INNOVATION AND COLLABORATION:

CHALLENGES FOR STATE RURAL DEVELOPMENT COUNCILS

A Paper on

the National Initiative on Rural America

by

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PREFACE

Partnership, collaboration, power-sharing, innovation, change—all are words in vogue in the public and private management literature. We hear them in the halls of government, corporate boardrooms, and the offices of community organizers. But while the words may roll off our tongues, the tasks they represent are not so easy to accomplish.

As facilitator in the writing of this paper, I have had the privilege to witness two intense, accomplished, thoughtful practitioners challenge each other. They come from different cultures and backgrounds and have different personalities, approaches, and writing styles. They joined together, came apart, listened, regrouped, and began again—at a new level and with new understanding and new energy. The result is a statement of their vision of the rural development initiative and the SRDCs for others to understand and embrace. This was truly a collaborative effort directed toward innovation and change.

The authors' insights and methodologies can greatly assist the initiative and state councils in providing a forum for people to come together, discover opportunities for meaningful change, and turn them into reality. It is hard work, requiring significant personal involvement. Yet the benefits are vital, and not only for rural America: when we create partnerships and truly collaborate for innovation, the most important changes occur in us.

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INTRODUCTION

This paper is the product of a persistent conversation of some 20 months, generated from our experience as State Rural Development Council (SRDC) executive directors, one from Maine, one from Washington. It centers on the theme that organizations—what they are and how they behave—are key to making a policy work. Despite their importance in the scheme of things, organizations receive scant attention from policy makers who formulate new programs or initiatives.

In order to meet the demands and needs of a changing rural America, organizations working in the rural arena must develop a capacity to change. This is not easy. Systems with strong political roots and constituencies are not readily malleable. New programs, no matter how innovative, seldom are designed to change institutions; indeed, they tend to reinforce the way organizations have always done business.

Organizational structure and culture are the real barriers, the real "impediments," to the shared decision-making required by a new covenant between providers and receivers of rural development services.

Fundamentally, the SRDC process must make change happen. The focus of this paper, therefore, is how organizations change or stay the same in the SRDC process. Understanding and managing this process are key to the success of this important initiative. With a shared agreement about what success looks like, we, as initiative participants, will have a clearer way to know whether we are succeeding. The question is not so much *what* projects we take on as *how* we take them on. We must begin to measure our success by the levels of change we can create, *first* in our own attitudes and behavior and *then* in the functions and welfare of rural communities.

To encourage the first task, we have developed a conceptual tool to help define, guide, and measure the process of organizational change in the SRDCs. We believe that such change is the heart of the initiative.

In focusing on the change *process,* we may appear to overlook the importance of substance and minimize the need for outcome. That is not our intent. There are substantive visions already out there for rural America. They are articulated in the 1988 National Governors' Association Rural Development Task Force Report, "New Alliances for Rural America," the 1992 Report of the President's Council on Rural America, "Revitalizing Rural America Through Collaboration" and the recent National Academy of Public Administration paper, "New Governance for Rural Development." Our concern in this paper is how we achieve such visions through collaboration and power-sharing. *In other words, how do we move substantive agendas through organizations that are resistant to change?*

These ideas and reflections come from our experiences over the past two years in developing our respective SRDCs. As practitioners, we each have a varied generalist background that spans work in several sectors at several governmental levels. Thus, we offer a paper not so much scholarly as one reflecting on our experiences, and we have written with a sense of urgency: we are concerned that, like past efforts, the current initiative will be co-opted by the old values and behavior before it can provide evidence of merit.

We have written this paper for the entire initiative "family"—an extended family, both within and outside the Beltway. We address this paper to the development professionals on the state and local level, the staff of the National Initiative Office, members of the interagency Monday Management Group (MMG), and the related public interest and government associations. All represent important sectors of the initiative.

The paper is organized in four parts. We begin by discussing the significance of the initiative from two perspectives. One comprises the multiple ideas and circumstances that brought about the initiative; the second describes the current rural context, which for many of us contains both rival images and conflicting meanings. Both perspectives point to the difficult challenges the initiative faces.

In Part II, we describe in some detail both the complexities and diversity of the state council process. Part III defines a conceptual framework for guiding and assessing the work of the SRDCs: four distinct environments within that framework suggest how councils can operate with varying levels of effectiveness.

Finally, we reflect on the policy implications of the organizational change perspective, suggesting what council leaders and policy makers can do to manage and support the SRDC initiative.

In the Appendices, we offer (A) some assumptions and observations that undergird the paper, (B) two matrix exercises for state councils and MMG working groups that wish to test our theories about how individuals and their organizations fit together as a council, and (C) an eclectic, wide-ranging bibliography.

PART I: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE INITIATIVE

Each administration since the late 1950s has initiated programs and services to improve the health and welfare of rural Americans, and each initiative has contributed to various aspects of rural life. Past efforts, however, have faltered in three ways:

- They have not approached rural issues strategically, with fundamental change and prevention as their goals.
- They have not focused on making lasting changes in the configuration of services so that rural communities themselves could address proactively their needs and issues.
- They have failed to direct meaningful, purposeful change in government agencies.

Instead, the bureaucracies created to develop rural America seem to have functioned as monuments to the status quo, so firmly cut in stone that (in our worst moments) nothing short of complete destruction seems to hold any promise of new configurations that better match the conditions of our times. Rural Americans have been so conditioned to expect the worst from federally initiated development efforts that their first question about the current initiative has been, "What are you trying to do to us this time?"

Begun in 1990, the National Initiative on Rural America represents a different, unique opportunity—one with great potential for making a lasting difference in rural America. Whereas earlier federal rural development initiatives operated typically as instruments of larger national and international policy goals, this initiative holds a promise of being the product *of* rural citizens, not simply *for* them.

The possibilities of the present initiative are indeed enormous. Consider the promise of these functions of the initiative:

- Contributing to the growing dialogue about the need for innovative change in the federal service system;

- Asserting that bottom-up leadership be the norm for doing business;
- Requiring that federal bureaucracies behave in new ways: strategically and collaboratively, in partnership with one another and with other public and private organizations.

Attending to *how* federal agencies deliver their services is unique to the present national rural development initiative. We believe that a fortunate set of circumstances and individuals allowed the federal system to embark upon this experiment in collaboration for change.

Yet as full of promise as it is, we fear that the current initiative is in jeopardy—its opportunities could so easily be missed. That possibility is real because the expectations driving the initiative suggest a complex organizational change process with provocative implications for agencies and governments. The changes require long-term commitment to a process of organizational transformation. More than anything else, the initiative needs a methodology that can effect "a new way of doing business" in rural America and a clear means of measuring success along the way.

The Need for Organizational Change and Collaboration

Beryl Radin (1992) points out that the initiative evolved to serve three federal agendas—substantive, process, and political. The *substantive agenda* involves the federal effort to redirect authority and resources to state and local governments and the private sector. The *process agenda* identifies interagency, intergovernmental collaboration and partnership as a more effective approach to developing new rural policies and programs. The *political agenda* was never defined clearly and as yet has not fully materialized.

The Clinton administration has an opportunity to shape and enhance the initiative on both the substantive and process level. The pitfall, however, of emphasizing the primacy, or even the presence, of a political agenda, is that "politics" at any level (federal, state, local or council) can easily compromise the

integrity of the council process. The political agenda, like the other two, must be managed thoughtfully and allowed to play out in such a way that it can help fulfill the initiative's ultimate purpose: organizational change for the welfare and benefit of rural communities.

The process and substantive agendas are compelling and powerful because they set forth the initiative's fundamental changes from past federal efforts. The ideas of "new governance" (John and Lovan, 1992) and "reinventing government" (Osborne and Gaebler, 1991) inform both agendas. At its core, the initiative aims to bring about something new and different, to transform a system through collaboration and partnership.

The need for a guide. At the outset, collaboration and partnership were cast as guiding principles for the SRDCs. The objectives, however, were left open and undefined. When pilot state council participants asked, as they frequently did, "What do you want us to do?", the reply came back, "That's for the councils to decide; you people are supposed to just do it!"

The "just do it" attitude was both encouraging and problematic. It was refreshing to have a free hand to do what made sense at the local level. But there was no methodology that prepared pilot executive directors and council leaders for the diversity of perspectives and situations they were to (and still do) encounter. We needed a guide to change our view of what we do, and how we do it. There was no such guide, naturally enough, because the initiative required *new* perspectives and behavior, and everyone involved in the early phase of the initiative was struggling to find the way.

Another related problem heightened the lack of a methodology. The initiative mission speaks only of *rural* end results—outcomes that any initiative, however configured, might aim for: "To improve the employment opportunities, income, and well-being of the nation's rural people by strengthening the capacity of rural America to compete in the global economy" (Hill, 1991). While few people would disagree with the intention here, the emphasis on ultimate rural outcomes helped to relegate *the need for organizational change* to the background. The substantive

agenda obscured the process agenda. As a result, councils have been confused, often debating whether to "develop projects" or more fundamentally change their ways of operating.

Organizational change is both the most crucial and most fragile component of the present initiative. We need a clear explanation of *why* change is needed and *how* it can happen. Not everyone is willing to buy into the need for organizational change, especially if it might mean the consolidation of one's programs with those one has been competing with throughout a career. For most council members, making deals and developing projects come naturally. Good deal-makers may even collaborate and build partnerships, but not necessarily in ways that change how they or their organizations operate. Yet the SRDC initiative calls for that kind of change.

The need for a tool. Early in its development, the initiative offered a four-step strategic approach to guide the council process. The approach illustrates the inadequacy of our present planning tools to bring about the kind of organizational change that leads to real innovation.

Grounded in rational, linear problem-solving, these four steps were meant to help change the way council organizations work and relate to each other on rural issues:

1. Identify rural community needs
2. Identify currently available resources
3. Develop a strategy to match resources to needs
   and identify and fill gaps
4. Implement strategy.*

In our view, this approach is inadequate simply because collaboration is so extraordinarily difficult—even within a single institution, let alone within the highly

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*Institutions and organizations regularly engage in this kind of development approach, usually followed by an evaluation procedure. At its best, the outcome can be an adaptable, evolving organization, responsive to internal and external factors. At worst, especially if the process omits an effective evaluation component and the wherewithal to respond to its conclusions, such a rational procedure can lead to a rigidification of an institution, locking it into a single perspective of what does or doesn't work.

competitive rural development arena. Before a genuinely collaborative strategic process can take place, there must be *a credible organization* to provide a forum with clear rules of engagement. Such an organization supports change in several ways:

- Allowing competing perspectives to be identified and honored;
- Encouraging the necessary compromises among divergent viewpoints;
- Helping council members see that individual and collective goals can complement one another;
- Fostering a sense of common purpose.

Thus, one of the first challenges implicit in the initiative was to develop the council into just that kind of credible organization. For many in the initiative, however, that challenge remained implicit and councils sometimes went astray. For example, if any one viewpoint dominated the needs and resource identification process before everyone was at the table, other credible players with competing viewpoints were alienated. Moreover, the first two steps had all the appearance of "doing again" what rural development organizations regularly do—"study the problem."

The promise of partnership. When we focus on *what* we should do instead of *how* we do it, we only reinforce our present values and behavior. A council too easily can take on a single perspective on rural development. However, when we focus on changing our behavior in developing programs, we begin moving ahead—toward program goals *and* toward a new way of doing business. *Unless we specifically link collaboration and partnership to change, innovation, and power-sharing, we end up reinforcing what we already have.*

If the initiative is to succeed, councils must reconcile the conflict between deal-making for the sake of doing deals and changing *why and how* we do the deals. Councils choosing deals for their own sake will become just one more entity competing for the attention and resources of rural America. Councils aiming at organizational change will build a vital institution that supports transformation,

both in the way government agencies operate and in the landscape of rural America.

The Rural Context

The context is the crucible. The initiative must face the essential features of rural America in ways that no previous national effort has been willing or able to do. Thus, we include four generalizations about rural America today, describing the context in which state councils operate and the challenges they face. *To be successful, state councils must foster changes in their members' values and behavior with these four basic conditions in view.*

1. **Rural development is paradoxical, conflicted, and ill-defined.** The paradox of rural development is simply that to "develop" an area is to make it less rural. Rural development practitioners might well *keep areas undeveloped* in order to conserve their natural beauty and other rural qualities. The paradox is only one of many conflicts in the field. Indeed, rural areas are arenas for conflict among all the different perspectives embodied in the American republic. For instance, development and policy professionals from all 50 states, asked in a Texas A & M survey (Fisher) to identify the types of initiatives that could "make a difference in rural areas," responded with an array of *12 different approaches* to rural needs—from economic development to environmental protection, from tourism to health care.

There is no clear agreement about what single thing rural development should be and do.** There is not even a descriptive unit that can uniformly identify what is "rural." Many people, despairing of attempts at defining the word, borrow a line from the debate on pornography: "I know it when I see it." On the

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** History offers little help. Before 1912, rural areas did not require any clear political-economic definition. There were value-laden descriptions of rural, ranging from the bucolic to the romantic, but there was no mistaking what the Louisiana Purchase was all about: expansion and development.

From 1912 through 1946, rural was often equated with agriculture because a preeminent concern of public policy was to ensure the nation an adequate, inexpensive, and safe supply of food. In the policy arena, rural *was* agriculture until about 1957, and it can be argued that national policy allowed rural communities to die rather than wasting tax dollars on maintaining them if the market economy could not.

other hand, methods for describing degrees of ruralness, such as the Beale coding system, treat rural areas as abstractions. Perhaps the closest we can get to describing rural areas is to place each community on a continuum showing their distance from urban areas and transportation corridors. In that view, some areas are more rural than others, and the differences among rural areas of all kinds become clear (see #4).

2. **Federal rural development policy has been formulated by default.** Rural development used to be everything from the wholesale disposition of land for private development to public financing of transportation systems so that regions could be developed (and taxed). These were the *real* rural development programs of the past, and much of the federal rural development service system is still designed to deliver this type of service. Though the heyday of massively funded rural development initiatives is over, the service configuration remains unchanged.

With few exceptions, capital was poured into a rural area to extract something primarily for urban consumption. When demand diminished, the community either diversified or itself diminished. Typically, public sector development emphasized the market side of this equation: subsidies and public services *followed* demand. Federal programs accentuated the production and distribution of the raw materials to produce commodities, with less attention to building and creating communities. Ironically, when local economies went "bust," mitigation strategies for people who were "dislocated" became the next rural development project.

Although rural development activities are grounded in conflict and span a wide variety of perspectives, public service systems do not reflect this situation. Development professionals do not necessarily come to their jobs as experts in rural life. Federal and state agency managers may function adequately as managers with little appreciation for the communities their programs are intended to help. Local government officials may be exposed to regulations only from the receiving end. In turn, regulators seldom have had experience operating the systems they regulate; worst of all, they may have a city the size of Chicago in mind as they

develop regulations that will affect the smallest American towns.

Many of us in rural development agree that our task is comprehensive and must include, among other things, both human services and economic development. However, our service structures suggest everything but this view. For example, regulators working to *protect* the rural environment are kept in a separate camp from those charged to *develop* rural areas. Our institutions have evolved competitively because of the unresolved paradoxes and dilemmas of rural development policy. We have no national consensus around the question "development for what?"—people? communities? resources? Rural policy, in default, is left to be worked out at the local level.

3. **Rural officials depend on state and federal assistance and are often buried by it**. Public entities in the most rural areas usually have a limited tax base capable of providing only marginal services. Rural economies, often specialized and dependent on outside capital, need support services most when their public revenue is declining. Officials in rural communities are under stress in the best of times; in the worst of times, they are often stretched beyond their limits.

Yet the service systems with rural development in their missions are often hierarchical and highly specialized. Scores of federal and state officials demand the time of each community clerk. The federal structure requires that a rural public official be familiar with dozens of separate agency requirements and regulations regardless of their relevance to community needs. Thus the array of agencies, each with its separate mission and procedures, incapacitates local officials by burying them with one hand, while offering "capacity building" technical assistance and grant programs with the other.

For survival's sake, local officials often find it easier to fashion requests for assistance that meet the demands of the delivery system than to address essential community needs. Program managers and end users alike suffer from an excessive emphasis on accountability—based in part in a lack of trust between governmental levels, and on the need to serve a broad range of people and communities—an emphasis that often obscures the specific needs of a single client or community.

4. A continuum of rural needs demands a flexible strategy. Describing rural areas on a continuum, we can make other generalizations about the extremes at each end. Communities that are resource-based or agriculturally oriented and close to urban and suburban centers tend to focus their public policy conflicts around values. These rural areas are vulnerable to unmitigated absorption—the loss of a rural identity through unplanned growth. By contrast, more remote communities typically face issues of development and diversification.

The communities farthest from population centers have the most tenuous hold on survival when demand for their commodities diminishes. Periodic shifts in demand make it difficult to maintain public services in regions that depend on a single commodity.

Rural and urban interests conflict when resource-based communities close to urban areas struggle to maintain their integrity. An example is the struggle between the desires to preserve open space and to capitalize on rapidly increasing land values. Other issues of the rural/urban fringe include planning and zoning of unincorporated areas and a struggle over who should pay for services to these same areas.

In the absence of a clear rural development policy, it is no surprise that state and federal service providers become confused. Forgetting the location of a community on the rural continuum, agencies provide assistance that fits somewhere else. We may help communities attract industry where there is no infrastructure to support an industry, or offer strategies to attract businesses and people where growth is unwanted and services are already saturated.

Rural America needs a flexible, coherent strategy that considers issues and interests at both ends of the continuum, delivering services and enhancing potential across the entire spectrum. If rural development practitioners would consider the special aspects of each individual rural setting (and there are hundreds), public programs could be genuinely transformational for rural communities—both in the way they function and in their full integration into the American economy.

Challenges. Our discussion thus far points out special challenges facing state rural development councils:

- Understanding the history of rural areas, the current forces that resist change, and the social and cultural conditions of rural people;
- Recognizing the continuum of rural communities and needs;
- Developing a coherent rural development strategy based on a broad consensus about values and goals;
- Re-creating government organizations that can work together and with local people and organizations.

In order to meet these challenges, we believe that the councils must become vehicles of change and innovation. Our special interest in this paper, therefore, is how the councils can become such vehicles. This is not an easy venture -- particularly given the complexity and diversity of the rural development arena in which the councils must operate.

PART II: THE STATE COUNCIL PROCESS: ORGANIZING AND MANAGING COMPLEXITY AND DIVERSITY

There are many public troughs feeding the activities of the players in the rural development arena. Each of these provides a unique development perspective, so that players come to the state council table from many frames of reference, their experiences distinct and their agendas disparate.

Separate sources, separate streams. Public investment has always been the biggest game in rural development. It flows down, however, in different streams such as EDA, CDBG, Farmers' Home, JTPA. Driven by the categorical nature of these resources and constrained by rigid rules, rural development practitioners have developed various roles, typically "deal-maker," "grants person," or "competitor."

Organized vertically, these funding streams also compartmentalize functions and activities. Reinforced by program funding rules and regulations, agency functions can quickly develop sensitive political boundaries with overlapping jurisdictional features. For example, consider the jurisdictions of EDA (the planning district), JTPA (the service delivery area), USDA-Soil Conservation Service (the resource conservation and development areas), councils of governments (COGs), community action agencies (CAPs) and Cooperative Extension. Operating in different historical contexts in pursuit of unconnected missions, these entities (as "districts" or "areas") are often placed on top of each other.

Separate agendas. These service delivery institutions all have strong constituent support, a formalized governance structure, long institutional memories, tales to tell, and an agenda to push at the council table. More often than not, tales and agenda concern just one or two sectors of the state's rural audience—health care organizations, job training service providers, developers or environmentalists—but never the whole rural scene. A few occasionally serve just single counties (a CAP agency) or have programs in every county (Cooperative Extension), but the majority have multi-county jurisdictions. Their development agendas are often defined more by sources or categories of funding than by

mission and goals shaped organically on the basis of changing community needs. Occasionally, these agendas are compatible and coordinated, but more often than not they are different and competing.

The many players in rural development have roles large and small, but never insignificant. Getting to know them, what they represent, where they come from, and how they are related (as family, friend, rival or foe) is a good start in the direction of understanding and managing the SRDC process. To get to know them well and to appreciate the complexity of their organizational arrangements, we have to be willing to acknowledge, understand, and work with *all* the rural development frames of reference—programs or services, and also constituencies and levels of government. Such acknowledgment and inclusion are at the heart of the SRDC process.

Institutional sets. As if multiple overlapping districts and conflicting agendas were not enough complexity, councils also face the fragmentation wrought by institutional sets. All council members tend to operate within sets. For example, technical colleges might interact mostly with state employment and training entities such as Private Industry Councils (PICs) and secondary vocational education centers. Simultaneously, other institutional sets such as state bureaus of health and medical services, though they command substantial resources (e.g., Medicare, Medicaid), often operate in a completely separate orbit.

Constituencies. There are many other constituent interests in rural development. Two examples are Native American tribes and the private sector. The complex cultural norms and behaviors of these additional players add an entirely different dimension to the council building process. Consider, for example, the difference between innovation for private gain and innovation for the collective good. Both motives are almost certain to come into play on any rural issue. However, to deny that these competing perspectives are present and active in the rural development arena ensures that a council will miss the root causes of the barriers to collaboration. *All* the constituencies command special resources and face their own unique and individually compelling needs and issues.

The players in the SRDC process must acknowledge the purposeful or intentional nature of collaboration and be clear and forthright about the motive behind their choice. Are we collaborating so that we can do business as usual, but do it more efficiently and thereby reinforce what we already have? Or do we want to collaborate to accomplish something new, to transform our organizations and our rural development efforts? If we want to do something different, we must engage in organizational change, innovation, and power-sharing.

PART III: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR GUIDING AND ASSESSING THE STATE COUNCIL PROCESS

The framework we are proposing springs from our conviction that the essential SRDC process is *to motivate* its members to change and innovate. At the same time, the process includes efforts to help them *behave* differently, collaborating and power-sharing. (See the diagram of the Motivation-Behavior Matrix on page 18.)

A state council with *high motivation for organizational change and innovation* and *collaborating and power-sharing behaviors* can create and implement new rural development paradigms. A council low in both characteristics is unlikely to produce comprehensive changes in policy or program outcomes. In fact, such a council may reinforce traditional deal-making behaviors.

These two variables drive the SRDC process simultaneously, shaping and reshaping each other in the process. On one hand, councils have some *motivation to change and innovate* in what they want and can do for rural America—programs and services, methods and procedures. On the other hand, councils have some interest in *collaborating and power-sharing behavior* as they carry out change and innovation efforts. The question now becomes, "Can the players change and innovate *together*, in collaboration and partnership?"

Many agencies are "innovative organizations," but they innovate in isolation, simply to maintain or enhance themselves. Likewise, some agencies will collaborate at the drop of a hat—on minutiae. But once the object of collaboration begins to require agenda changes or shared decision-making about resources, staff reduction, or program elimination, these agencies will quickly back away from the table.

Management and new governance literature and conversations are rife with the words "change" and "innovation." Real change and innovation are extraordinarily hard to actualize, whether for individuals or for organizations. The difficulty arises partly because past habits, norms, and values—individual and organization-

MOTIVATION-BEHAVIOR MATRIX
Mapping the Work of the SRDCs

HIGH

HIGH/LOW	HIGH/HIGH
LOW/LOW	LOW/HIGH

MOTIVATION TO CHANGE AND INNOVATE

LOW   HIGH

BEHAVIORS
IN
COLLABORATING AND POWER SHARING
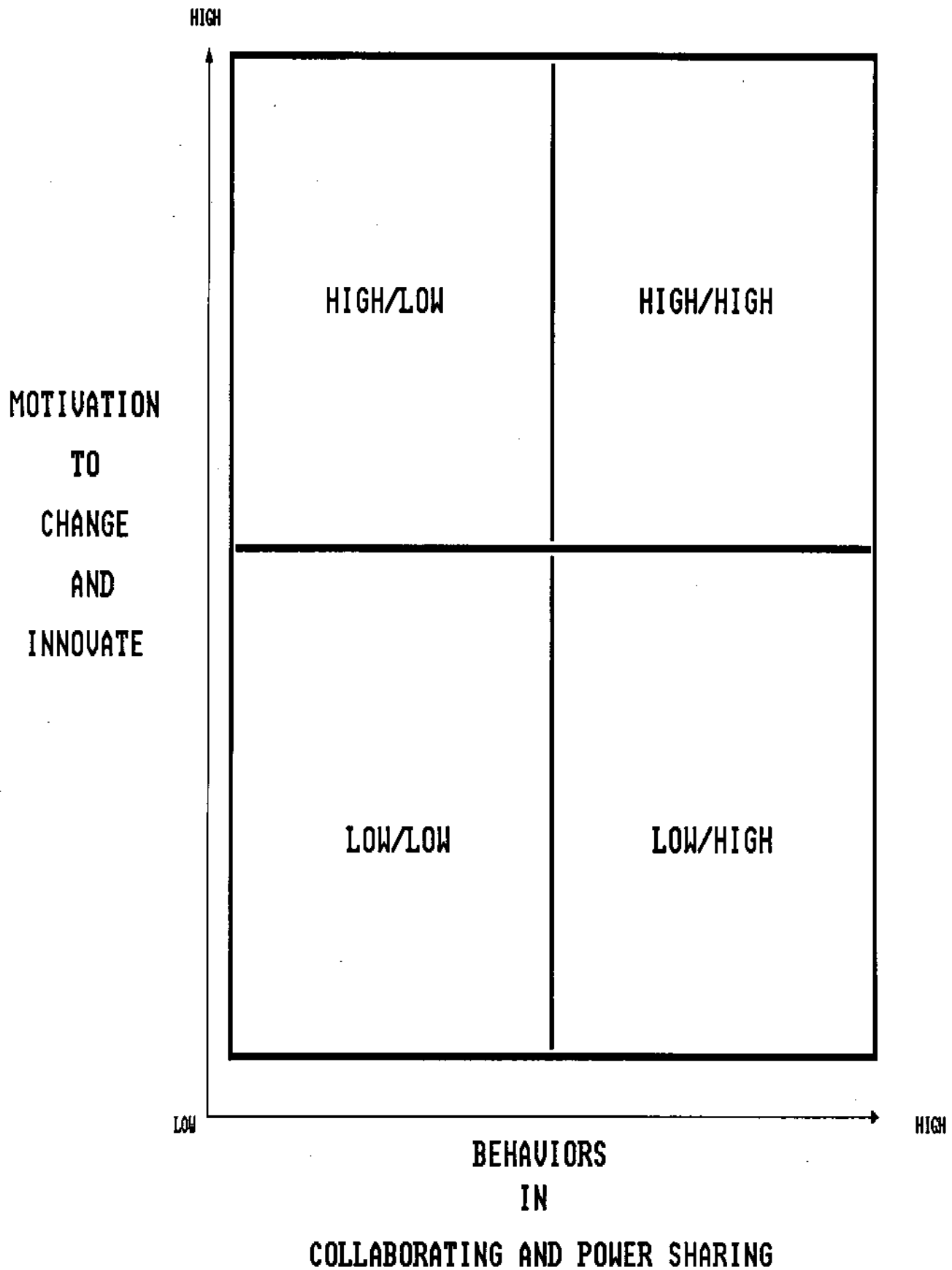
there is conflict, *negotiate and mediate.* If you must avoid or abandon an issue, at least acknowledge why you could not resolve it. When the council does act, members should commit to work plans that state clearly *who* will do *what* and by *when.*

5. What counts is the participation. Participation heightens appreciation for the potential of the state council process; it also spurs members to change and innovate in a power-sharing and collaborative mode. Chart an organization's level of involvement as a way of tracking the change process. It scarcely matters where involvement begins; engage players wherever you can.

For those at the top of agencies and organizations: your participation is crucial. If you cannot be at the table yourself, thoughtfully endorse the council process and support your representative's work. You will be enormously helpful.

6. The traditional development model—needs assessment, resource identification, strategy development and implementation—works some of the time but not all the time. However, it works best after the players create a common frame of reference, a shared vision, and solid relationships.

7. Be wary of tinkering by making easy and facile changes. They can give the wrong signals and keep you from attending to real challenges and opportunities. At the same time, waiting for the big picture, the "strategy," to come together can waste precious time. Look for issues or targets of opportunity that can help you engage the council in the change process. Choose issues so that in time the council can knit these "bits and pieces" of incremental change into a coherent change strategy.

8. Invention is part of the council's learning process. The nature of the SRDC process requires commitment and persistence in an atmosphere of experimentation. A "strategy" born of a consultant's work session is worth less than the development of your own strategic principles and behaviors.

PART IV: CONCLUSION—
INSIGHTS FOR COUNCILS AND POLICY MAKERS

The organizational change perspective can offer useful insights to councils as they form in new states. We believe that the following principles and suggestions are vital to keep the initiative true to its promise.

Suggestions for council leaders

1. The SRDC process is essentially one of making change happen. The process is not linear or one-directional; it consists of a series of "zig-zags." Council activities can go in several directions at once. The important thing is to know *why* you are where you are, understanding the forces that brought you there and those that may help you move forward.

2. Straight talk is all-important to a productive state council process. Council members' honesty and forthrightness about their motivation and behavior are essential. Others need to know who you are, what you represent, and how much you can speak for your organization. Listen well to all perspectives and respond thoughtfully. Most of all, acknowledge your doubts, fears, and hopes: you are not alone in having them, and acknowledging them helps to create norms of openness and honesty.

3. Creating a *culture* for change and innovation, collaboration and power-sharing, is the quintessential goal of the SRDC initiative. The work of the councils is not easy; encouraging cultural change takes time. Members need to stay at the council table, engage in real issues and problems, and see that their efforts really can yield new outcomes for rural communities. With support and encouragement, members can create a new pattern of shared values (for change and innovation) and behavior (in collaborating and power-sharing).

4. Commit to follow through on all issues brought to the council table. Always follow through by one of three means: if there is agreement, *take action;* if there is uncertainty, *gather more information and bring it back to the table;* if

single organization can handle by itself. The question is, "What can we do together that we would not and could not do separately?" For example, how can education and training resources be reallocated and used to help "finance" sustainable self-development efforts in rural communities? Can "job creation" and "job training" be undertaken together? Developing creative, doable answers to such questions as these requires that council members be willing to spend much time together.

Leadership styles are another important factor. Command and control, intimidation and manipulation, bargaining and trade-off—these have to give way to a leadership style that is transformational, open and trusting, and focused on problems and issues rather than personalities and past histories. Appropriate leadership is crucially important for councils because they are non-traditional matrix organizations, not hierarchical and bureaucratic. As such, the council process must be issue-focused and totally participatory.

The matrix can help the council and its staff to map out and assess exactly where they are with their projects or action items. Where they find themselves in the framework may not be where they think they are. Using this framework of analysis, council members can challenge each other to expand their boundaries and move on to higher ground.

Councils should be able to move wherever they want and need to within this framework, according to their own state and local context. The more *conscious* this movement, the more potential there is to ground organizations in local needs and issues. In the long run, however, no matter where a council finds itself—in an *HL, LL,* or *LH* environment—its members should aim for an *HH* environment.

sectors made every effort to collaborate and power-share for a highly desired and popular national goal. To make possible the kind of technological innovation needed for this nation to land a crew on the moon, the aerospace industry successfully adopted a decentralized, project-based "matrix organization" approach to management that values teaming, trust, autonomy and sharing of both ideas and resources.

To create and sustain the *HH* environment require much time and patience. A council does not arrive there overnight, and when it arrives, some members may not like what they find. Some members are likely to get there sooner than others. Here we find diversity on another dimension: differences in readiness for change among council members.

Once in the *HH* environment, organizational norms and behaviors undergo marked transformation. Here it is no longer enough just to ask strategic questions about issues and weigh long-term solutions to problems. *HH* results come as members challenge each other's organizational missions and assumptions. At the sub-state regional level, new organizational arrangements replace old ones. Rural development players discover that what they can do together would not or could not be done individually. Now groups that have competed out of different interests discover the politics of the common good.

Reflections

Keeping our eyes on where we are at the moment, as we attempt innovation and collaboration, is the key. Each cell has its own very different meanings of these words. "Collaboration," for example, in an HL environment, might mean "treason," whereas, in LH, it can mean something very different. As long as councils pay attention to where they are at a given moment, and build a common vocabulary grounded in a context appropriate to the situation, we believe that successes will come out of all four cells.

A number of things can help a council move into the *HH* environment. One is the nature of the rural issues the council wants to tackle and how it identifies them. They must be salient, overarching, cross-cutting—above all, issues that no

Events such as these can compel the players at the state council table to collaborate and power-share. Because they share in the crisis, their interest in collaboration is high. But their motivation to change and innovate is low. The dominant emotions, grief and anger, arise from a strong attachment to the old days and the old ways. Plotting how to defer the inevitability of the crisis is the primary behavior, followed by seeking funds for temporary relief.

The *LH* environment *can* be particularly promising. The high collaborating and power-sharing behaviors can cause special bonding among the players and create a new, different culture for change and development. We see this bond among the representatives of the six northern Maine communities on the Loring Readjustment Committee. When the spigot has run dry once again, the water gone for good, and one is dying of thirst, one might feel compelled to ask, "What would be a long-term, strategic solution to this problem?"

Another example occured in Forks, Washington, a timber-dependent community, that received public funds after the community began to suffer from dramatic changes in the timber industry. Though the intervention was remedial and short-term, it served as a catalyst for Forks to forge new relationships and coalitions both regionally and within the community.

In short, when survival is at stake, individuals and organizations are more willing to participate in change and innovation previously unthought of. No longer, except in denial, can business-as-usual work. Trips to the offices of the congressional delegation yield nothing. Backed into a corner, players can see a paradigm shift begin. If they don't just "cut and run," either out of desperation or after netting a short-term gain, a strategic, long-term scenario can unfold.

The HH Environment: **H**igh Motivation to Change and Innovate
                                              + **H**igh Behavior in Collaborating and Power-Sharing

The *HH* environment is filled with ambiguity, risks, and uncertainty. However, it gives birth to the rural development strategies we need for the 21st century. This nation's race to the moon is a good example of what can be accomplished in an *HH* environment. Entities within both the public and private

In the *LL* environment, people see the solution to rural issues as more and different categorical programs and resources. Interestingly enough, both the "resource provider" on the federal level and the sub-state regional "service deliverer" share this point of view. They tend to play each other's tune and march to the same drummer: "For sure, more resources for my programs will do the trick!" In this environment, a classic kind of politics comes into play—single interest advocacy—and the value of the SRDC lies in its usefulness as a lobbying forum.

The *LL* environment *does* have its own opportunities for developing new paradigms. The trick is for councils to know where and how to find and capture these opportunities. The Job Training Amendments of 1992 and the Inter-modal Surface Transportation Efficiency Act (ISTEA) might be examples of such opportunities. Both acts came out of an *LL* environment and yet contain program elements that bode well for the SRDC approach to rural development (e.g., local rule-making, multi-jurisdictional collaboration, and local community involvement).

The LH Environment: **L**ow Motivation to Change and Innovate
                        + **H**igh Behavior in Collaborating and Power-Sharing

This cell is the most chaotic and least stable of the SRDC environments. Accordingly, it may provide the greatest opportunity for growth. Unlike the previous two cells, *LH* is neither safe nor comfortable. The focus for behavior within this cell is on the short term: get it done and get out. Consider, for example, Desert Storm: a high degree of collaboration and power-sharing to help achieve a goal that was hardly change oriented or innovative in any long-term geo-political sense.

The *LH* environment usually arises after a crisis over which there is little or no control. Examples include the impending closing of Loring Air Force Base in northern Maine, the dramatic and inevitable structural changes in an industrial sector such as textiles in the South and timber in the Northwest, and the imminent death of a small agricultural community in Kansas.

both, for longstanding cultural and political reasons, these two entities are not able to collaborate and power-share.

Government funding streams, or "categorical programs," exacerbate this problem. Federal and state agencies compartmentalize their resources and services. Some agencies have separate programs for towns and Indian reservations, no matter how close they are geographically *or* what benefits could result. Special interest groups further deepen this division.

Innovative organizations working in isolation from each other can collaborate and power-share if their shared circumstances change. A sudden increase in the flow of cargo traffic across the reservation, for example, could lead initially to conflict and then to recognition of the need to collaborate.

The LL Environment: **Low Motivation to Change and Innovate**
                                     + Low Behavior in Collaborating and Power-Sharing

The *LL* environment is the most comfortable place to be for most organizations in the SRDC process. It is safe and warm; players coming to the SRDC table are not challenged to make any fundamental changes in their points of view; nor do they question the mission and structure of their organizations. A new policy initiative must be adapted to conform to the organization's existing needs and mode of operation. There is little challenge to current organizational norms or culture.

The primary motivation of an *LL* organization is to maintain or enhance its present domain—to do what is needed to keep it alive and ambulatory. Interorganizational efforts express themselves in bargaining or trade-off behaviors. People are not yet ready for problem-solving in partnership; they give attention and energy to organizing and reorganizing for greater efficiency, to looking for changes in rules and regulations, and to hunting for impediments (FmHA audit requirements and cumulative effects of EPA mandates upon local governments are among the recent quarry). Eliminating impediments on this level is beneficial, but it can become a diversion from a real change agenda.

The HL Environment: **H**igh Motivation to Change and Innovate
+ **L**ow Behavior in Collaborating and Power-Sharing

In the *HL* environment, we find highly innovative organizations driven by strong leadership and well-articulated missions. Here, council members are strongly motivated to change and innovate within the contexts of these missions, and so they value transformation within their separate organizations. Development issues are "idiosyncratic," and each organization is inclined to do its own thing. Many non-profits and regional development entities operate in the *HL* environment.

In a larger sense, the organizational features of the *HL* environment are adapted from the traditional values of the private sector. These can be entirely appropriate, if your aim is to capitalize on an innovation. Sharing all company secrets is not necessarily conducive to bottom line performance.

Power-sharing and collaboration are seldom valued; rather, strong competition for resources and a high premium on "grantsmanship" characterize the *HL* environment, for both resource-poor and entrepreneurial organizations operate in it. Councils spend energy seeking a "project solution" to local problems and give little attention to building regional coalitions or joint ventures. Information-gathering and resource-shopping are dominant behaviors at the SRDC table. "Checking it out . . . that's why I'm here today," many participants at *HL* council meetings have said. "I'm willing to come again, if you can show what's in it for me."

Drawing on the landscapes and experiences in Maine and Washington, we offer the following *HL* example. An isolated coastal town, prosperous decades ago as a fishing port, and an Indian reservation lie only a few miles from each other. The coastal community is linked to the rest of the county by a state highway that runs through the middle of the reservation. Unemployment has been high in both communities. In recent years and separately, both have undertaken successful development efforts. The leaders in both communities are strongly motivated to change and innovate. Both have special development advantages and resources—accrued to one as an Indian tribe and to the other through the strategic capacity of the town's docking/warehousing facility. However, to the detriment of

al—shape even the way we think about a change or innovation. Thus, foremost among the conditions to change and innovate is a willingness to challenge, or *rethink,* our own assumptions (habits, values, and norms) and meld visions of the new and different that arise from competing perspectives.

"Collaborate" and "power-share" do not mean simply "coordinate" and "cooperate." Connected to common missions and goals, collaboration and power-sharing are creative, intentional, and deliberate processes. To collaborate and to power-share mean to make policy and program decisions in concert, sharing each other's resources, dumping old agendas, and developing new ones together. These behaviors at first occur tentatively, experimentally, at the fringes or boundaries of organizations. In its best form, the council process endorses such behaviors, supporting their reiteration throughout the system, from the top down and from the inside out. The SRDC process can be a powerful instrument for change and innovation.

Viewing the SRDC process through the lens of our matrix suggests that a council can take on at least four different orientations, presented as cells in the diagram. The council processes in any cell differ markedly from those in the other three. The matrix, describing four contrasting SRDC environments, is useful both for mapping the direction of an SRDC and measuring and assessing progress.

We describe the cell environments as snapshots of what is happening in a council. Organizations and individuals seem to move into and out of various cells continually. Each matrix environment has its own reason for being; it responds to requirements of the situation specific to that environment. We attempt to describe each as objectively as we can, based on our experience. Our descriptions are not final judgments; we hope that our examples will prime the pump of dialogue and the exchange of ideas. *Two principles are especially important:*

- All four environments are valid and can yield benefits.
- State councils should strive to be safe forums for exploring the motivations and behaviors within each cell.

Suggestions for policy makers

Our counsel for legislators and agency heads is implicit in those already suggested for state council leaders. Thus, we want to make just these four general recommendations:

First, the SRDC process is developmental and highly individualized. Allow it to unfold in its own way and at its own pace within each state. Councils will benefit from your patient support. Appreciating the subtleties of the change process will help.

Second, the success of the SRDC initiative depends on whether you in the executive and legislative branches acknowledge the need for systemic change in the way governments and jurisdictions work. Your support for that kind of change has enormous implications for policy. Your active participation in systemic change can herald unprecedented program consolidation and enhance the transfer of authority and resources to state and local levels.

Third, as a comprehensive interagency, intergovernmental change effort, the SRDC process needs your *long-term* support. The core council staff needs only modest funding, but it must be available for the long haul and unencumbered by federal or state mandates or directives. The initiative also needs your *visible* commitment to the long-term change process.

Fourth, besides commitment, creating change requires specific skills and know-how. Councils must have resources for comprehensive staff development in the strategies and skills of organization development. You can earmark resources for that effort, targeting critical groups in the initiative: staff of the National Initiative Office, members of the Monday Management Group, state council leadership (chairs and members of executive committees), and council staff.

APPENDIX A
ASSUMPTIONS AND OBSERVATIONS

How effective we are at intervention is determined by how conscious we are of the variables that support the current situation. The process of building an SRDC is an intervention among the many perspectives and beliefs of the stakeholders in a state's rural development programs.

If we want to change how organizations work, then we have to pay attention to how they are presently working.

Economic development and rural development practitioners are not usually experts in organizational development and theory.

It pays to be clear about how things are working at the moment before making any movement toward change.

Perceptions are the foundation for behavior.

Perceptions will not change until they are acknowledged.

Every level of government and stakeholder group involved in rural issues has a different frame of reference.

Very few development practitioners have worked at more than two levels of government during their careers.

The medium is the message.

We will be unable to get each other to change unless we ourselves are willing to change.

APPENDIX B
MATRIX EXERCISES

> "When I use a word," Humpty Dumpty said in a rather scornful tone,
> "it means just what I choose it to mean -- neither more nor less."
> "The question is," said Alice, "whether you can make words mean
> so many different things."
> "The question is," said Humpty Dumpty, "which is to be master --
> that's all."
>
> -- Lewis Carroll, **Through the Looking Glass**

* * * * *

The matrix is intended to serve as a tool to help organizations move through the change process. It can be used as both an assessment tool and as a guide for change. To elaborate further how this might be done, we offer two exercises.

The first concerns how the meaning of a word can differ depending upon the cell or environment in which it is used.

The second illustrates how projects, programs or issues can take on different orientations and meanings when they are moved from one cell to another.

Each exercise will help state council members discover and articulate their own, and each other's, assumptions. The more we engage in a dialogue about why and how change needs to occur, the more likely we can make change happen for the desired result.

Please use the words and issues matrix exercises to engage your council members in a discussion about how you are presently thinking about your council processes and activities.

EXERCISE I: WORDS

As in the Lewis Carroll quote above, words mean what we wish them to mean or, by default, what we allow them to mean. Paying attention to the way a word is used is extremely important when two or more individuals are trying to understand each other and work together. For example, the word "change" can simply mean "to adjust," as in changing the gap on a spark plug. This is far from a transformation, yet when done correctly, it makes a car run better -- if only for the moment. In our first sample word matrix, we offer four possible ways that people can use and think about the word "change." Unless we agree about how we are collectively using a word, there is really little point in talking at all.

EXERCISE II: ISSUES

Our paper in part has been about how we collectively can engage in rural development differently, so we can significantly enhance the welfare of rural communities.

The environment of each cell has its very own guiding principles for all activities or projects that fall within it.
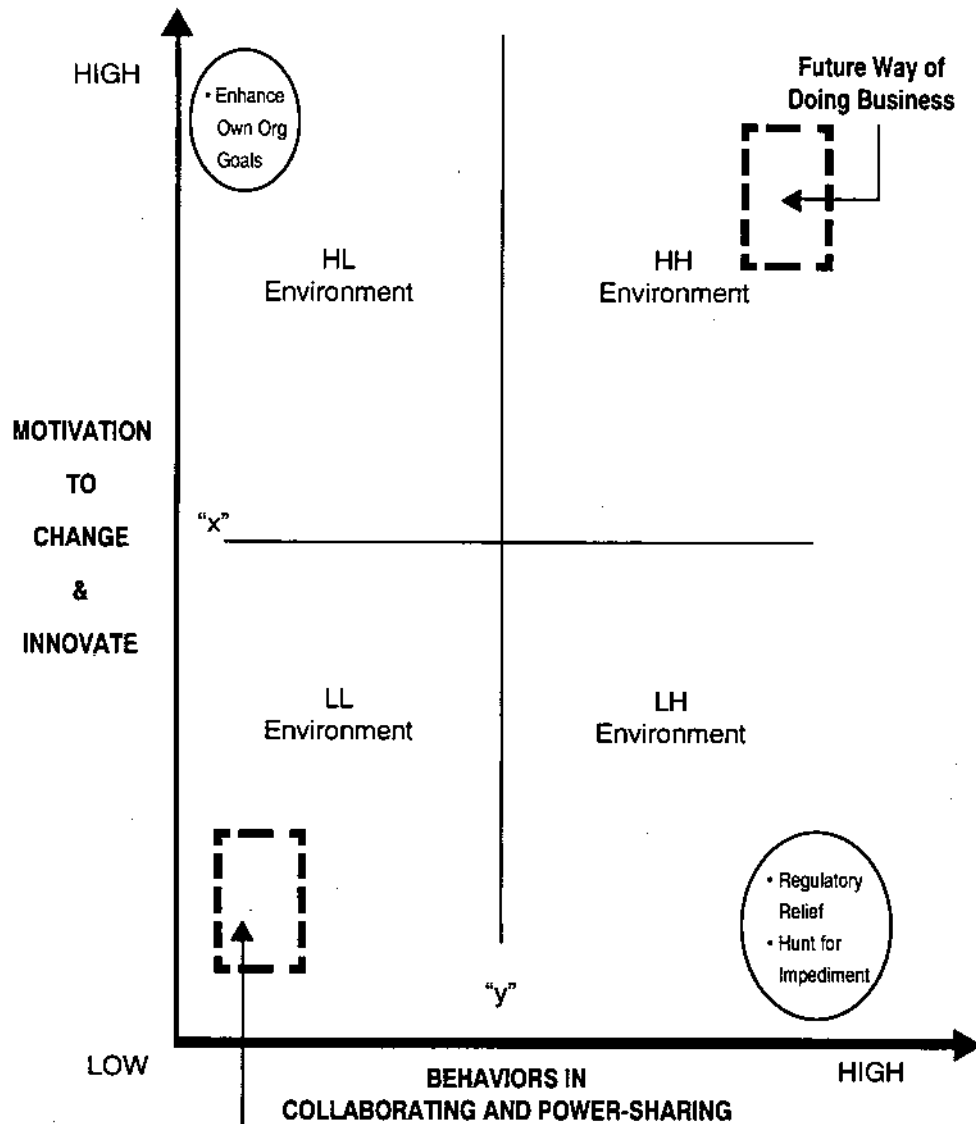
Issues take on a unique and special meaning within each of the four environments. Housing, for example, from one orientation could mean housing for the night through a motel voucher program. Surely no one would mistake this for a long-term solution to homelessness, yet it has its place in the day-to-day reality of the homeless. How we think about and assess programs offered as solutions to housing issues is key to being able to change our collective approaches into long-term strategic solutions.

* * * * *

In this "exercise packet," you will find:

1. A different, more expanded version of the "Motivation-Behavior Matrix" than the one described on page 18;

2. An Issue/Project Worksheet based on the four matrix environments, containing five rural development issues with "housing" and variable program or policy responses included as an example.

3. A blank Issue/Project Worksheet that you can copy for use with your council members.

4. A Word Worksheet, based on the four matrix environments, containing five words with "change" and its variable meanings as an example.

5. A blank Word Worksheet that you can copy for use with your council members.

First, study the Matrix for a few minutes, and then do the exercises with the "words" and the "issues" -- either by yourself or with your council members.

HIGH

MOTIVATION

TO

CHANGE

&

INNOVATE

• Enhance
Own Org
Goals

HL
Environment

HH
Environment

**Future Way of
Doing Business**

• Collaborate
• Problem Solve
• Ask Strategic Questions & Seek
  Long Term Answers
• Challenge Present Missions &
  Assumptions
• Build New & Different Relationships
• Redefine Institutional Goals &
  Policy Directions
• Do Together What Can Not
  and Would Not Be
  Done Separately
• Transformational Leadership
• Develop Lateral Coalitions
• Practice the Politics
  of the Common Good

"x"

LL
Environment

LH
Environment

• Regulatory
  Relief
• Hunt for
  Impediment

"y"

LOW

**BEHAVIORS IN
COLLABORATING AND POWER-SHARING**

HIGH

**Present Way
of Doing
Business**

• Coordinate
• Bargain and
  Trade Off
• Do Deals for
  Temporary Relief
• Look for Impediments
• Fine Tune Rules & Regulations
• Seek More $ for Same Programs
• Strong Command and Control
• Practice the Politics
  of Single Interest Advocacy

MOTIVATION-BEHAVIOR
MATRIX
FOR
MAPPING THE WORK OF
THE STATE RURAL DEVELOPMENT COUNCILS

MATRIX EXERCISE #1: WORDS

For every word in the left-hand column, develop a meaning for each of the matrix environments below. Use the examples given for "change" as a guide.

MEANING → WORDS ↓	INNOVATION = LOW COLLABORATION = LOW	INNOVATION = HIGH COLLABORATION = LOW	INNOVATION = LOW COLLABORATION = HIGH	INNOVATION = HIGH COLLABORATION = HIGH
PARTNERSHIP				
CHANGE	Fine Tuning/ Tinkering	Strengthen an organiza- tion's internal operations	Change in means but not in the ends	Strategic, long-term changes for the collective good; transformational
STRATEGY				
LEADERSHIP				
RESOURCE				

MATRIX EXERCISE #1: WORDS

For every word in the left-hand column, develop a meaning for each of the matrix environments below.

MEANING → WORDS ↓	INNOVATION = LOW COLLABORATION = LOW	INNOVATION = HIGH COLLABORATION = LOW	INNOVATION = LOW COLLABORATION = HIGH	INNOVATION = HIGH COLLABORATION = HIGH

MATRIX EXERCISE #2: ISSUES & PROJECTS

For every issue in the left-hand column, define a project or a program approach for each of the matrix environments below. Use the examples given for "Housing" as a guide.

PROJECTS → ISSUES ↓	INNOVATION = LOW COLLABORATION = LOW	INNOVATION = HIGH COLLABORATION = LOW	INNOVATION = LOW COLLABORATION = HIGH	INNOVATION = HIGH COLLABORATION = HIGH
JOB CREATION				
HOUSING	HUD Section 8 Low Income Housing	Habitat for humanity	Motel vouchers	Affordable ownership housing integrated with job development and training as well as child care components
HEALTH CARE				
TRANSPORTA TION				
WATER				

MATRIX EXERCISE #2: ISSUES & PROJECTS

For every issue in the left-hand column, define a project or a program approach for each of the matrix environments below.

PROJECTS → ISSUES ↓	INNOVATION = LOW COLLABORATION = LOW	INNOVATION = HIGH COLLABORATION = LOW	INNOVATION = LOW COLLABORATION = HIGH	INNOVATION = HIGH COLLABORATION = HIGH

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2. See previous note.

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On Leadership

Finally, as we move the SRDC Initiative onto the next "level" and consider what can be done to help engage the council in the "HH" mode of operation, leadership is key. The following references will be useful to state council participants:

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4. For a copy of this paper, please contact the author at the University of Maine Cooperative Extension, Room 104, 5741 Libby Hall, Orono, Maine 04469-5741.

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Stephen Buxbaum is the Executive Director of the Washington State Rural Development Council. Previous to this position, Buxbaum worked for the Washington State Department of Community Development (1987-1991); first under the Small City Community Development Block Grant Program; and then as manager of a diverse, state-funded economic development program that provided dollar-for-dollar matching grants to local and tribal governments and non-profit organizations. Both programs placed a premium on building local and regional capacity to initiate and carry forward effective community development projects.

In 1990, while still employed by Washington State, Buxbaum was detailed under a loaned personnel agreement to work for the Council of State Community Development Agencies, in Washington, D.C. In this capacity, he coordinated research and policy activities concerning rural development issues for the member state development agencies during the formulation of the 1990 Farm Bill.

From 1982 to 1987, he was the Director of the Farm and Community Council in Olympia, Washington. The purpose of the Council was to provide assistance to communities, human resource organizations and agricultural businesses in projects that utilized urban purchasing power to foster rural growth and stability. In this capacity, Buxbaum worked with several small marketing cooperatives, farmers' markets and sustainable agriculture organizations.

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Born in Tienjin, China, Ho is a naturalized citizen of the United States who served in the Korean War. He holds a B.A. from Oberlin College in government and a Master's in history from Columbia University.