

Team Managed Organisational Change Within A District School Psychological Service (SPS)

By P. Watts and G. Leyden

What determines change in your Local Education Authority (LEA) Psychological Service? How is change managed? How far is the Psychological Service free to negotiate change? At what point are constraints imposed, internally or externally, which render key points non-negotiable? Questions of this sort are critical when 'service delivery' is being discussed, or when papers are presented which reflect new service directions. However, most descriptions of service innovations in journals not surprisingly concentrate on the new products or systems themselves. The circumstances or conditions which enable the changes to be generated receive less attention, and the starting point is often 'First, catch your hare'.

This article is about catching – rather than cooking – the hare. By this we mean our focus will be on the major factors which influenced the process of psychological service reorganisation carried out in one large, city based team of 25 professional staff comprising, educational psychologists, remedial teachers, social workers and pre-school parent counsellors, supported by six clerical staff. This team was part of a larger LEA School Psychological Service (SPS) wherein a further 47 professional staff were based in seven area teams. At that stage there was no mandate to include the entire county service in the review and reorganisation.

The major purpose of this paper is to detail the change process for the city team, with the actual outcome being of secondary concern. A number of

theoretical models could be applied. However, apart from a commitment to an underlying problem solving approach, this account focuses on the practicalities by which change was accomplished. Nor, within this review, shall we make explicit the management models and culture in which the service was embedded within the LEA.

Our subsequent product inevitably reflects local priorities, resources, procedures and personnel, each of which will vary from authority to authority. Therefore our aim in this paper is to outline the process and, finally, identify those common elements which may generalise to other services and authorities. However, if you are seeking a consideration of the theoretical issues relating to reorganisation and model building you need read no further.

Background and setting conditions

There were a number of developments in this SPS during the 70's and 80's, linked to the development of more effective and systematic arrangements for identifying and meeting the special needs of pupils. During this time the publication of the Warnock Report and the 1981 Education Act had significant implications. In particular, a county wide policy decision was taken for our service which resulted in each team taking management responsibility for the '81 Act procedures within its own district, up to and including drafting the Statement of Needs, as well as providing the psychological advice.

These factors were primarily responsible for a doubling of the establishment in the nine years following local government reorganisation. An additional post of Senior Educational Psychologist (SEP) was subsequently created to help manage the 25 city based professional staff.

One final point relates to the implications of political changes following the four-year cycle of Local Authority elections. In Authorities where power changes hands every four years, policy initiatives and priorities may only have an actual 'shelf life' of three to four years before they are withdrawn, or superseded by fresh ones. Support services are inevitably – and perhaps rightly – caught up in this process. In our view it requires psychological services to examine their policies and priorities in terms of current political accountability, and to be prepared to explain and negotiate them at councillor and committee level, as well as with administrators.

For reasons familiar to readers of this journal, it is during the last 10 years or so that psychological services have begun to focus on their accountability to customers, the public, schools and the LEA. Perceptions shared by a number (but fortunately not all) of schools about our service probably echo staff-room comments in many parts of the country. Some perceptions can be summarised as follows:

1. the 'service' was responsible for long waiting lists,
2. too little attention was offered to the problems of the children referred by schools,
3. too little practical help was offered to staff in respect of managing children's behaviour, or devising learning programmes,
4. 'reports' – when they arrived – were couched in jargon,
5. 'reports' only contained information which the school already knew,
6. psychologists had nothing useful to offer,
7. psychologists (like policemen) were never available when you wanted one.

(Some may hold views (6) and (7) at the same time)

Irrespective of whether such views were representative, or accurate, or fair, it was quite clear that the service was not seen as being as effective or supportive as it should have been by some teachers. This had to be recognised and built in to any review.

Conversely, many staff of our service found themselves apparently trapped within a system which was unsatisfactory, but which they felt powerless to change. For instance, the open referral system did not benefit the child, the teacher or the psychologist.

It offered teachers only an illusory opportunity to specify the help they were seeking and focused attention largely on the child and away from teaching and other school arrangements. (If you do not accept this, count the number of school files, or files on teaching arrangements and compare the totals.)

Other dissatisfactions mirrored those expressed by some of the teachers. For instance, psychologists criticised referral forms for the following reasons:

1. they contained too little information to enable priorities to be established,
2. the 'problem' was seldom formulated to indicate the sort of help being sought,
3. there was no control over the quantity of referrals that might arrive at any one time,
4. some schools only asked for help in respect of longstanding difficulties shortly before the pupil was due to leave,
5. other schools referred excessively as part of a case to attract more resources,
6. a few schools never referred for a variety of reasons,
7. referring a pupil was often seen as shifting responsibility from the teacher to the psychologist.

Obviously, there was a need to re-negotiate with schools, other consumers, our own service and our LEA the nature of the service we should be offering, how it should be delivered and how that could be made clear to users. Above all was the recognition that the SPS is but one element within a much larger organisation as well as being part of a network of other competing and complementary systems/agencies.

Terms of reference

As finally agreed, after consultation with Senior Management in the Education Department, and our own staff, the terms of reference for the review and reorganisation were as follows:

1. for the immediate future the service was to remain multi-professional, with all four existing professional groups,
2. the reorganisation should reflect the agreed aims and objectives of the service,
3. it should be completed and implemented within one year,
4. it should at this stage only apply to the city and not to any of the county areas,
5. it would not involve other support services,
6. there should be no additional cost implications (staff, accommodation or equipment) for the LEA.

The change process

Rationale and process of change

Within any account of a change process there should be at least four elements; the rationale underpinning the process (the theory), the process itself (how it was done), the product (the outcome of the process) and the element of evaluation (product-in-practice). As indicated above, it is our intention within this paper to outline the rationale but-above all to focus on the process and practicalities of change. We will not give any description of the end product. Our reasons for this are as follows: whilst there have been a number of articles and books appearing over the years dealing with the reorganisation of SPSs, most of these have dealt almost exclusively with the 'this is what we came up with' aspect, with less attention to the context, practicalities and process of the change. By concentrating on context and process we hope that this account may be more useful to others whereas the details of the product obtained are really only relevant and applicable to the local situation in which it is implemented.

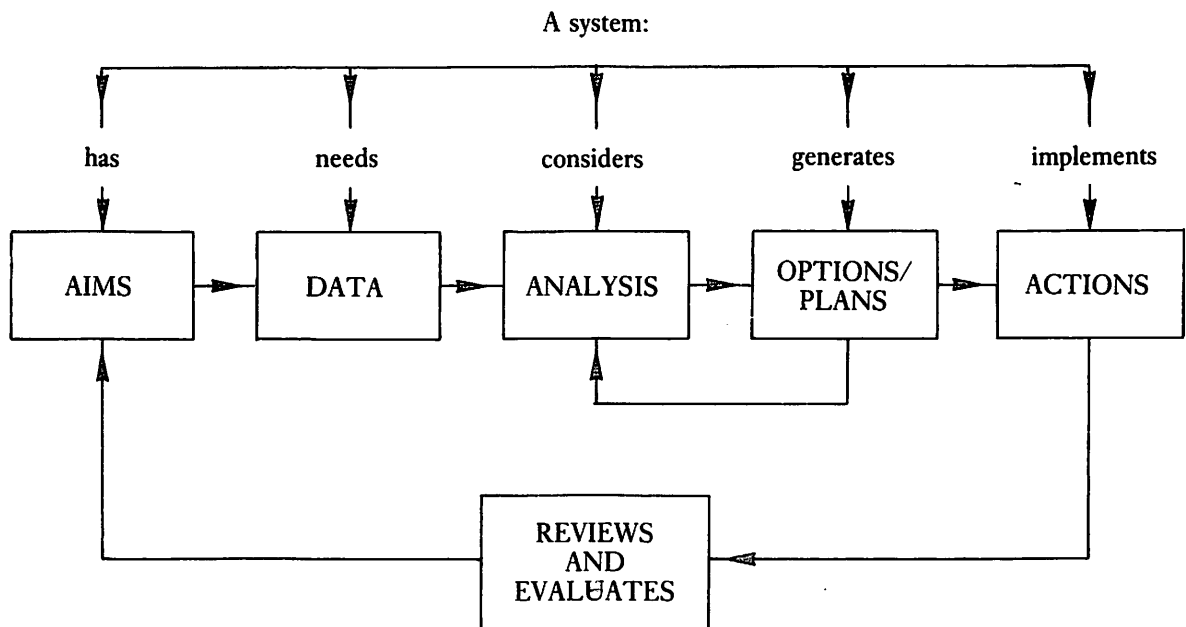
Briefly, the model that was employed for the change process was as follows:

This model derives from a problem solving approach. There are a number of key concepts relating to it which were a reflections of the management style which we sought to establish and which shaped the process of review and change. They were:

- all change should be informed change, in that all staff to have access to all information,
- all proposals/information from whatever source to be given equal consideration,
- successive stages to be covered by a series of working parties, with their reports available to all staff,
- all staff to have the opportunity to contribute to all stages, but with different degrees of involvement, (There were limits on the numbers in any one working party. This did not preclude anyone making a submission to any working party on which they were not directly involved.)
- discussion of different stages to be through staff and professional group meetings,
- any activities directly linked with change to have a high service priority and to allow for rescheduling of other work with SEP support,
- schools to be consulted and kept informed,
- decisions on all key elements to be by consensus or majority vote.

Diagram A

SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT



By these means it was hoped that all staff would play an active part in the change process, feel that the final result had 'something of themselves' in it and thus have a commitment to making it work.

A timetable was set for the implementation of the model with deadlines for each stage:

The successive stages in the process were communicated in advance, thus avoiding the need for ad hoc decisions of 'well, what do we do next?' Everyone knew how each stage in the process fitted in – where, how and when. This we considered to be a very important aspect of the process. By setting out the rationale and the process clearly and unequivocally, by charting the course and timing of the process in advance and by actively involving everyone as partners in the process, we sought to minimise the uncertainty, stress or anxiety which is often experienced in any change process. Our intention was to produce a reorganised service in which all had played a part in shaping and determining the outcome.

Data Collection and analysis (Autumn Term)

Four working parties, drawn from professional and clerical staff, were established to provide the information we needed to carry out a review and plan any subsequent reorganisation. The 'school as consumer survey' necessitated the design of a 39 item questionnaire asking schools to specify the type of support they would like from each of the professional groups. This was sent to each primary, comprehensive and special school in the district. The total number of schools was approximately 140. Three copies were sent to each primary, secondary and special school with a request that they be completed by Headteacher, Deputy Headteacher, Classteacher.

A second working party had the task of identifying and quantifying all demands made on any branch of the service by outside consumers. Working party three investigated the service's response to the demands made upon it, including a time allocation study for all staff. Working party four balanced the school as consumer survey by researching our own staff priorities and preferences in respect of the nature and style of work.

The relationship between the working parties is illustrated in Diagram B.

Staff were invited to volunteer for any working party, with the SEPs maintaining oversight to ensure appropriate size and balance of representation within each task group. We proposed that any one person could only serve on one working party as a main member, but might be co-opted to other task groups

Diagram B Relationship between working party domains

	In theory	In practice
Internal to S.P.S.	S.P.S. staff expectations, priorities and preferences (W. Party 4)	Work undertaken by S.P.S. staff (W. Party 3)
External to S.P.S.	Consumer expectations and priorities (W. Party 1)	Current consumer demand on service (W. Party 2)

for specific purposes. Each group should comprise four members, plus any short-term co-options. In addition, any member of staff could make a written submission to any working party. Each working group was asked to nominate its own chairperson. A detailed written brief was provided which confirmed the areas to be covered and provided guidelines about how the task was to be completed and written up. The report was to be made available in draft form to the SEPs in the week before half term. Reports would then be typed up during the half term break and a copy circulated to each member of staff and to the Principal Educational Psychologist (PEP). Additional information was obtained by the SEPs or other individuals designated for that purpose. For instance, other psychological services with a similar multi-disciplinary service were contacted for information about service organisation and delivery. A journal review was carried with a similar purpose. Informal information was also sought from schools and officers, and through INSET. A 'room usage' study was carried to chart traffic flow and peaks of demand within our own building. (This led to a re-allocation of rooms according to function rather than personal occupancy, eg team rooms, quiet writing room, resource room, reprographics, interview/meeting rooms, etc).

The task of data collection was allocated high priority and working parties were invited to negotiate with SEPs some rescheduling of existing workloads. However, it is also true to say that staff needed protecting against their own commitment to pull everything else in as well as to take on these additional tasks within a tight time scale. (Remember that in addition to serving on one working party, each member of staff was also a respondent in respect of other working parties).

One working party negotiated a week's extension of its time quota, but otherwise the information was available immediately after the half term deadline, and copies of reports were available to each member of staff. The terms of reference of the working parties resulted in descriptive, illuminative data being produced and only simple statistical techniques were used – or needed – in the analysis (eg means, standard deviations, percentage, correlations between rankings).

The reports themselves were analysed at a series of staff meetings, which included a presentation by each working party at a plenary session and a discussion about the key findings. There were also follow-up meetings by the separate professional groups in respect of implications for their work. The conclusions reached by these discussions were tested for relevance, cost and 'achievability' against the service 'Aims and Objectives'. This further analysis was the basis on which the possible options for the reorganisation were evaluated (see Diagram A).

During this phase the SEPs were also negotiating with the PEP in respect of LEA staffing, planning and policy issues likely to have a bearing on the review and reorganisation.

At all stages, staff meetings – both plenary and professional groups – provided a feedback loop for the evaluation of data, options and procedures. We were fortunate in that the major findings were consistent – uncomfortable though some of them may have been – with the result that consensus agreement about them was achieved at both professional group and plenary meetings.

Formulation of options/planning (Spring Term)

An additional, multi-professional working group was formed with the brief of generating possible models for organising SPS staff and service delivery for the rest of the centre to discuss. This group identified six relevant models of organisation. Although there is virtually no limit to the ways in which services might be organised it was felt that these six identified models could be considered as the basic building blocks. It should be noted that the models relate only to the organisation of an SPS and not to the nature of the work undertaken. Thus any of the models might apply to a service offering only project work, or to one operating an uncontrolled open referral system.

The working group outlined a number of possible advantages, disadvantages and unknowns for each model which have been summarised in Table 1. The

rest of the centre then added considerably to these in discussion.

A process of elimination began with certain models (ie autonomous professional groups and the allocation model) being rejected very early. Specialist teams, both by age, and problem, were also rejected but not without there being an acceptance that they had certain positives to offer. These discussions represented the feedback loop shown in diagram A whereby possible models are matched against the known data and a 'goodness of fit' is estimated. The model is then accepted as a possibility or rejected or modified in some way.

It was at this stage that we encountered Menken's wry comment — 'For every complex problem there is one simple, obvious solution . . . and it is wrong!' Discussion then centred on a 'mixed economy' model that would borrow desirable features from several of the models without inheriting too many of their disadvantages. This was chosen to meet our particular multi-professional needs and situation and we are not implying that it is necessarily a preferable model in other circumstances.

Finalising plans (Spring Term)

The large number of professionals involved and tasks undertaken made the reorganisation a complex problem to which there was no 'one simple, obvious solution.' In coming to the decisions about structure, organisation, roles, tasks, responsibility, etc., the following points needed to be borne in mind:

1. Every decision has its price and ought to take into account a great many variables.
2. There are a number of alternative solutions to every problem, and some, which at first glance seem the most desirable, are precluded because of prohibitive cost, or other factors.
3. It is necessary to arrive at some course of action. Decisions have to be made, despite the fact that information is never as good or as you would like it to be. One can only estimate as far as possible what costs might be incurred, what situations might develop as the result of carrying out one decision as opposed to another. Assessment and reassessment are essential components of the continuing process of decision making.
4. There will be constraints placed on resources and their management within an SPS which are inextricably linked to the restraints operating within and upon the LEA as an organisation of local government.

It follows therefore, that the new system could not

Table 1

	Area Based Work		Specialist Teams	
	Named Schools (Patch – system)	Area Teams	Age	Problem
Advantages	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Local knowledge of schools, contacts, other services; easy point of contact for other services. 2) Can forge close-working relationship with EP or PRT. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Allows some matching/ specification of staff interests and expertise. 2) Minimises gaps in service delivery when vacancies; easier staff induction. 3) More flexible use of staff in teams; facilitates working in sub-groups on particular tasks/projects. 4) Professional/personal support more accessible. 5) Some local knowledge of schools, contacts, other services; easy point of contact for other services. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Speedy response to changes in circumstances, need, staffing. 2) Encourages learning from others. 3) Matches staff specialist knowledge, experience and expertise with expressed need of clients. 4) Service objectives can be made explicit to consumers. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Speedy response to changes in circumstances, need, staffing. 2) Encourages learning from others. 3) Matches staff specialist knowledge, experience and expertise with expressed need of clients. 4) Service objectives can be made explicit to consumers.
Possible Advantages or Disadvantages (or unclear)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Widest variety of generic work. 2) Devolves decision-making and gives autonomy to field workers but little protection from system. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Increased bureaucracy and meetings; diminished autonomy for decision-making. 2) Possibility of less efficient team members being 'carried' by more efficient workers. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Individual job satisfaction could increase with specialisation. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Individual job satisfaction could increase with specialisation.
Disadvantages	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Individuals isolated: difficult to exchange information and knowledge. 2) All responsibility for area rests with one person. 3) Inflexible service delivery, problems with long absences/sick leave, courses and when extra staff appointed. 4) Problems with cross catchment area special schools. 5) Difficulties for SEP's to maintain overview of relative patch demands, pressures on individual staff, etc. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Weakening of personal relationships network of some patchworkers, diminished knowledge of local schools, problems, agencies, etc. 2) Problems for part-time members of team in co-ordinating work, allocating time for meetings etc. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Staff may have skills, knowledge and interests in a number of areas simultaneously; restriction may become frustrating. 2) Future career prospects may be restricted if moving to an appointment requiring generic work. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Staff may have skills, knowledge and interests in a number of areas simultaneously; restriction may become frustrating. 2) Gaps in service delivery could appear if a particular specialist leaves. 3) Future career prospects may be restricted if moving to an appointment requiring generic work. 4) Difficult to balance caseload pressures across specialism areas. 5) Some difficulties for specialism boundaries if child/family has multi-faceted problems.

Autonomous Groups	Allocation Model
1) High individual autonomy; devolved decision-making. 2) Experience of wide range of work.	1) Work can be fitted to existing skills. 2) Possibility of wide range of work.
1) Obstructs cross-profession working and interchange of ideas, skills, knowledge. 2) Difficult to co-ordinate input to consumer and can lead to inconsistency of service delivery. 3) Minimises opportunities for support from colleagues; the buck stops with the individual.	1) No close ties with schools. 2) Little co-ordination and work with others. 3) Time-consuming allocation meetings. 4) Little individual control over own work; determined by others. 5) Inconsistency of service delivery to consumers.

possibly be perfect for all the situations it might have to deal with. However, the aim was for a significant improvement over the previous position, and acknowledgement was made that evaluation and further development must be an integral part of the new structure.

One of the key aspects to the form of organisation we chose was that of group size. There are a number of distinctions between large and small groups. (See Table 2).

Table 2 Some characteristics of large vs small groups

Small Groups	Large Groups
decisions reached easily	more difficult decision making
constrained views	wider range of views potentially available
increased cohesion	rise of subgroups/cliques
greater agreement and team based satisfaction	increased disagreement/and dissatisfaction
high rate of participation by group members	less active participation by all group members
increased personal rewards for individuals	potentially decreased personal rewards for group members

For some decision making activities and developments a small group situation would seem to be appropriate, eg where a quick, unified decision is required. For others, the increased quality control or accountability of a larger decision making body may be more important. Within the city SPS we needed to ensure that we had easy access to both eg by using multi-professional area teams (small) and professional groups or the whole centre team (large).

We also identified a number of desirable key characteristics of the new organisation. For instance it should make efficient use of staff expertise, and promote joint work, mutual support and flexibility of role. It should also promote close links with schools based on a system/team interaction and thus regulate the workload of individuals. In all there were 20 such characteristics including, of course, the ubiquitous built-in evaluation.

Discussions centred around variations of mixed-economy models exploring such matters as; service delivery to special schools, membership by psycho-

logists of more than one team, time allocation to different activities, the models in practice, open vs contracted referral system and the effect these would have on the models, teams sizes and constitution. A total of four possible mixed economy models were considered by the staff, judging them against the known data. Eventually a consensus was reached and the models whittled down to a single choice. We opted for teams of 4, 7, 7 and 7 staff; the team of 4 being a pre-school team, and the others school age area teams. This option was accepted unopposed at a full plenary staff meeting of all professions.

Implementation

The implementation of any reorganisation is a major factor in determining whether a new system succeeds. This was carefully planned and the major tasks are summarised in table 3.

Table 3 Major implementation tasks

Internal to SPS	External to SPS
(1) Preparation of guidelines for schools and staff.	(1) Control/Restraint on referrals transition period. (by SEPs)
(2) Allocation of resources (rooms, equipment, secretarial cover etc.)	(2) Informing senior officers and other agencies. (by SEPs)
(3) Withdrawal from existing school and casework commitments and transfer where appropriate.	(3) Informing HT's of new arrangements via area in-service meeting and handbook for schools (by SEPs)
(4) Negotiating and planning by new teams in respect of working arrangements, timetabling, team building and identifying strengths, operational planning.	(4) All schools were to appoint key liaison person. (by Headteacher)
	(5) Further induction to new system for schools via initial team visits. (by teams)

This list is not inclusive and other steps were taken in respect of other local factors. However, most of the above points may well apply to other services considering a reorganisation.

Evaluation

After the new system had been in operation for a school year an evaluation of consumer satisfaction (ie schools) was undertaken. Generally speaking it was very positive and the critical comments provided a basis and impetus for further development and fine tuning. Perhaps the most telling remark was from one headteacher who wrote: 'The initial consumer expectation questionnaire was very good. It is worthwhile evaluating the service. I like being asked again. Thank you!'

Conclusions

A considerable amount was learned both by us and the team about change processes and how to manage them. Some of the key points might be summarised as follows:

- (i) the process of change can be achieved within a reasonable time scale (eg 1 year) without unduly raising anxieties, and in such a way that most/all of the staff support it.
- (ii) It needs to be done within a reasonable time scale or else momentum/interest/commitment can be lost, or staff burnout can occur.
- (iii) The process, structure and timescale should be presented, known and agreed in advance — a responsibility of management. It can be stated that change *will* happen, and proposals put forward about *how* it will happen, and *when* it will happen; but the 'what it will be' cannot be determined in advance.
- (iv) Consultation, discussion and negotiation are essential. Furthermore, if they are not undertaken honestly then other team members will detect the covert agenda or subtle directing. In the end the final organisation was not exactly what either of us — as managers — had privately anticipated. However, it more than fulfilled the original objectives and was a genuine team creation. Carried out in this way, the process also proved an unexpectedly successful exercise in team building.
- (v) On balance we probably left too much flexibility for the new teams to harmonise their working styles when the system was 'up and running' — more might have been done before this by way of detailed planning for the new operation.
- (vi) Managers and change agents must have both support and allies. The first was available as

Table 4: Two ways of managing a change process

A. 'How to plan changes'; a system in action	B. 'How to change plans'; an inaction system
A1. Negotiate terms of reference and liaise with those to whom the service is accountable.	B1. Treat project as internal, confidential SPS exercise, work within the constraints you 'think' you have.
A2. As a team, formulate an overall strategy and procedures for planning review, reformulation and implementation.	B2. Publicly keep all options open at all times — don't allow any decision taking to subvert the dynamic unplanned processes at any stage.
A3. Negotiate appropriate time scale for completion of project (eg 12 months) as well as for completion of successive stages with appropriate deadlines.	B3. Reassure staff by setting no deadlines or making them so immediate that they cannot be met or worried about.
A4. Identify the nature and amount of data needed in order to plan each successive stage.	B4. <i>Either</i> (a) Assemble as much data from as many sources as possible (Dataglut), <i>or</i> (b) Make a fresh start — collect no data. (Datavoid).
A5. Ensure all relevant information is available to all staff.	B5. Avoid staff confusion and distress by withholding information which does not confirm management favoured choices. Protect staff from the knowledge that you are doing this.
A6. Involve all staff actively in all key decisions concerning outcomes.	B6. Make sure senior management shoulder their responsibility for taking all important decisions without necessarily worrying other staff about details or implications.
A7. Identify views of all/representative major clients/consumers of service.	B7. 'Sound out' only those who can be trusted to think 'on the right lines'; or alternatively, nobody — 'they won't understand our problem/issues'.
A8. Reschedule, defer or decrease existing workloads to ensure staff time to carry out review, planning, implementation.	B8. Publicly promise major client groups that <i>all</i> demands on the service will continue to be met, subject to staffing, Gerbil, '81 Act and other traditional escape clauses.
A9. Within constraints of A1 and A3 above, carefully consider each option — avoid hasty decisions.	B9. Save (a) time (b) energy (c) anxiety by getting senior management to decide (ideally in advance of above steps) final outcome and then indulge in token consultation.
A10. As a team, agree a process for obtaining feedback from major consumers (and line managers) on the working of new arrangements in order to carry out a review.	B10. Time for you to rest on your laurels. For the rest of your team, the chance to show their mettle by taking responsibility for the success — or otherwise — of the new arrangements. You can't molly coddle them indefinitely.

there were two of us working jointly. We believe that there are considerable potential advantages to such shared leadership.

Secondly we were also strongly supported by staff who were committed to change.

- (vii) There is no sure-fire recipe for success. However, there would seem to be a number of factors/approaches which influence the style of the process and possibly the success (or otherwise) of the outcome. These are summarised in table 4.

You won't of course accomplish all the steps A1—A10 as well, or sensitively, or effectively as you might wish — at least we certainly didn't. However if you score 10 on the 'B' scale . . .

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