of the young women that it serves; inappropriateness of the style and standard of accommodation it was offering to contemporary young women, a hugely ponderous structure and governance. Urgent financial imperatives and other external and internal factors indicated the need for radical changes and the YWCA responded with both a change in purpose and structure. On the one hand they decided to disengage entirely from their long-term role as a social landlord, refocussing their efforts onto projects and campaigns, usually run in partnership with others, on issues of urgent concern to young women such as that on 'Stop Violence Against Women'. Alongside this the YWCA has continued with a parallel and almost equally momentous revamping of its governance which has led to a completely different, streamlined composition of the Board. Instead of the main criteria for being on the Board being to have taken years to work your way up the YWCA hierarchy, the new Board of no more than 15 members (with an upper age limit of 61) has only a third of places reserved for YWCA members with others actively recruited from people who have the specific skills the organisation needs. This is much more decisive 'de-layering' and fast-tracking than any other traditional organisation so far a major move towards the management/partnership approach where:

Board members should be selected on the basis of their expertise and contacts so that they are in a position to add value to the organisation's decisions rather than just select, monitor and control management (Cornforth and Edwards, 1998, p.12-13).

It is perhaps significant that the YWCA works with young women and girls (as does GFS Platform for Women - a transformed version of the very traditional Girls Friendly Society founded in 1875) and have a very focussed purpose whose need is very obvious. It seems, as the case studies demonstrated, to be much more difficult to transform a more generalist organisation and ensure its relevance to the women of today. The Business and Professional Women (BPW) finds it difficult to attract younger women who are often overwhelmed by the twin responsibilities of running a family and a career (see Grant, 1995). They are also faced with increasing competition from more specialist professional women's groups (Women in Management, City Women's Network, Women in Publishing, Women in Banking and Finance etc) which are proliferating. The National Council of Women (NCW), first founded in 1895, is another case in point. Its original aims were 'to end

discrimination against women to inform and interest women in participating in public life, in order to influence matters relating to women, and to improve conditions of life for all'. Over the years it has been involved with the recruitment of women police, with magistrates and jurors and with the fight for equal pay and equal opportunities. The centenary history of the NCW (Glick, 1995) also details its work on such diverse issues as breast cancer, on pensions for war widows, equal retirement ages, discrimination against women in the tax field and family law. The NCW's also acts: 'as a *co-ordinating* body to which societies with similar aims can affiliate'

These ambitious aims necessitate a complex bureaucratic structure which includes ten regional councils, with around 42 local branches. It also has many affiliated organisations which work with NCW at both local and national level and it in turn is affiliated to the International Council of Women (ICW), with national councils in 74 countries, and to the European Centre of ICW. All affiliates, regions and branches elect members to the Council and, by ballot, to the Committee of Management (COM), which forms part of that Council, and has 15-19 members, including a President, four Vice Presidents, Treasurer, members of the COM (who are elected for two years renewable) and some appointees such as the Editor of the magazine and the Chair of the ICW Committee GB who is elected without limit.

This structure is, however, much less complicated than pre-1988 after the then President, Eve Martin, had given an undertaking to be particularly involved with the reorganisation of NCW. Extensive consultation led to amendment of the Articles of Association, resulting 'in a more compact and workable ... and streamlined Council' (Glick, 1995: p.101-2). The system of special committees and working parties was also reduced and streamlined and, although NCW's structure remains very complex and hierarchical, it also encourages 'fast-tracking' for women who are encouraged to make their way fast to the top. Daphne Glick had been 'head-hunted' herself in 1989 and 'fast-tracked' to the position of President within ten years. In the early 1990s a young woman, Tobe Aleksander, was also head-hunted and moved rapidly to become Vice President by 1993. But she was rare as one of the few younger woman within NCW. Overall it shares with almost all generalist organisations the problem of both a falling and an ageing membership. It was not possible to get an exact figure for present membership but by 1971 the total membership was approximately 7,000 (compared to approximately 30,000 at its peak) so is probably much lower by now. The current membership seems to divide between the extremes of those on the 'fast track', who are very professional and business like, and those (usually older members) who regard the organisation 'as their child'. NCW are not now seriously even trying to attract younger women (for all the same reasons as other organisations give) but are instead targeting the 'young retirees' (although they, like other organisations, face the new challenge of the 'earnest grandma' who is constantly standing by for grandchildren, and the need to accommodate the longer-living husbands, whose wives are correspondingly less free). This seems to indicate, again like other organisations, the need to develop in some way a 'two-tier' system to accommodate the needs of different categories of membership. However since the creation of its website and interactive forum more interest has been shown by younger women and a system of individual membership has been created for those who do not wish to join a branch

The role of President of NCW is extremely demanding since, with only limited office staff she has to undertake a very heavy weight of hands-on administrative work as well as her representative/leadership role and needs to spend about four days a week on the task. Till now NCW have rejected the idea of employing a professional director or encouraging any leadership role in paid staff but there is some indication this is being reconsidered. The next few years are seen as crucial both for NCW and for all other comparable women's organisations all of which urgently need to 'look closely' at themselves. To this end NCW has already commenced further streamlining its procedures and is concentrating on specific projects to which every member can contribute.

Conclusion

The research revealed a part of the organised women's movement which still plays a very important, indeed transformational, part in the lives of many women (what a synopsis has, sadly, had to leave out are all the voices of individual women who told me passionately how much belonging to their organisation had enriched and transformed their lives). It also showed how great an impact these organisations have had on the wider society. Both external pressures (including very importantly the changing pace of women's lives, with both pressure of work and family, combined with hugely expanding educational and social opportunities, making it very difficult for younger women to devote the same time to their organisations as previous generations) and internal problems (such as over-bureaucratic and hierarchical structures and a suspicion of professional management and leadership leading to conflict or suspicion between the board, staff and volunteers) have led to a large, and sometimes drastic drop in membership. This in turn brings great financial problems since most organisations are overwhelmingly dependent on subscriptions (although some, like the Guides and the MU, have developed strong trading branches), and there is a universal reluctance to pay increased dues, even when members may be simultaneously contributing extremely generously to causes the organisation is promoting. There is a particular problem in attracting younger women and several organisations, notably the TG and the NCW are no longer even seriously trying to do so, instead targeting the 'young retirees'.

In the light of these challenges many organisations are responding bravely and creatively, adapting their governance, re-visiting their mission statement to make sure it is still relevant to today's women, stripping out unnecessary bureaucracy, 'delaying' their hierarchies, allowing 'fast-tracking' in order to encourage new members, developing protocols for good relationships between staff and members as volunteers, working hard on the relationship between chair and chief executive, improving communications, using the internet, working on their media profile, even considering amalgamations (although none as yet has done this). Failure to respond in such ways leads to obsolescence, as is happening with the once very vital Co-operative Women's Guild. The YWCA leads the way in willingness to change, with a total transformation both in its purpose and governance - moving from a traditional 'agency' model to a managerial/ partnership model - but other organisations are beginning to make, or at least consider, similar changes in

the light of such strong contingency factors urging change. The governance of most women's organisations is, however, hybrid and, as membership organisations, they also have a political/ democratic dimension, representing the views and needs of their members.

3.2 Enabling sisterhood: the structure and governance of women's groups from 'second wave' feminism

Introduction

For the purposes of an enquiry concerned with appropriate governance, the mushrooming of organisations (although that term is in itself inappropriate to many of the small consciousness-raising groups, which were hardly organised at all) which came out of the women's liberation movement of the 1960s and 1970s are particularly relevant: not only were they intended to change the world and women's place in it, but they were intended to do so in a particular way which mirrored the ideals they were fighting for, replacing the structures of patriarchy with ways of organising that better reflected women's ideals.

So, while the traditional organisations were almost invariably highly hierarchical and bureaucratic - with many-tiered structures, categories of membership, strong leadership positions and innumerable rules and regulations - the groups which came out of the women's liberation movement were very different. Instead of being large, they tended to be very small, at least initially; fluid rather than rigid; flat rather than hierarchical; with leadership diffused rather than concentrated in a few positions. And although the women's movement certainly did not have a monopoly on collective ways of working, it has been extremely closely associated with what has been called 'collectivist-democratic organisations' as opposed to 'rational-bureaucratic models' (Rothschild-Whitt, 1979; Ferguson, 1984). In fact, the women's movement tended to see hierarchy often as synonymous with patriarchy and thus to be avoided at all costs.

We saw above how the traditional mass-membership organisations are being forced to streamline their highly hierarchical structures in the face of changing needs, removing tiers and committees, cutting their boards drastically, giving opportunities for 'fast tracking'. Ironically, as they have become flatter, the flat organisations of the women's movement find themselves forced to build in more structure, to drop pay parity, to employ at least a co-ordinator if not a director, in response to similar pressures. My research examined why - and how successfully - they are doing this; why collectivity has proved such a difficult ideal to sustain over time but one which is so hard to abandon; how much can be saved to carry into these re-structured organisations, and what we can learn from these case studies about what enables or disables women's organisations.

I start by looking broadly and briefly at the range of organisations which came out of the women's movement in the 1970s and 1980s; then in some depth at eight organisations of varying sizes, working in different areas, looking particularly at the effectiveness of their structure and governance and how they have managed to survive, when so many did not. What strikes

one in looking at these organisations is how much smaller they are both than the traditional mass membership organisations and the organisations which came out of the women's movement in the US. There is no UK equivalent to the National Organization of Women (NOW) in the US which has always, since its founding in 1966, developed a mass membership of women both in chapters around the country and as direct members (Tobias, 1997).

As we saw, there have been a number of studies of the women's liberation movement. Nor was there a total void in the formation of women's organisations between the more traditional organisations we looked at above and the explosion of groups in the 1970s. Books like Smith (1990) and Pugh (1992) show strong activity by a whole range of other groups between the wars and beyond.⁵ But in the 1950s and early 1960s many 'self-help groups were launched by women at home' (Jermain, 1981: pp.6-7), one of the most notable being the National Housewives' Register (NHR) 'for housebound wives with liberal interests and a desire to remain individuals' which came into being after a heartfelt letter to Mary Stott's Women's Page of *The Guardian* from a young isolated mother in the suburbs - and grew, at its height, into 21,000 members in 1,000 neighbourhood groups.

One characteristic of the National Women's Register (it was to change its name in 1987) is its determination to this day to remain resolutely non-campaigning and non-political, in any sense of the word. This is one of the major differences with the groups of the 1970s. As a book like *Sweet Freedom* (Campbell and Coote, 1987) shows, the groups that emerged in such numbers from the early seventies emerged directly from a movement, the Women's Liberation Movement, and were imbued with a particular philosophy, feminism. This not only affected what they did, but also how they did it.

The start of 'second wave' feminism is variously attributed to the publication of Betty Friedan's *The Feminist Mystique*, (1963) the foundation of the National Organization for Women (NOW) in US in 1966, and the Miss America pageant in Atlantic City in 1968 (at which bras were only reputedly burnt). In the UK its early landmarks include the strike of women sewing machinists at Ford's Dagenham in 1968, and the trade union rally for the National Joint Action Campaign for Women's Equal Rights (NJACWER) in Trafalgar Square in 1969. Its first major landmark was the first National Women's Liberation Conference held at Ruskin College Oxford in February 1970. This led to the setting up of the National Women's Co-ordinating Committee and the evolution of four basic demands:

- equal pay now
- equal education and job opportunities
- free contraception and abortion on demand
- free 24-hour nurseries.

The Second Women's Liberation Conference in 1971 led to three further demands:

⁵ Groups like the Six Point Group, the Women's Freedom League, the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship (NUSEC), the Women's International League of Peace and Freedom, the Women's Peace Crusade – although Pugh (1992) does suggest that the period 1945-1959 could be called 'the nadir of British Feminism'.

- financial and legal independence
- an end to all discrimination against lesbians
- a woman's right to define her own sexuality.

The final National Conference in 1978 additionally demanded:

- freedom from intimidation by threat or use of violence or sexual coercion, regardless of marital status
- an end to all laws, assumptions and institutions which perpetuate male dominance and men's aggression towards women.

No women's group from the late 1960s, early 1970s onwards could have failed to be influenced by the women's liberation movement (WLM) whose ideas were disseminated through workshops, conferences, marches, demonstrations and numerous publications of greater or less duration. Notable amongst the latter was *Spare Rib*, founded in July 1972 as 'the magazine which puts women's liberation on the news stands.' This was the longest running and most well established periodical of the WLM in Britain, effectively charting the history of the movement, until it was finally to close in 1993. But the WLM was probably most characterised by mushrooming consciousness-raising groups⁶. The London Women's Liberation Workshop – 'a network of small groups with an information service' – claimed to be 'the first organisation of the women's movement'.⁷ The account of the first nine years of one of their small groups, the Belsize Lane group, demonstrates the heady and life-changing excitement – the 'revelation' and 'exhilaration' of being part of such a movement. It describes the multiple campaigns and activities developed around the established WLM demands above (including helping to set up a nursery), the exclusion of men, the fluidity of the movement and the way in which the group keeps small but constantly changes and reinvents itself.

Such debates were to take place in groups all over the country. From them were to develop a collective ideal of organising which came directly from the philosophy of women's liberation. The groups which came out of the WLM and actually solidified into organisations were extremely wide-ranging and often quite short-lived, forming, inevitably around the issues which were important to the movement. Erin Pizzey opened the first women's refuge at Chiswick with maximum publicity in 1972, and although this continues vigorously under the title 'Refuge', the main work for survivors of domestic violence is now delivered via the members of Women's Aid Federation

⁶ Jo Freeman describes consciousness-raising or 'rap' groups:

The process is known as "consciousness-raising" and is very simple. Women come together in groups of five to fifteen and talk to one another about their personal problems, personal experiences, personal feelings and personal concerns. From this public sharing of experiences comes the realization that what was thought to be individual is in fact common; what was considered a personal problem had a social cause and probably a political solution (Freeman 1975: pp.451-2).

⁷ See 'Nine Years Together: A History of a Women's Liberation Group', (1978), *Spare Rib*, Issue 69, April 1978: pp.41-46.

England (WAFE) which was formed from 35 groups in 1975 (see case study). Around the issue of rape, the first rape crisis centre was opened in 1976 (run as a collective, with two employees and many volunteers). By 1985 there were 45 centres (and more opening all the time) designed to provide a woman-centred framework of support. They were usually run as collectives substantially, and sometimes exclusively, with volunteer support. The Rape Crisis movement finally achieved their own Federation in 1996 (see case study). There were many, many groups formed around childcare. Two were the Camden Children's Community Centre formed in 1971 and the Kingsway Children's Centre in 1977. Many groups from all over the country came together in 1980 to form the National Child Care Campaign to campaign, lobby, research and give advice on setting up nurseries. Health and reproductive rights were also major arenas for organisation. The National Abortion Campaign was set up in 1975 (having come out of the Co-ordinating Committee in Defence of the 1967 Abortion Act) as a federated, non-hierarchical, feminist organisation committed to give radical mass support for a 'women's right to choose'. It was followed in 1983 by the Women's Reproductive Rights Information Centre (WRRIC) set up with money from the Greater London Council (GLC) and these two represent different ends of what has been a passionately contested political argument about the place of abortion as a single issue or situated within the wider field of reproductive rights (see Hohmeyer, 1995: pp.41-48). The 1970s and 1980s were also the decades when campaigns to set up well women clinics were fought and won.

Another surprising group of organisations (of which there does not seem to be anything comparable in other countries) are those which developed around the issue of women in prison, often beginning as self help groups set up by women coming out of prison and led by charismatic founders. The first of these was the Clean Break Theatre Company set up in 1979 to provide a voice for ex-prisoners and make something positive of their experience. Women in Prison followed in 1981, started by Chris Tchiakovsky as a support and campaigning group for women prisoners; CAST (the Creative and Supportive Trust) in 1982, set up to provide support to women before and after release, and WISH (Women in Special Hospitals) started by Prue Stevenson in 1984 to support women in special hospitals and secure psychiatric units. Then in 1986 the Female Prisoners Welfare Project was started by Olga Heaven, with its accompanying Hibiscus Project which supports the women (mainly from Nigeria and Jamaica) caught acting as 'mules' (the subject of a Clean Break production at the Royal Court in 1996) by smuggling drugs into the UK. Working with a clientele which is often very 'near the edge', these organisations have faced difficult internal problems but have proved themselves very resilient!

There have also been a hugely creative and diverse set of groups of women in all sectors of the arts. Many of these were very transitory but others, like the Women's Playhouse Trust, the Women's Art Library or Women in Music, are already entering or well into their third decade. And even the more recent manifestation of women organising for peace focussed on the peace camps first set up around the US base at Greenham Common in 1981 proved surprisingly enduring (Blackwood, 1984; Young, 1990). The network of generic women's centres (like the more traditional generic women's organisations) have had a struggle to survive unless, like the Women's

Resource Centre (WRC) (see case study), they have managed to find a more strategic or specific purpose. Possibly more in tune with the twenty first century are the professional women's groups which have proliferated since the 1970s with a 'Women in..' group now available to give support to women in almost every profession, competing, as we saw, with the older organisations for professional women.

The capacity for a loosely formed group to transform itself into a properly constituted organisation, employing staff (a process which is usually only achieved with great struggle and often considerable pain) obviously depends substantially on its access to funding, as well as other internal and external contingency factors. With none of the reserves which most organisations from first wave feminism brought with them, this usually means access to statutory funding, whether at national or, more frequently, local level. There has been very compelling research to demonstrate the imbalance in funding available for women's organisations, both traditionally and currently (Bowman and Norton, 1986; Grant, 1987; Riordan, 1996, 1998a and 1998b and 1999; Klinker, 1998, Soteri, 2001 and 2002).

The WLM was far from a totally unified, homogenous movement. Political splits were to form quite quickly - notably between liberal, socialist, and radical feminists (see Calas and Smircich, 1996). Debate was also to rage around how far the groups should become institutionalised, accept money from statutory or other funders, deliver services as well as campaign. One of the most painful battles was that of the relationship between the WLM and black and ethnic minority women, who felt their needs were neglected by both anti-racist groups (usually dominated by men) and the feminist movement (usually dominated by white, middle-class women). This led to the development of autonomous groups to fight all aspects of the oppression black women face - race, sex and class discrimination. Amongst the first of many of its kind was the Brixton Black Women's Group in 1973. In 1978 OWAAD (Organisation of Women of African and Asian Descent) was formed and held its first conference in 1979 attended by more than 300⁸. In 1980 its second conference was attended by more than 600; but sadly OWAAD was not able to sustain its ideal of Black (meaning Afro-Asian) unity beyond 1982, and there has been no unifying umbrella body for black women's groups since. However black and minority ethnic women's groups organisations remain very strong. I looked in depth at the East London Black Women's Organisation (ELBWO) but I could equally have chosen many others including Akina Mama Wa Afrika, an extremely effective development organisation for African women which celebrated its 15th birthday in 2000, or Southall Black Sisters (SBS), a group of Asian women born out of the anti-racism struggle in 1979, and still on the frontline in the fight against fundamentalism, racism, domestic abuse and, together with a recent, small but very effective group, Justice for Women, fighting for exactly that for women driven to kill their abusive husbands. SBS held on tenaciously to their collective structure and only finally relinquished it in October 1998 to move to a modified or 'democratic hierarchy', with joint co-ordinators, to give greater support and

⁸ See 'Black Women together: Organization of Women of Afro-Caribbean and African Descent', *Spare Rib*, No. 61, August 1977 and Black Women Fighting Back, *Spare Rib*, No.95, June 1980

structure. In addressing the eight case studies that follow I was concerned to cover essentially the same ground already covered in Part 3.1 i.e. questions about their governance, relationships between paid staff (if these exist) and committee members and between the Chair and the senior staff member, about financial viability and so on, but to make this as specific as possible to organisations which came out of the women's movement. So questions ranged around:

- whether their organisation was structured hierarchically or as a collective (or a modified/hybrid form of either)?
- the strengths and weaknesses of their chosen structure,
- how far it had been able to adapt to change and external contingency factors?
- how far it could cope effectively with conflict?
- how far it brought out the best in staff, committee members and volunteers?
- what sort of style of leadership the organisation allowed/ encouraged?

Questions also allowed space for interviewees to introduce their own concerns. As before (on the principle of triangulation) I interviewed at least two (and usually far more) women from each organisation chosen because they had different standpoints and interesting perspectives to share. The case studies were chosen through a process of network sampling, with a concern for balance in size, constituency, area of work and so on. Six are individual organisations (originating between the years 1975 and 1983, a period when the WLM was at its strongest). The other two are movements – the refuge movement and the rape crisis movement which originated in 1971 and 1976, respectively although the Rape Crisis Federation was established as recently as 1996. The eight organisations are as follows, in chronological order of first setting up:

Refuge Movement	1971
Rights of Women (ROW)	1975
Feminist Library	1975
Rape Crisis Movement	1975
East London Black Women's Organisation (ELBWO)	1979
300 Group	1980
Maternity Alliance	1980

*The case studies**The Women's Refuge Movement*

The founding by Erin Pizzey of Chiswick Women's Aid in 1971 helped to get the issue of domestic violence recognised and there are today around 150 refuges in England. Chiswick Women's Aid started as a collective but moved away from this even before Pizzey left. After Pizzey's departure in 1981, it developed into a very managerial organisation, now called Refuge, running several refuges and a 24 hour crisis line and led by a high profile Director and spokeswoman, Sandra Horley. Meanwhile in 1975 the Women's Aid Federation England, with, in due course, parallel federations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, was formed to support the growing number of refuges and there have been tensions between the two organisations ever since. WAFE has had a strong, but not doctrinaire, commitment to collective working both in its own governance and in the advice it gives its members but, after a strategic development programme, has now adapted its own internal management structure and governance away from collectivity into a hierarchy with a Director. Although both organisations are comparatively large and well-resourced (Refuge, with a turnover around £1.5million and 65 staff; WAFE, £0.5 million and around 17 staff) this in no way meets the demand and there is an urgent need for far more refuge spaces.

Both Refuge, WAFE and the numerous individual women's aid refuges round the country (which started small but have had to adapt to ever increasing demand, the 'contract culture' and now the challenge of the new 'Supporting People' funding regime for supported housing) have had problems (in the case of individual refuges often acute and painful) developing appropriate governance and structures and responding to various contingency factors both internally and externally. In Refuge's case the challenge of an idiosyncratic founder has obviously played a part. Both organisations have illustrated different responses to similar challenges but are now moving closer together, at least in their governance, around a more managerial and hierarchical structure, although WAFE (and its now many member organisations who have moved away from a fully collective structure) is determined to retain the best working practices encouraged by collective working.

The women's refuge movement thus demonstrates the capacity to change structure and governance, adapting collective structures in the face of contingency forces, but also how hard this can be in practice. It also demonstrates the importance of developing both appropriate leadership roles and the capacity to deal with conflict.

The Feminist Library

The Feminist Library was founded in 1975 as the Women's Research and Resources Centre by a group of women academics, changing its name in 1983. Its purpose has been to collect the increasing quantities of donated

material emanating from the women's liberation movement. It has had various homes and has, since 1989, been housed in premises donated by Southwark Council. Although it was, up till 1988, to receive funding (from the GLC etc) which allowed it to employ staff, it has since then operated on a shoestring, entirely on a volunteer basis. This means that although it has acquired a considerable collection (10,000 books, 1,500 journals etc.) it can only give limited access to it, although it is much valued by its users. While most organisations which came out of the WLM have grown and developed more hierarchical or managerial structures, the Feminist Library is one of the few organisations to operate still as a pure collective, currently of five members (and visiting the Library feels like going back to an archetypal women's group of the early 1980s) and it seems to be its size which allows it to do this. Its future could have been threatened by the newly opened, well funded Women's Library (formerly the Fawcett Library) but in fact the two seem to have developed a helpful symbiotic relationship which supports rather than undermines the future existence of the Feminist Library.

The case of the Feminist Library thus demonstrates that a collectively run organisation **can** survive into the 21st century, but only, it would seem, on a small scale.

Rights of Women (ROW)

ROW was founded in 1975 as a feminist organisation in response to the fifth demand of the WLM 'for legal and financial independence'. Registered as an Industrial and Provident Society, it was known for its collective structure as well as its campaigns. This structure was adapted in the 1980s, when it received funding first from the GLC and then the London Boroughs Grant Committee (LBGC) which allowed it to employ staff, who formed a workers' collective with management provided by a Management Committee/Policy Group. By the mid 1990s this structure was showing the need for overhaul, with problems arising from this Group showing more interest in policy than management, with resultant staff conflicts, power imbalance, lack of accountability etc. At the same time ROW has always been much respected for its campaigns on domestic and sexual violence, best interests, rape, lesbian parenting and employment and for its authoritative publications.

An organisational review by outside consultants in 1998/9 suggested wide-ranging changes, including moves away from its collective structure. ROW accepted these recommendations and went on to implement them in full - separating out the Management Committee (MC) from the Policy Sub-Group and appointing a Director who is now able to work successfully as a team with the MC. This example of 'dramatic turnaround' (see Mintzberg) has also had a very positive effect on ROW's potentially serious funding crisis - with renewal of grants and much more emphasis given to earned income. There is still a very real need for a legal advice line for women and thus in a sense ROW has become 'mainstreamed'. This may ensure its survival but, as with all similar organisations adapting to rapidly changing times and environments, it can present dilemmas for those who knew ROW as the radical, cutting edge of the women's movement.

ROW thus seems to be an organisation which has retained its purpose (which remains highly relevant) and at the same time successfully adapted its collective structure in response to internal and external contingency facts - but that this is, unsurprisingly, not an entirely unproblematic process.

The Rape Crisis Movement

This movement also comes out of the heart of the women's liberation movement and originated with the founding of the rape crisis centres in Nottingham and Manchester in 1975 and in London in 1976. There are now around 65 centres (RCCs) or lines all over the country which are run in the belief that sexual violence is predominantly a result of male power, and seek to empower women to take control of their own lives, treating them as survivors rather than victims. Their collective ways of working are strongly linked to this belief and the examples I looked at in some detail demonstrated very cogently both the strengths and weaknesses of participatory democracy described in the literature.

Most RCCs have remained small, with inadequate funding and a strong dependence on volunteers. Most are still run as some sort of (usually modified) collective although they are struggling to adapt these structures to make themselves more accountable and diverse, to provide better supervision and training for staff and a better service. They have been much helped recently by the development of the Rape Crisis Federation established in 1996 to support and campaign on behalf of the movement. Divisions still exist overall, for instance over the question of remaining exclusively 'women only' (with many funders favouring mixed provision), but on the whole the Federation (one of whose guiding principles has been the promotion of 'women only' services) has been successful in bringing cohesion to a rather fragmented movement and in raising the profile of rape crisis. It has recently received a large Home Office grant which again brings it much further into the mainstream, although it is also grappling with the challenge of adapting its own governance and ways of working to meet these new challenges.

This case study thus demonstrates a movement which has retained its strong purpose (even in the face of competition from the more mainstream Victim Support) and in many ways strengthened it as rape, and its shockingly low conviction rate, remain high on the public and political agenda. At the same time it has substantially managed to adapt its governance and develop some very creative hybrid structures attempting to marry the best of hierarchical and collective ways of working.

East London Black Women's Organisation (ELBWO)

ELBWO came together in 1979 out of the excitement generated by the first conference of the Organisation of Women of Asian and African Descent (OWAAD). Although OWAAD disbanded in 1983 ELBWO, with its firm base in the local Afro-Caribbean community of Newham, has expanded and diversified its work. Having started in members' homes, it acquired its first premises in 1984 and in 1988 moved to a very imaginatively converted church hall which has been its centre ever since. It has always given a strong emphasis to education, both to Saturday schools and holiday play schemes for children, but it has also always been a great inspirer to higher education

amongst its members (at a recent education seminar five school heads or deputies spoke from its own membership). ELBWO used to be run as a collective but, with a shared understanding that a collective only works if you have equal strengths and abilities and that problems arise as you grow and diversify, it was able in 1997 (in marked contrast to many organisations) to make a smooth transition to the employment of a manager to lead the team of seven permanent and at least eight sessional staff and develop a successful partnership model of governance. It is able to attract young women (so that those who started as toddlers twenty years ago are now coming back as playscheme workers etc) and retain the loyalty of its members over many years. Although it receives core funding from LBGC and Newham, it is very overstretched financially. While rooted in its local community, ELBWO contributes to many wider forums and partnerships and has a strong intellectual interest in developing an analytic and political dimension to its role.

ELBWO thus exemplifies a highly adaptive organisation which, while remaining true to its values and purpose and rooted in its community, has been able to exploit external contingency factors to its own advantage. It has encouraged inspired leadership and was able to move unusually easily from a collective to a hierarchical structure.

300 Group

The 300 Group was founded in 1980 by a strong campaigner for democracy, Lesley Abdela (see Abdela, 1989) with the mission to get more women into Parliament and public life. From its entrepreneurial beginning it was determined to be resolutely cross-party and to maintain this in its governance, evolving a complex constitution with structures including a Board of Guardians, a National Executive Committee and various committees. In 1988 it set up its Education Trust which, after some internal disputes, went independent as the Menerva Trust in 1992. Not surprisingly for an organisation of women seeking political power, the 300 Group has needed to struggle with the internal dynamics of the distribution of power and has found it difficult to differentiate between governance and management. But many women have profited from its excellent training courses and publications and it has been extremely influential in raising the issues publicly. Although there has been discussion about whether the 300 Group still has a role now that there are so many more women in Parliament (a contingency factor which it helped to bring about), it was, after a very quiet period, to experience something of a revival in the light of the fears that the number of women in Parliament would be drastically reduced in the 2001 General Election.

The 300 Group is thus an unusual organisation which can perhaps best described as an adhocracy which has been very effective in promoting its purpose (and getting this 'mainstreamed') but has found it more difficult to 'grow' its organisational structure.

Maternity Alliance (MA)

The MA was founded in 1980 to make life better for pregnant women, new parents and their children and has been doing it successfully ever since. It has grown to a membership of 72 national organisations, seven hundred local groups and several hundred individuals working with it on working groups on disability, ethnic minority communities, legal or trade unions. It has strong partnerships with a range of forums and has been very effective in influencing progressive Government policy in its field. It has always been effective in raising money and now employs around thirteen paid staff.

The MA has succeeded in adapting its own governance and management to its expanding role, using its Finance and General Purposes Committee very effectively to reduce the likelihood of conflict. Its Director has worked hard to reduce the 'long hours' culture and develop very 'family-friendly' employment policies. She negotiated a move away from pay parity (not an easy process), but although on paper the MA looks like a hierarchy it has developed a very democratic, team-led and transparent way of working which makes it much admired - and a model which, although it is not overtly a women's organisation, the organised women's movement has something to learn from.

The MA thus illustrates how diverse and complex are the possible variations on the continuum between bureaucratic and hierarchical models at one end and collective or participatory democratic models at the other. It shows how effective a truly adaptive organisation, which has fully faced the challenge of conflict, leadership and diversity, can be.

Women's Resource Centre (WRC)

The WRC came out of the women's movement in 1983, with its origins in the Institute of Education's Women's Education Group. It has moved from its initial educational bias, via a drop-in centre and library, to an advice line (only recently discontinued) to the strategic and capacity-building umbrella organisation for women's groups in London that it is today. In the course of this change it has moved, with initially considerable pain and conflict, from an old style collective to a streamlined staff team led by a Director with a model of governance which is now a hybrid between political/democratic and managerial/ partnership (see Cornforth and Edwards, 1998). It is responding to problems in finding trustees by developing and growing its own and working hard on developing its own structures and procedures. On the strength of a large Lottery grant, it has been able to run a three year research and capacity building project in partnership with the Centre for Institutional Studies at the University of East London, while providing a dynamic support and representation role for the women's voluntary sector in London. This includes training programmes on capacity building, MC development, monitoring and evaluation; conferences on key issues; representation on many strategic bodies and facilitating consultation on, for instance, the GLA's Equality Strategy and the review of funding for the women's sector recently carried out by the Association of London Governments (ALG), the successor body to the LBGC.

It thus seems to illustrate how a collective can reinvent itself as a dynamic, diverse hierarchy and an organisation near decline can use contingency

factors to help effect a truly 'dramatic turnaround'.

Conclusion

We have looked at a range of organisations or movements which came out of, or were strongly influenced by, the women's liberation movement of the 1970s. Several of these have moved from being very loosely structured consciousness-raising groups (hardly inviting the name 'organisation' at all) to sophisticated organisations employing staff and delivering complex services to conform with rigorous quality assurance measures. To have made that transition from informality to formality in a climate which, as Riordan (1996, 1998a and b and 1999) shows, has never been encouraging to women's endeavours; and where their organisations have always been starved of money and forced to exist on the margins of viability, with shabby offices, and out of date equipment is in itself an achievement. (Many organisations never made such a leap at all or, if they did, could not sustain it once the GLC and Metropolitan counties, with their comparatively generous funding for women's organisations, were abolished in 1986). And to do this in a way which attempts to retain in their reconfigured governance not necessarily collectivity itself (except in the case of the Feminist Library) but their deep commitment to democratic, participatory ways of working, is a real achievement. It is hardly surprising that in the process of doing so they have often had to struggle with the challenge of conflict, leadership and diversity.

Although these case studies were chosen to give a wide cross-section of organisations they cannot, of course, be representative of the sector as a whole which is very wide-ranging and diverse. The WRC conference on capacity building on 1 July 1999 was attended by a full range of organisations from health, the arts and design, Women's Aid, refugee and ethnic minority groups, women's centres, young women, older women, new technology, non-traditional work. It also had a woman from a group called Sistervision who reminded us that there was still a strong part of the women's movement on the edge of the millennium which – like the Spiral Women's camps she helps to run – were still informally structured and non-hierarchical, striving for the feminist ideals of inclusiveness and full participation (see Auckland, 1999). Likewise, although the last women may have left Greenham Common, women's involvement in peace camps and other anti-arms activity remains very strong, with the launch of the Women's Network of the Campaign Against the Arms Trade (CAAT) taking place on September 25 1999¹⁰.

For these case studies, working out ways to adapt this commitment to participatory ways of working in an era of 'mainstreaming' but little money to support women's organisations has led, as we saw i to the development of some extremely creative structures and working practices which attempt to support and affirm everyone involved – users or clients, staff, volunteers, management committee, and members.

¹⁰ See *Newsletter* of the National Women's Network July/August 1999 and Fay Weldon's article 'Mother's Day' in *The Sunday Times* 12 September 1999.

This chapter also shows that organisations can be very resilient. The WRC was almost at the point of closure a few years ago but is now a major player in encouraging capacity building for the women's voluntary sector in London. The Feminist Library has managed to survive as a pure collective in spite of virtually no funding at all since 1988. Rights of Women has emerged from the challenge of restructuring much stronger and better equipped to face the 21st century. The Rape Crisis Federation has managed to bridge various groupings in what had been a very divided movement. And each of these has managed to put on the public agenda issues of women's rights or concerns which were previously invisible so that, for instance, survivors of domestic abuse no longer need 'scream quietly' (Pizzey, 1974) – and several of them have managed to contribute to much needed changes in legislation.

3.3 The Fawcett Society: bridge between traditional and modern

Fawcett's roots go back to 1866 (when a small group of women including Millicent Garrett Fawcett collected more than 1,500 signatures for John Stuart Mill to present to parliament with its Women's Suffrage Amendment to the Reform Bill) and its early history, from its first name of the London Society for Women's Suffrage, is deeply interwoven with the suffragist movement. Once the full vote was won in 1928 it was able to broaden its work to include work on employment, sex discrimination, equal pay, education, the media etc. Its library, started in 1926, was to form the basis for the Fawcett Library (now the renamed Women's Library which, thanks to an initial major Lottery grant, was able to re-open in beautiful purpose built buildings in 2002) and the Women's Service Trust, established soon after, has supported the Society financially ever since, now as the Fawcett Trust. Fawcett has thus had a financial cushion which most women's organisations do not enjoy, although in the last decade it has been increasingly diversifying its funding base with grants particularly from charitable trusts for specific pieces of policy work. It also has a membership which is unusually generous in giving money to the Society (see Grant, 1999a for more detail on the development of the Fawcett Society).

Until 1992 the Fawcett Society had a small membership (400 and falling) and a highly respected but rather staid image. It was run from a small office with the help of one or two administrative staff. It had an executive of 12 and specialist committees in education, public affairs, health and media. However, moves for change, which had been brewing for several years, came together in the decision to appoint for the first time a director who would actually be allowed to direct, thus moving the organisation from an 'agency' to a partnership model of governance. Since then Fawcett has expanded in every direction; it moved into much better premises (and in 2002 is due to move again); its membership has grown fivefold; it hosts the influential Women's Budget Group; its work on taxation, pensions, political representation, democracy and equal pay has been influential and high profile; it has built effective partnerships not just with women's organisations, but with democracy organisations, with women MPs, with the Women's Unit etc. With a young Chair and a young new Director in the late 90s it projected an image of a young, dynamic, campaigning organisation and this image of vigour and diversity has been sustained with a change of personnel in top positions so it has avoided the danger of being over-

dependent on any one strong, charismatic personality.

Fawcett has also demonstrated that it is able to overcome internal problems and come through them stronger. It is now evolving more flexible structures, with the specialist committees, (with regular meetings), being replaced by expert groups which are only called on when needed, (although this has, inevitably, not been entirely without pain, with some members regretting the loss of old ways of working). Fawcett is now working to involve more – and more diverse – members in its governance, in its local groups and in its Activist Network. Fawcett seems to have succeeded in making the very rare transition from traditional to very modern organisation and at the same time providing a bridge also between the world of the organised women's movement and that of wider campaigning organisations. It looks set to be there campaigning strongly for women's equality right through the 21st century, as it did for the whole 20th and nearly half the 19th century.

Fawcett thus demonstrates that it is possible to update structure and governance, purpose and leadership simultaneously - and that the effect of this can be transformational.

4 WHAT DOES THE RESEARCH TELL US ABOUT WOMEN'S ORGANISATIONS OVERALL?

4.1 Summary of conclusions

We have looked at a range of organisation at different points along the broad spectrum which makes up the organised women's movement - from the traditional mass membership, hierarchical organisation at one end to the small, collectively run, overtly feminist group at the other. Although different ends of the sector obviously face different challenges, one of the perhaps surprising research findings is how much these organisations have in common and how their concerns, if not always their solutions, are very similar - and growing more similar so that boundaries between traditional and modern, between first and second wave feminism, between those that are hierarchically and collectively structured are becoming increasingly blurred and organisations are becoming increasingly hybrid. This is not only in the case of the Fawcett Society, which was chosen as a bridge between the two extremes for that very reason, but also in the YWCA which has made quite remarkable efforts to update its purpose, governance and partnerships. From the other direction, formerly collectively run groups are becoming increasingly hybrid, if not hierarchical. It is encouraging to find that old doctrinaire battles about whether you are 'feminist enough' (Bewley, 1996: p.169), or what sort of feminist you are, which discouraged many women from using the title at all, are becoming less and less important.

When I came to analyse my data, using a form of 'discovered, grounded theory' (see Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Corbin and Strauss, 1990) eight main paired categories - substantially there in the literature but reinforced by the interviews and other methods of data collection - emerged mostly strongly. There is space here to do no more than summarise the conclusions.

Structure and Governance

The organisations we have looked at come from all parts of the organisational continuum from the 'rational bureaucratic' to the 'fully collectivised democracy'. However, they have tended over time to move closer together, with the hierarchical organisations stripping out layers of bureaucracy and the flatter organisations building in more structure. The resultant organisations are thus more 'hybrid', with structures and governance which are adaptive, and, in several cases, extremely innovative.

Power and Leadership

The women's movement has had an ambivalent relationship with power and leadership. In traditional organisations these concepts were recognised as important - with role models of very powerful women - but sometimes abused. In feminist organisations built on a participatory-democratic model, power and leadership were often rendered invisible, leading to 'power

illiteracy'. There is now a growing understanding that power exists in all organisations and can be both used or abused – and there are models of good and even transformational leadership developing in all parts of the organised women's movement.

Conflict and Conciliation

Although the organised women's movement still experiences considerable problems in dealing with conflict (so that even when an organisation has a disciplinary procedure on paper, it may never be invoked) it is developing a much more realistic and less personalised approach to organisational conflict. This allows it to develop innovative institutional methods of conflict resolution and conciliation which avoid tearing individuals or organisations apart. Cockburn's (1998) research on three women's organisations in areas of conflict give some very relevant insights on how to handle conflict and conciliation.

Size and membership

While, to the women's liberation movement, small was considered beautiful and groups tended to become 'closed' if they became too large, most traditional women's organisations are dependent on their members' subscriptions and thus very concerned at their rapidly falling membership numbers. Challenges of membership revolve around questions of diversity, especially over age, and persuading young women to join/remain is a key issue. There is also concern about lack of ethnic diversity and an ageing membership and moves towards meeting the needs of a more 'segmented' approach to membership.

Purpose and partnerships

Women's organisations of all kinds are revealing themselves as increasingly prepared to adapt their purpose or mission in response to changing needs and falling membership and to be willing and pragmatic enough to seek new and even unlikely partners for their work - and give priority to developing these partnerships. The building of alliances, particularly across ethnic and cultural divides, provides particular challenges.

Income and accountability

The organised women's movement is - both historically and currently - chronically under-funded. For the traditional organisations this is largely due to falling membership and a great reluctance by members to pay increased subscriptions - and research needs to be undertaken to encourage women in the UK to invest in their own organisations as women do in the US. Those organisations which are part of the women's voluntary sector have become the most underfunded part of the whole sector, with 'women specific projects' under particular threat in a time of 'mainstreaming'. But women's organisations are beginning to see new funding regimes as an opportunity rather than a threat and to make their accountability to their funders work for

them rather than against them - as well as recognising the need to generate far more of their own income.

Context and contingency

Women's organisations are affected both by internal - size, age, income, task and ideology - and external contingency factors, including the changing role of women and vastly increased opportunities for them in the wider community. To be able to survive in the 21st century organisations need to be aware of these wider societal forces and have strategies for responding to them appropriately. This was amply illustrated by the way organisations which have managed to do this most effectively clearly have the best chance of survival and growth.

Transformation and change

Although there is a strong tendency for organisations to hang on to the symbols of their past, the organised women's movement (both traditional and second wave feminist) has shown itself open to change, even quite dramatic change. The research as a whole has been transformational because it reveals a movement which has both changed, and continues to change, the world and the individual women involved in it. It also transformed my thinking as the researcher and stimulated further research and enquiry amongst the interviewees.

4.2 Recommendations: towards better governance

My research was always intended to be 'action orientated' and one of its main aims was to:

- Draw up guidelines for the good governance of organisations as a contribution to the development of good practice in the organised women's movement.

We saw how many of the problems and challenges organisations faced were, like bad marriages, predictable and repetitive while the successes and solutions were, conversely, often unique and innovative. But women's organisations have an enormous amount to learn from each other's successes and failures and the following criteria and recommendations, drawn directly from the experience of such varied organisations, were developed to help this to happen. Underlying the recommendations that follow was a evolving set of **Criteria for Measuring the Success and Effectiveness of a Women's Organisations** which is attached as Appendix 1.

Recommendations from the research for achieving success/ effectiveness in women's organisations

1. Define clear roles, responsibilities and accountabilities (with clear job descriptions and person specifications) between the board/ trustees and staff, especially between the chair and chief executive **but** also allow for permeability between the two. Recognise the distinction between governance and management (while allowing for permeability) and encourage a relationship of mutual respect between Board and staff and members with appropriate protocols to safeguard this.
2. Recognise that the relationship between chair and chief executive is often difficult and one which needs to be carefully 'managed' and worked for. The two post holders do not need to like each other but they do need to **respect** each other and share a belief in the core values of the organisation.
3. Give priority, and devote resources, to finding - and 'growing' - your Board members and to developing their skills and confidence to the full (through detailed induction, training and so on) once found.
4. Ensure that your constitution, structure and governance is appropriate to this stage of your organisation's development, is **enabling** rather than **disabling** and will allow your organisation to grow in the context of your strategic planning. Do not be afraid to make brave and even drastic changes if these are necessary to ensure the future of your organisation.
5. Support and affirm good and appropriate leadership and expertise wherever it occurs in the organisation. Do not be afraid of the concept of management (even flat organisations need to be well managed). Develop a management style which is transparent, encourages open communication, is appropriate to your organisation and draws on the best thinking on women and management. Encourage an affirming culture which recognises what is good (work on the principle of 'public praise, private criticism'), brings out the best in all (including volunteers), celebrates success and uses talent appropriately.
6. Develop a family-friendly workplace which encourages the involvement of women with caring responsibilities and **discourages** the 'all-hours syndrome'. Encourage diversity of all kinds, including ethnic diversity. Recognise and value difference.
7. Open a dialogue over whether black women are ever likely to want to **join** generic and overwhelmingly white women's organisations and what such organisations would need to do to make this happen. Most importantly, develop appropriate and mutually beneficial **partnerships** between ethnic minority women's groups and more generic women's organisations.
8. Recognise that conflict of interest and abuse of power can occur in any organisation, and have the mechanisms in place to deal with them wherever they occur and well before they happen - and do not be afraid to use these mechanisms immediately if things go wrong. Always stand

up to a disruptive individual or group. Never let a situation fester by pretending it is not happening.

9. If you want to attract younger women to your organisation, make it as attractive as possible to them by:

- Ensuring your mission engages the enthusiasm and commitment of young women
- Recognising young women are very busy and so not making unrealistic demands on their time
- Opening up your governance, breaking down bureaucracy, allowing head hunting and 'fast tracking' so that younger women (or women who join as young retirees) have a chance of acquiring leadership positions without having to wait fifteen years to get there
- Providing very focussed campaigning or other roles which allow young women to develop skills, experience and possibly qualifications which they can see as relevant and important
- Ensuring that your organisation projects an image which is as diverse as possible and shows young women actively involved at all levels

10. Make the conditions imposed by funders work in your favour rather than against you and give a high priority to monitoring and evaluating your work and ensuring quality at all stages. Ensure the highest standards of financial management.

11. Expand and diversify your funding base, explore ways of increasing earned income and work on encouraging a climate whereby your members can be persuaded to support their organisation far more generously financially.

12. Infrastructure and other comparable organisations should:

- Build up a comprehensive database which maps the sector as a whole
- Advocate strongly on behalf of the sector to funders and to central and local government.
- Identify and initiate appropriate research.
- Provide a range of training, master classes, seminars, mini consultancies, mediation etc which are responsive to the developing needs of the sector and assist in capacity building.

APPENDIX I: CRITERIA FOR MEASURING THE SUCCESS AND EFFECTIVENESS OF A WOMEN'S ORGANISATION

1. Does it have a mission, aims and objectives, which all women as stakeholders perceive as relevant and important?
2. Does it fulfil its original or revised mission, do what it was set up to do, make a real difference in the external world?
3. (If it is a membership organisation) does it (within its constituency) have a growing, diverse and involved membership to which it is democratically accountable?
4. Do its governance and structures enable and empower it, bringing out the best in the Board, staff, volunteers, members, users and other stakeholders, encouraging models of good leadership and providing the mechanisms to deal with conflict and prevent the abuse of power?
5. Does it have a flexible and adaptive organisational structure and an evolving vision to allow it to respond to rapidly changing needs and challenges and to undertake a change agency role?
6. Does it encourage user feedback, and appropriate monitoring and evaluation and is it fully accountable to all its stakeholders?
7. Does it encourage inter-agency work and develop partnerships with a range of other appropriate organisations?
8. Is it sufficiently financially stable to be able to reliably plan for its future activities in a context of strategic planning?

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