

Woodside  
Mount Parker Road  
Quarry Bay  
HONG KONG

26 April, 1989

Dear colleagues,

This is a paper written for a social psychology course I am taking as part of my Master's degree through Operation Impact. I found looking at the last two years through the screens of this discipline very interesting. The levels ( $O > P < O, P > < O, P < O, P > O, O < P > O$ ) and social influences identified in Part II show this most directly. I hope you will find this worthwhile.

love, Mary Hampton

## **ICA Hong Kong and the Woodside Community: a case study**

### **I. Describing the situation--a scene set for change.**

*Between September, 1986 and December, 1988 the residents of Woodside made a complete change in styles and directions. The original residents were all staff of the Institute of Cultural Affairs (ICA) and the Ecumenical Institute (EI). These two organizations have been the public faces of an intentional community, the Order Ecumenical, for the past twenty-five years.*

In 1986 the organization might be described as continuing the structures of its tradition. That year, the Panchayat, a five member symbolic leadership team for the whole international organization moved their base from North America to Hong Kong. This team were not seen as part of the Hong Kong staff as they had separate responsibilities. For much of the next two years some or all five would be on assignment, traveling outside Hong Kong.

Four of this team of three men and two women were married. Their spouses (three women and one man) joined the current team assigned in Hong Kong. With these four there were twenty adults assigned to the ICA/EI in Hong Kong. They came from the U.S., Australia, Korea, Taiwan, England, India and the Philippines. Five families had a total of seven children ranging in age from one to eleven years. All members of this staff participated in a communal economy with income pooled, many expenses budgeted jointly and a set monthly stipend for each family.

Three of the twenty adults held jobs that were not directly part of the ICA. One was retired. The other sixteen were fulltime staff of the ICA. Their task was to carry out self supporting social and educational programs in Hong Kong and the region. These programs were in youth activities, civic education, social services, group training and consultancy for businesses. It was the intention that programs with businesses would produce enough income to allow other members of the team to work full-time on the social programs.

In addition to working together in task teams, the staff lived at the same place, Woodside. The Woodside community met formally two to five times a week for

study sessions, shared planning, and communal celebration. A daily mediation and worship was held with varying numbers participating. Meal preparation, cleaning, child care and driving were shared through a weekly assignment roster. A weekly calendar of events was posted in the main meeting room.

There was a "down" side to this. I quote from a letter which my husband, Stuart Hampton, recently wrote describing this time:

"The several people assigned to ICA work were not bringing in enough money to sustain the ongoing operations of the house, corporate life -- collegia, studies, rituals were declining in popularity and interest. Long term "Order" families were leaving. There was a haunting specter of entropy into nothingness, the abandonment of Woodside, of intentional community, and of the ICA presence in Hong Kong."

In 1988-89 the Woodside residents are associated by shared interest and personal motivation towards creating intentional community. Nine of the original twenty people are still at Woodside. One is paid to manage the building and also works as an ICA consultant on a fee basis. Another, who now lives in Australia, returns to Hong Kong to work with ICA programs when they are scheduled. The other adults all hold jobs not directly related to ICA. Two members of the former Panchayat group are still in Hong Kong, both working at other jobs. Living at Woodside, in addition to these adults and their children are others, some with previous relations with the ICA and some "friends of friends".

Everyone contributes to the facility costs by paying a community cost (rent) based on the percentage of space occupied. Each family is responsible for this cost and for all other personal expenses. Families prepare their meals separately and generally organize their own time and practical arrangements. (There are certain shared tasks, such as driving children to school, that are rotated among the families involved.) Those interested meet for a breakfast sharing time approximately once every two weeks. There are also many shared social events around holidays, birthdays and other occasions. Community life is lively.

I quote again from the same letter:

"Over the next 12 months, through a rather serendipitous chain of events, a new reality in Hong Kong emerged. Woodside is now a richly diverse thriving community, made up of Filipinos, Brits, Americans, Sri Lankans, Chinese, Australians, Malaysians, Koreans and French. Woodside no longer operates at a loss, but more than pays its own way. ICA is a profitable business. Community life is not rote and unimaginative. It is creative and spontaneous.

"Now the key to this journey was the individual and corporate recognition of the passing away of the Order. That painful realization of the last two years snapped the [resident families] out of the mental lock of our 200 years of 'Order' experience, into a 'new found land' of inventing with our lives, without having to put everything into an abstract and much hallowed box called the 'Order'.

"In Hong Kong we've invented and reinvented ways of operating, that have captured a movemental sense of power. We have attracted to our Woodside House 15 bright, NEW global people from across Hong Kong, who (whether they know it or not) hunger for a community with a sense of purpose and spiritual depth. Everyone pays their own way. Consensus is in the centre of the table. Corporate

gatherings celebrate the rich individual experience of each member. There is an air of surprise and spontaneity at weekly rituals and celebrations, because it's not the same old people saying the same old things in the same old patterns. There is continuously new input. Out of the 30 people who live here, only 1 is a full-time ICA employee, (I'm on the Board but work full-time as a research analyst for a finance magazine). But the ICA has 2-4 major very well paid programmes a year, with the business elite of Hong Kong. And the ICA runs at a profit because, it is not leeches by the dependency of the rest of the community."

## **II. Using social psychology analysis tools do look at what is going on here.**

*The levels and types of social influence at work can be looked at from two perspectives: that of the "old hands" who have been present through this transition and that of the "newcomers" who moved into the situation. I have chosen the "old hands" view, because this is my own experience and because this is the group for whom the changes are an issue. I believe the dominant levels of influence have shifted as we have gone through these months. The descriptions of influence are arranged to show this sequence.*

The starting point for the "old hands" was corporate culture which proclaimed to value the corporate over the individual and the mission over relationships in the group. In this situation, **group pressures on the individual (O>P<O)** were extreme. The shared values and sense of momentum toward mission had attracted people to join and to stay. Conformity was seen as justified by the external purpose and shared values.

The **ongoing interaction of individuals (P> <O)** initially supported business as usual. The camaraderie of shared tasks and living were reinforced by deep friendships. Any resentment or sense of individual time wasting or irresponsibility spilled over into the whole community, and reinforced the story that the only reason for a shared life was an external mission of global proportions. Group patterns (shared housing, income and corporate life) reinforced a self understanding of operating in ways separate from the larger society. There was strong investment in belonging. Most of the members in Hong Kong had been part of this organization for more than ten years. All had made international moves as part of their participation.

**Each person was in a position to be very directly affected by the others (P<O).** One family decided to leave quite suddenly due to critical illness of a parent. Their departure changed the team configurations, economic viability and options for those remaining, but was accepted as understandable and justified. Other departures also came as sudden and were more emotionally charged. One man left with his daughter announcing as he did so that he was seeking a divorce. A family went to the U.S. for Christmas and the wife declined to return. These events produced strain and resentment among those remaining. Shared commitments loomed heavy on the smaller number available to fulfill them. The remaining members wanted a common story about what was going on. Many discussions were held. A study book, Spirit [Transformation and Development in Organizations] by Harrison Owen, provided a useful talking point about what this meant for the organization.

At the same time reports of shifts to individual based economics, moving away from corporate living and creating a graded salary base came from other locations

around the world. Toward the end of the two years the Panchayat group made a recommendation that their team, and other international structures of the organization be discontinued.

**Each person had to interpret the meaning of what was going on (P>O).** Most of us began by trying harder, assuming we could carry on what a larger group had intended. It became apparent that continuing in the familiar ways was economically and practically unfeasible. At first, the individual options seemed either/or. "Stay and loyally carry on or leave and allow the rest of us who are committed to do so."

**Members of the group had a major influence (O<P>O)** as individuals and families struggled with what to do next. Three people organized the Spirit study. The man who moved back to the U.S. when his wife decided to stay there, took a job involving frequent trips to Hong Kong and showed an option not previously part of our imaginations. Others found jobs in Hong Kong that enabled them first to contribute regular income and then to be in a position to see their families could function independently. The same man who arranged his work to include ongoing travel to Hong Kong recruited the first incoming tenants to take over his apartment in the building.

*Each type of social influence changed dramatically in the new Woodside community.*

**Conformity** changed from "doing it the way we always have" or "being corporate" to individual interpretation of "what works when the world does it" or "what are we trying to create here". The expected norm affirmed by the group has become individual initiative and responsibility.

**Media influence** changed from common study and shared memory to new ideas shared in nonpredictable ways.

**Self justification** of "what we've decided our lives are about" changed towards "finding what works for me and what I intend to do with the rest of my life". The people who live at Woodside seem increasingly clear of their own directions, but there is little sense of common direction. The **cognitive dissonance** present when choices were "not part of our mission" are now expressed in terms of "not knowing any new way to talk about our common goals when the old ways don't fit".

**Aggression**, acted out or verbal, was a response to frustrations of "everyone being in charge means no one is" and of "your choices effect my life intimately, but I can't stop you". Now that each individual and family is responsible for its own living, aggression is seen only in minor irritations "who left these dirty dishes?"

A subtle **prejudice**, or we/they division separating the Order community and the rest of the world, was part of the bonding of the group. It seems to be replaced by openness to any form of caring activity -- with the opposite danger of making no value judgements at all.

**Attraction** was downplayed by Order members at Woodside. Sayings rehearsed included "colleagues are not friends" and "we can work with anyone to get the job done". The present criteria for new residents includes "people who will fit in". The response of newer residents to the Woodside facility, to shared meals and events, and to the working relationships present has enlivened these events for everyone.

In a new sense all of us have been attracted to Woodside, to each other and to community life.

**Formal group process** efforts are very much part of the ICA/Order heritage of some Woodside residents. Strategic planning and structured problem solving were part of every effort. These tools, familiar and perhaps stale to all the "old hands", are used sparingly in our current gatherings.

*The present situation is dynamic, and very much in process. Members of the community (old and new) are optimistic and excited about the future. Many factors influence what is being created.*

**Positive influences** in the situation include new ideas. The new tenants have been a source of inspiration and of renewal. Expanded contact with the Hong Kong community we are part of provides an increased sense of belonging and ways to influence the society. Old and new residents now have more to report and share. Old hands have individually and collectively discovered we can meet our economic needs, and, that emotional and spiritual support are not dependent on maintaining forms for the sake of doing so. Members who described themselves as trapped doing things they did not enjoy now see they have the option to do "anything I want with the rest of my life". This sense of freedom creates lively excitement and a climate of support.

**Undesired influences** threaten ideals held by group members. There is a tendency for the old hands to defend "the way we have always done it" and for the newcomers to assume someone else is in charge. Hong Kong is a very money oriented, consumer-oriented society. Most residents are now working directly in local businesses, schools and social service organizations. Several now have more money at their disposal than at any previous time in their adult lives. Individuals also have increasing commitments and interest outside Woodside, leaving less time for the community.

Two problems seen are hinted at above. No one would chose less participation in the local society, but it would be of little use to extend openness to the point making no value judgements. The second issue has to do with the need for a community identity and purpose. All residents, old and new, find Woodside an ambient inviting place to live, enjoy its retreat-like atmosphere and shared social activities. The question is whether more is needed. There is a fear that individual interests and self sufficiency could replace not only common mission but the shared values that led to that mission.

*III. Strategies for change are ways that the effect of influences already present can be channeled so that positive influences can be made more effective and the impact of the undesired influences can be reduced.*

Deciding to be open to incoming residents who did not share the common background and then to recruit such residents was a major turning point in the life of the community.

Opportunities to met together, share a meal and exchange ideas are an important way a new sense of community is fostered. Currently there are 1-2 hour gatherings twice a month for breakfast or afternoon tea on Saturdays. (Other occasions such as holidays or birthdays are taken as opportunities for events commonly planned or hosted by one or more families.) Increasing dialogue situations for all residents

reduces tendencies to fall back on past patterns out of habit or for the newer residents to abdicate involvement in favor of old hands who know what is going on. Maintaining openness to new residents and a balance of long term and short term tenants enables freshness in these dialogues.

Functional independence seems fairly well established. We are developing forms of shared planning and responsibility for the co-operative elements of our lives (facility upkeep, equipment, common supplies). The related question of what, if anything, the community would do if someone is unable temporarily or long term to meet their own needs has not been resolved. The present group consist of young people and families who are fit and largely economically secure. It seems unlikely our ideals would extend to welcoming someone who was not able to carry their own weight.

The sense of individual and group freedom to create what we intend to do with our lives is fostered by exchange among residents and other local contacts and international "networking" to stay in touch with others from related communities.

The pressures of the surrounding culture of materialism will have to be dealt with by each individual and family. The continued demonstration of attractive "voluntary simplicity" is a strategy to support them in this. Shared community supports individuals in deciding to live with only what they need rather than what they might be able to afford.

Outside interests are a gift rather than a danger if not seen as competition. The issue here is re-educating ourselves away from a we/they mindset on what it means to contribute to society.

*IV. All of the strategies named have been attempted during the months. The following evaluation of strategies focuses on those I have directly participated in.*

The creation of dialogue opportunities in the form of shared events has been implemented by posting a schedule and inviting any resident to decide to host the twice monthly gatherings. A limited amount (from rents) pays for food for these occasions. Initially these events were attended largely by old hands plus one or two curious newcomers. Suggestions to newcomers that they would be welcome to lead the events increased participation. Alternate times were found when some had commitments on Saturday mornings. The key tactic is probably the dining room white board which serves as a message and announcement centre. These planned gatherings have been well received. They will continue while the group supports them; this ongoing effort at present, prevents these becoming an institution of the new community.

Participation in Hong Kong networks and in dialogue with people in other locations has individual and corporate aspects. Many of us are writing or tailoring-by-computer letters to twenty or more ICA/Order colleagues around the world. Letters and publications received are posted or passed around to share. Interested residents (including those with no ICA background!) meet when correspondence requires more than individual responses. These informal networking approaches seem a more timely and appropriate response than any formal compiled reports.

The second problem or issue described above has to do with the question of community identity and purpose. I believe we are in an time of "open space" as

Harrison Owen describes it. This is not time to enforce decisions or to commit ourselves to lasting strategies. It is an excellent time to work out how we relate and what shared interests invite working together. The strategy involved here is cultivating and encouraging dialogue. So far this has been very successful.

I plan to create a particular aspect of this dialogue by inviting all residents to read this paper as one version of the "Story of the Woodside Community" and to reflect on the implications for our future. I anticipate that explanations and story telling will be necessary, both to describe the past and to create a common story.

## **5. Summary and Review:**

Over the past two years a painful and potentially destructive situation in a missional community has led to a transformation of the operating modes of that community and the adoption of new roles. Approximately half the members of the present community had relationships to the parent organization and were part of this living situation two years ago.

This has been one of the more difficult papers I have ever tried to write. It is very strenuous to try to describe social influences in an aspect of my own life and my chosen community. It has also been very revealing. Social psychology concepts and language have given me a way to objectify some of the events of the past two years. As noted above, I intend to share this paper with interested residents because I believe a common story of these events is important to our common future.

Looking at a process where I have been intimately involved from the social influences at work has been revealing. I have learned about some pressures of social influence (conformity, aggression, self-justification). I fear most of our self-selected group would have assumed we were either immune to most of these or at least saved from serious effects by the purity of our motivation!

I am learning about my effectiveness in influencing others. The strategies evaluated in Part IV were all very simple. In reflection, I can see that they have contributed to the new health I see in the community. I also see a benefit in using the objective screens of social psychology to give a new way to interpret what is going on. I believe providing ways to re-create the story of our organization through written summaries and reflection is one of the most effective ways I can influence others.

It was certainly simpler to be part of a community where a small number of activities that could be used to explain our purpose, but I would not want to go back to that. If I wish my situation were different were different at all, I would wish for others in the Woodside community who share my professional interests in health and wellness. Perhaps, this means I should recruit.

I am pleased with the community I am a part of. I believe we have successfully weathered outgrowing one mission and now have an opportunity to live another, that of providing a supportive community for workers engaged in many aspects of society.

# Connecting the Global Grid

An Internal Paper of The Institute of Cultural Affairs  
by Len Hockley

June 1, 1989

For myself, and I believe a lot of us, the image that has sustained us in the long march has been a sense of a global movement of colleagues working toward common goals. For us, it did not take an Information Revolution to reveal that the times require a global communications network. In the common memory of the Institute (ICA) there have been many attempts at starting such a network. The longest and probably the most effective tool in its day was the Global Report and the related packet of information. Also there were Global Research Assemblies, Global Treks, Regional/Area Councils, Image, and Edges. Old ones are shed as we form the new. The important thing is that we keep our eyes on the prize, a global movement.

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No one media is enough to effect the job. Each has its failings. The age of the personal computer has introduced a new communication tool that can fill a gap which has been a nagging problem over the years. It is the motivation gap that exists in the time between the highs of face-to-face warm-body meetings. On returning from a face-to-face meeting, it seems we often do not carry through on the great intentions we have pledged to do. One reason is that we lose momentum because we lose contact. The cry is always "We need to keep more in touch," but time and cost usually mitigate against this. Travel itself takes so much time and is so expensive that, perhaps, we need to redefine what "keeping in touch" means.

Computer conferencing has many gifts that can be used to bridge the time gap between face-to-face meetings. At a minimum, operating as they do out-of-touch and out-of-time bounds, computer conferences can keep a sense of momentum going. (At a maximum they can easily become addictive.) Computer conferences can provide an interactive environment that in some important aspects make them preferable to a face-to-face meeting.

We are all acquainted with the gifts of face-to-face meetings: being together in the same space; eye to eye contact; immediacy of response; etc. But let's look for a moment at the unique advantages of computer conferencing.

In many ways these advantages are the opposites of the advantages of the face-to-face meetings; that is, since people don't meet in the same space, there is no need to match calendars or travel. In fact, people can, so to speak, be in continuous 'contact.' Also, because there is no visual contact, one loses much of his/her prejudice. Gender, color, age, dress, accents, physical beauty are all transparent.

Even the lack of any immediate feedback can come as an advantage. The demand to respond is a demand to be ready with one's best answer with little or no time for reflection. Computer conferencing

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*"No one media is enough to do the job. Each has its failings."*

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not only allows time to think but time to write and rewrite. Time to throw away the first angry response and settle on the statesperson's third one.

This is all to say that, in many respects, the gifts of computer

conferencing complements those of face-to-face meetings, completing the picture. With a proper mix of the two plus the overtones of other modes like the privacy of personal mail and the vocal subtleties of telephone conversations, one can imagine a great symphony tuned for sustained action and motivational highs.

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*"Gender, color, age, dress, accents, physical beauty are all transparent."*

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One might well ask, "Since computer conferencing has been around for a long time why hasn't it become more widely used?" There are some sound answers:

1.) Computer conferencing asks a lot all at once. We have had centuries of face to face contact where sight and sound are used to soften or modify the meaning of words. There is even a well worked out conversation etiquette to codify the appropriate use of voice volume/tone and gestures for a particular situation or effect. The lack of such guidelines for use in computer conferencing can make for painful situations where the proposed effect of a particular message is 'missed by a mile.'

2.) Also, the present telecommunications equipment beyond the telephone is, to say the least, not the most user friendly or the easiest to put together. Computers and telephones, themselves, are quite commonplace, but between them there is a 'black box' called a modem and some special software which can be difficult to understand. It is my experience, however, that with the help of colleagues these obstacles can be overcome and the results can be more than gratifying.

How can we use this information tool in our work? Its power lies in its ability to conserve and extend the forward momentum gained in such face-to-face meetings as the "Our Common Future" meeting in Mexico last Nov. Enabling the power of computer conferencing is the goal of a task force set up at this meeting. They will start by connecting the ICA offices that see the need.

There have been three distinct breakthroughs since ICA's initial efforts at setting up such a global electronic network with INFONET in 1985 and ECONET in 86/87. The first is the putting together of a cost effective software package that can run on almost any IBM compatible personal computer or on the Apple Macintosh. This package will send and receive messages globally at a cost that is much below the cost of voice, telex, or fax. The major emphasis here is its cost effectiveness. A three page document can be sent to London for 99 cents or Hong Kong for \$2.17. We have come a long way from the time it cost ICA:Brussels \$5 to look at their empty INFONET mailbox.

In line with this, the second breakthrough is the harnessing of the fact that calls originating in the US to points outside the US are much cheaper than those originating outside the US to the same points in the US. For example, a three minute call between NYC and Madrid originating in NYC costs about \$2.75 whereas the same call originating in Madrid cost about \$9.00. This is true in general around the globe and the difference is basically created by different local taxes.

The third breakthrough was the rebirth of ECONET with its low cost service (a local phone call plus ten cents per minute or about 8 cents a page), packet switching centers on three continents and over four hundred member organizations. We now have over forty continental USA member locations on ECONET plus two active overseas offices, Taiwan and Tokyo.

Combining these three breakthroughs gives us a system that will allow overnight delivery

of up to three pages of typed material to most of the capitals of the world including India and Africa for less than \$3 (about one fifth the cost of fax) and in a form that encourages many-to-many (versus one-to-one) conversations.

We are calling the system ICA Mail or ICAM for short, and it is now in beta-test between NYC, Madrid, Brussels and Houston. Soon we will add Chicago and LA. In the US and Canada it is intended that the system will be inclusive of ECONET. That is, one will be able to be a member of ICAM by having a membership in ECONET. It will work something like this: messages sent to non ECONET locations in Europe and Africa will be sent to "icanewyork" on ECONET for forwarding through the ICAM system; messages to Latin America will be sent to "icahouston"; and those for SEAPAC and the Sub-

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Continent will go from "icataiwan". The forwarding will be automatic and the cost of up to three pages of information will be the cost of a one minute phone call to the target city from the contact city (NYC, Houston, or Taipei)

What are some of the implications of having such a system relative to building a global movement? First and foremost is that because it is low cost there can be an extension of world-wide networking beyond the so-called developed nations. It will include nations that are not privileged to have satellite connections and those whose PTT's (Public Telephone and Telegraph's) have decided to make participation in global networking out of the question for their local people. A good example of how local costs can kill connections occurred last fall. ICA wanted to give a demonstration of the power of computer conferencing to the Society for International

Development, at their conference held in New Delhi, India. We put together all the connections through the Indian PTT in the 'right' bureaucratic manner only to find out that it would cost \$36 per minute of connection. This could be compared to a cost of \$2.90 per minute on ICAM.

ICAM will allow the globalization of some of the benefits we have experienced locally using ECONET. For example, after the "Our Common Future" conference a group was formed to put out the report tabloid. There were members of the group in Florida, Texas, New York and Illinois and they had no budget for travel. Not only was the text for the tabloid shared and edited electronically but they did their 'gathering' on ECONET.

ICAM can be a medium that will encourage cooperation between ICA and other agencies. Computer conferencing is a tool that gains financial advantage through a higher volume of traffic.

The moral of the story is that you should see your local movement computer bug and encourage s/he to joins ECONET (phone 415/923-900) where you both can plug into the Globe through ICAM.

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