CHAPTER 3

REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND FORMULATION OF CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

In Chapter 2, the context of the study was described. This included the place of communities of women religious in the Roman Catholic Church, the way in which these communities have been governed, and the kinds of change which became apparent in communities of women religious after the Second Vatican Council. Finally, considerable detail was given of the evolution of governance in the Mercy community, from its foundation in Ireland (1831) until the establishment of the Union (1954) and the Federation (1957) in Australia, the point at which the present research begins.

Introduction

The analysis of the historical antecedents of the change process leading to the adoption of the new structure of governance seemed to suggest that four characteristics were of particular importance in understanding the Mercy community and change in the community. These were the focus on mission, the commitment of the members, the servant quality of the leadership, and the ethos or culture of the community. These characteristics were labelled "organisational", and their identification was the justification for the decision to begin with an examination of the religious community as an organisation. The results of the literature search increased understanding of the context of the study, helped define and formulate the research problem, and assisted in the design of a conceptual framework as a guide to investigation of the research problem.

This chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section, a review is made of literature related to the religious community as an organisation. The second section presents relevant literature on selected organisational characteristics. In the final section, selected aspects of change theory are used to develop further the research problem and to contribute to the formulation of a conceptual framework to guide analysis of the process of change in this research.

THE RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY AS AN ORGANISATION

Introduction

In this section, a review is made of literature about organisations which seemed to offer the best guide for later exploration of the research problem. It is argued that an understanding of the Mercy community as an organisation is necessary as a background against which the process of change might be analysed. If the religious group showed characteristics commonly acknowledged as belonging to other groups known as organisations, it could be identified, described, and analysed in the same way as those organisations.

Review of the literature disclosed a certain ambiguity about the usefulness of definitions. Some writers, for example, March and Simon (1958:1), stated that definitions of organisations do not serve much purpose, while others, such as Hall (1977:18) and Silverman (1971), asserted that they yield a good deal of insight into the phenomena under discussion. For the purposes of this research, the view taken by Perrow (1970:1) was accepted. He believed that:

> No matter what you have to do with an organisation - whether you are going to study it, work in it, consult for it, subvert it, or use it in the interest of another organisation - you must have some view of the nature of the beast with which you are dealing. This constitutes a perspective on organisations.

From the literature, it was established that the religious community possessed many of the elements distinguished by Weber (1947:145-6) in his pioneering writings on organisations. As with other organisations, the Mercy community is a corporate group with legitimate interaction patterns among organisational members as they pursue goals and engage in activities. The Mercy community also has a system of communication, a willingness on the part of the members to contribute to the goals of the organisation, and a common purpose among them, all of which are important organisational elements according to Barnard (1938:73) and Champion (1975:1). Further elements, distinguished by Hall (1977:23), are found in the Mercy community. For example, an identifiable boundary to the group is set by the regulations pertaining to membership entry. The strong adherence to Gospel values and the emphasis on commitment to works of mercy indicate to what extent the Mercy community as a collectivity has a strong normative order. This initial search of literature showed that the Mercy community possessed several elements common to all organisations.

A further search of literature was made to find specific studies on religious communities as organisations in order to give more specific direction to a study of the process of change in the Mercy community.

Religious Communities in Organisation Theory

In the extensive material on organisation theory, there was very little mention of religious communities as such, while reports of research were usually concerned with authoritarian structures supposed to be characteristic of most religious communities, typically defined as coercive socialisation processes. Yet, these stereotypes do not

capture the fullness of religious communities as organisations (Cada et al., 1979:115-116). This is particularly surprising when it is remembered that religious communities have been part of history for some time and, generally speaking, any religious community has a longer life than most organisations (Hostie, 1972).

Analysis by Francis

As early as 1950, Francis (1950:437) attempted "to apply a specifically sociological frame of reference to the analysis of a class of religious phenomena commonly referred to as 'religious orders'". Although Francis drew most of his illustrative material from male religious orders, his method of analysis offered some guidance in studying a female religious order, such as the Sisters of Mercy. He drew attention to three quite distinctive features found in different degrees in all religious groups.

1. Search for balance. First, he discussed isolation, that is, withdrawal from the "world" in order to be able to devote one's self to a set of spiritual values. The specific end of this withdrawal is the acquisition of certain religious ideals which the person feels cannot be achieved to the same degree or with the same assurance of success in his "normal" social setting. He pointed out that life in religion always implies the minimisation or rejection of some values and the maximisation of others found in the culture within which the religious is living.

The choice of values was an important consideration for the Foundress of the Mercy order. She rejected strict monastic enclosure for the members of her community in order to accord them the freedom to engage in the mission of the group. At the same time, in each convent, she ensured adequate privacy for the Sisters in developing

religious life in community. In Catherine McAuley's time, a certain amount of tension developed as Sisters tried to work out a balance between the demands of the mission of the group and their personal need for a supportive community life. While this tension has continued to be experienced by successive groups of Sisters of Mercy, the primary commitment of members has been to the mission of the religious community. Speaking of the Foundress, Savage (1949:3) claimed that:

> . . . her life-work was one of personal service, based on the conscious recognition of the close relationship that existed between herself and every other person whom she strove to help. It is this complete conviction of the primacy of the spirit that gives Catherine's life-work its special significance and distinguishes it from much of the social service of the modern welfare state.

In this research project, an investigation was made into the ways by which Australian Sisters of Mercy worked out a balance between the demands of mission and community life in order to establish a commitment to mission.

2. Influence of the social and cultural system. Second, Francis asserted that religious orders are always functionally interrelated with the social and cultural system in which the members live and work. Particular attention must be given to this matter when a religious congregation sets up communities in other cultures. Even in the new setting, these communities can only be completely understood on the basis of the historical culture in which they have originated.

In the foundation period of the Sisters of Mercy, as each Mercy centre was established, the customs and traditions of the early Irish Mercy communities came with the founding Sisters. Women who were professed into the early Mercy communities were expected to live the "Mercy way of life" as it was lived in the communities established by Catherine McAuley in Ireland and England. The particular cultural background of the Sisters had to be taken into account when the process

of change in Mercy centres in Australia was analysed.

3. Strength of the religious ideal. Third, Francis (1950:440) argued that the common ground where all orders meet is a religious ideal characterised by a selective emphasis given to certain portions of biblical precepts. While all Christians are called to these precepts, some choose freely to dedicate their lives in a radical way to the living of such precepts. Members of the religious organisation freely choose to live in a way which distinguishes them from members of most other types of organisation.

In discussing distinctive features found in all religious groups, Francis directed attention to the pre-eminence which members of a religious group give to particular spiritual values and the mission of the religious community. He also emphasised the need to study the historical culture in which a religious community originated. These emphases on membership and culture indicated possible directions for research.

Analysis by Hill

A different perspective on religious organisations was offered by Hill (1973:6). While he believed that the religious order had been, to a large extent, ignored in typologies, he considered that it might be fitted into the existing frameworks, with important consequences for analysis. He constructed an ideal type of the religious order, drawing attention to significant sociological features. Although Hill was concerned with nineteenth century monastic orders, application may also be made to active orders, such as the Sisters of Mercy. In comparing the religious community with other organisations, he explored the religious order as a quasi-sect, as a total organisation, and as a limited case within the concept of normative-compliance.

1. Quasi-sect. He argued that the monastic order represented the most fully developed form of minority group protest within a wider church organisation and was characterised by its permanence and by its rejection of secular concerns. Of particular interest to this study is the fact that the sect internalises its own authority, while religious orders derive their authority ultimately from the parent church.

2. Total organisation. He also argued that religious orders shared certain superficial features with other examples of total institutions, such as prisons and mental hospitals. These were mainly concerned with the way in which orders had traditionally centred their daily activity on a community timetable and nominated the functions that their members performed in community.

3. Concept of normative-compliance. The voluntary nature of the membership is a fundamental distinction of religious communities. Further, religious orders have non-instrumental goals; rules and administrative requirements are legitimated by reference to symbolic rather than pragmatic demands (Hill, 1973:7-14).

Each of the issues raised by Hill offered insights for the exploration of different aspects of the Mercy group. He drew attention to the voluntary nature of the members, to its existence as part of the Church, and to its non-instrumental goals. These are all considerations relevant to analysis of the Mercy community.

Analysis of the Church as an Organisation

Further insights into an approach to analysis of the Mercy community were gained from a study of literature on "religious organisations", as the term is generally understood. When most

researchers use the expression "religious organisation", they are referring to a Church. In the literature, this was clearly evidenced by the large number of major studies of different aspects of churches, particularly the Roman Catholic Church, as organisations. In view of the close relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and religious communities, a review of these studies gave insights into religious communities in general, and indicated lines of exploration for the religious community in this research. The writings of immediate relevance emphasised centralisation of authority, primacy of belief systems, increasing professionalism of members, and the mission undertaken by the Church.

According to Hinings and Foster (1973:97), one of the elements in many definitions of churches (cf. Johnson, 1957; O'Dea, 1966; Troeltsch, 1931; Weber, 1965) is "formalised and routinised administration of the means of grace". As churches develop routines and procedures to deal with their activities, centralised patterns of authority develop. At the same time, a specialist, qualified ministry with clearly delineated areas of authority also develops so that churches have the hierarchy, differentiation, and specification typical of bureaucratic organisations.

As a result of study of formal organisation structure, Hinings and Foster (1973:93) proposed a preliminary model for the analysis of churches which postulated the primacy of belief systems in determining the operational goals of churches, their subsequent membership, size and resource position, and consequent upon this, their organisational structure. In view of this insight from literature and of the importance Catherine McAuley placed on commitment to the demands of Gospel values, analysis of the belief system of the religious organisation was undertaken as an important part of the investigation of the

Mercy community.

In their research on clergy in the Roman Catholic Church, Fichter (1961) and Struzzo (1970) showed that the growing professionalism of the clergy (in occupational terms) produced problems of adaptation for the bureaucratised structure of the Church. This insight raised the question of the relationship between the increasing professionalism of Sisters of Mercy and the type of governance they saw as appropriate for their organisation. Furthermore, using the Harrison study of the American Baptist Convention as an example, Thompson (1975:23) pointed out that churches faced problems of authority and power of their leadership similar to those faced by non-religious organisations. Harrison (1959:x) demonstrated how the full-time officers of the Convention operated as a bureaucratic power centre. In the present study, the researcher examined the way in which members of the national executive of the new Institute of Sisters of Mercy were elected to their position and the amount and kind of authority they were given.

A further aspect in the study of religious organisations was emphasised by Thung (1976:64) who, in her analysis of the church of the future, highlighted a decisive characteristic which distinguished this church from other churches. She spoke of the church as "missionary", that is, concerned with the problems of society and with the ethical dimension of Christianity. She admitted that these concerns were not new. What was new was that the concept of the church as "missionary" connected these concerns with questions about the structure and functioning of the church. Thung (1976:70) pointed out that:

> . . . It is difficult to imagine any social body which does not manifest any activities . . . . The problem becomes, what <u>kinds</u> of activities people carry out.

Activities undertaken by the Sisters of Mercy are clearly indicated in their formula of vows. In addition to the vows of poverty, chastity and obedience, the members of the Mercy religious community take a fourth vow, a vow of service, normally phrased as "service of the poor, the sick, and the ignorant (See Act of Profession: Appendix B). In searching for ways to analyse the process of change leading to the new structure of governance for the Sisters of Mercy, the researcher took the approach used by Thung and looked for evidence of a relationship between the mission, as indicated in the vow formula, and the structure of governance of the Mercy community.

After analysis of the literature on church organisations and with the fourth Mercy vow in mind, it seemed worthwhile to turn to writings on human service organisations in an effort to gain further insights into the Sisters of Mercy.

While criticism may be made of the use of the term "human service" as too functional an understanding of a religious community, considerable support for studying the Australian Mercy community as a human service organisation was found in a trilogy of essays which had the theme of seeking to illuminate the meaning of the innovation of the Constitution on Governance which formalised the establishment of the Sisters of Mercy in Australia in 1981. The authors of the trilogy (Jennings and O'Toole, 1979:4.2) concluded their writings by saying that "emphasis on the concept of service rather than on bureaucracy may facilitate a better understanding of the [centralisation] issue."

The literature on human service organisations was then reviewed in the belief that it would provide additional insights about the distinctiveness of the Mercy community as an organisation.

THE MERCY COMMUNITY: A SPECIAL TYPE OF HUMAN SERVICE ORGANISATION

Hasenfeld and English (1974:1) described the growth of human service organisations in the following way:

> One of the hallmarks of modern society has been the vast proliferation of formal organisations explicitly designed to process and change people. This trend reflects, on the one hand, the shift of socialisation and social control functions from primary groups such as the family to the state, and on the other hand it reflects the development of complex people-processing and people-changing techniques that can no longer be implemented in small social units.

From the review of literature, the researcher chose the broad term, "human service organisation", as an appropriate general description for the religious organisation under study. The use of the term for this research is now discussed.

Key Characteristics of Human Service Organisations

Hasenfeld and English (1974:8-20) identified some of the key characteristics of human service organisations which set them apart from other types of formal organisations.

First, they pointed out that the raw materials to be worked upon are not value neutral, but persons with cultural values and social and moral identity. The human service organisations dealing with these clients need to maintain an ideological system which provides its personnel with reference points in coping with the moral components of their decision-making processes. Sisters of Mercy throughout Australia work with people from a wide diversity of cultural, religious, and socio-economic backgrounds. Questions in this study were directed, in particular, towards the Mercy ideological system which provides the basic reference points mentioned by Hasenfeld and English.

Second, Hasenfeld and English (1974) also pointed out that goal definitions in human service organisations were problematical and ambiguous. Sarri and Lawrence (1980:1) emphasised this point when they claimed that:

> Because they must accommodate to multiple and often conflicting goals, human service organisations are likely to develop ambiguous and often contradictory goals. When this occurs, the issues concerning who should be served and what services should be provided are never fully resolved, and clear goal priorities are not established.

This characteristic provided insights into the focus of the goal (that is, mission) of the religious community.

Third, another characteristic of human service organisations, which Hasenfeld and English (1974) believed had profound implications in defining the unique character of human service organisations, was the relationship between staff and clients. Sarri and Hasenfeld (1978:184) supported them in the belief that:

> . . . human service organisations have been distinguished from other types of bureaucracies by the centrality of client staff transactions as the core activity in such organisations.

Further, Steiner (1977:14) drew attention to the often-ignored fact that, in the human services, it is the client who determines the need, based on analysis of problems, on the type of treatments performed, and on their duration.

A growing need in human service organisations is their reliance on professionals to implement their service goals. Two reasons are given for this. First, the nature and complexity of human problems of the clients demand the services of trained and skilled personnel. Second, according to Hasenfeld and English (1974:17-18), "the enhancement of the clients' well-being requires the employment of personnel who have a strong orientation and commitment to the ideal of service". They also noted that an unanticipated consequence of increased professionalism was the alienation of

clients, particularly the impoverished, from the services provided by human service organisations. In the research, the question was asked whether increasing professionalism of the Sisters of Mercy had an alienating effect upon their clients who are traditionally among the most needy in society. For the purposes of this study, the commitment of the Sisters to the needs of their clients was studied in some detail.

According to Sarri and Hasenfeld (1978:51), a dialectical tension exists in social service delivery systems between advocates of a strongly centralised structure and advocates of a strongly decentralised structure. Support for centralisation is based on concern for coordination between organisations offering different services and pleas for elimination of duplication of effort. Support for decentralisation is argued on the basis that it allows for maximum organisation responsiveness and maximum benefits from interorganisational division of labour. It is also argued that duplication and overlap increase system reliability. The researcher noted this discussion in the literature about the merits of a centralised or a decentralised social service delivery system. In the interviews with the Major Superiors and the delegates at the National Chapter in December, 1981, she asked the Sisters to describe the way in which their group carried out their mission to the poor, that is, the structure of their social service delivery system.

Throughout the extensive literature about human service organisations (cf. Hasenfeld and English, 1974; Pollak, 1976; Sarason et al., 1977; Sarri and Hasenfeld, 1978; Sarri and Lawrence, 1980), little mention was made of the people who manage human service organisations.

The apparent dearth of literature about the managers of human service organisations would seem to indicate that they do not make a significant contribution to the functioning of human service organisations. However, according to Steiner (1977:13), these people are one of the most important organisational resources. He claimed that the performance of many human service organisations must improve so that service could once more become the primary organisational objective. To achieve this, he believed that a great deal of emphasis should be placed on the managers. This insight from literature directed attention to the management of the Mercy community as a human service organisation. In this research, questions were raised about the structure and the quality of leadership in the Mercy organisation, and a study made of Sisters in formal leadership positions.

In a later section of this chapter (see pp.89-96), a review of literature on leaders and leadership in organisations other than human service organisations provided insights into the way in which the Sisters of Mercy managed their religious community. In that section, it will be argued that leadership is an appropriate organisational characteristic to assist in understanding the process of change in the Mercy community as a human service organisation.

Identification of the Mercy Community as a Special Type of Human Service Organisation

As a result of the study of literature, it is argued that identification of the Mercy community as a human service organisation is justified. It is, however, a special type of human service organisation.

In writing about the study of organisations, Thung (1976:44) argued that typology was a useful "conceptual tool for explaining differences between phenomena that in other respects are comparable".

In this study, the researcher used the insights from Thung's writings to assist in establishing the distinctive nature of the Mercy community as a human service organisation.

Thung (1976:44) claimed that:

> . . . for a typology of organisations, one should preferably trace a few crucial features of organisations that appear to explain as much variety in organisational functioning and structure as possible. To find out which features can be considered crucial, however, is a difficult task.

In this study of the Mercy community, the task of selecting crucial features was complicated by the fact that few research findings on religious communities as organisations were available to act as a guide. Moreover, with a phenomenon as complex as a religious community, the number of important characteristics was very great, and the usefulness of particular characteristics to account for the distinctive nature of the organisation was not immediately apparent.

However, as a result of the study of the context of the Mercy community and of the review of relevant literature, the researcher selected a restricted number of organisational characteristics to explain the special nature of the organisation as a human service organisation. The four characteristics considered crucial were focus on mission, commitment of the members, servant leadership, and the ethos of the community.

Although these characteristics are not usually related in organisational studies, they were chosen for this research for two reasons. First, the literature indicated that questions related to these characteristics would serve as an appropriate guide when beginning to explore the subproblems. Second, because of the nature of the Mercy community as a human service organisation, and because of her role in that organisation, the researcher decided that questions about the four characteristics would provide appropriate data through

which to analyse the process of change.

Summary

Investigation of the literature, then, gave support to the contention that there are dissimilarities as well as similarities between human service organisations, as they are generally described in the literature, and the religious community. In this study, it is argued that the characterisation of the Mercy community as a special type of human service organisation, based on the following crucial characteristics, is justified.

1. Focus on mission. The Mercy group as a whole has a focus on mission and is committed both to institutional works and to individual forms of service.

2. Commitment of the members. The Mercy religious community offers a wide range of services to individuals and groups in need, to whom, by virtue of their vow of service, they are expected to show a high degree of commitment.

3. Servant quality of leadership. The voluntary and committed nature of the membership, as well as the diversified nature of the services, makes unusual demands on the leadership of the group. The leadership has a two-fold role of spiritual leadership to the individual members of the religious community, as well as the task of coordinating the services to be carried out by the group as a whole. In this type of leadership, identified from later study of the literature as "servant leadership", the leader ensures that other people's highest priority needs are being served.

4. Ethos of the community. During the long life span of the group, one hundred and fifty years, the development of a certain way

of doing things, of approaching people, of relating to the Church, was recognised by the people within the group as a "Mercy" way of serving people, and by people outside the group as distinctively different from the way in which other religious communities go about the ministry of service and from the way in which many other human service organisations function. A study of this organisational characteristic, termed "ethos" or "culture", emphasised facets of the organisation which were uniquely "Mercy".

In the next section of this chapter, a review of relevant literature about each of these characteristics, namely, focus on mission, commitment of the members, servant quality of leadership, and ethos of the community, is presented.

SELECTED ORGANISATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY

The four characteristics selected as crucial to understanding the Mercy community are discussed in this section of the chapter as a basis for developing the conceptual framework used in this study.

Focus on Mission

Eldridge and Crombie (1974:60) claimed that organisations, like other kinds of social groups, have some properties that one can get to know about without knowing anything about the properties of their members. Such factors as the length of time an organisation has existed, its location and size, and its prestige or reputation, are of this sort, and have been called "global" properties. Knowledge of these observable properties give useful insights into the identity of the organisation. The most important and obvious of the properties is what the organisation does, that is, its mission.

Because of the close relationship between any religious community and the Church, analysis of the mission of the religious

organisation must be made first of all in the light of the mission of the Church. Chittister (1980:84) summed it up when she said:

> . . . the mission of the Church is, very simply, the proclamation of the Good News . . . the announcement that Jesus is, saves, cares, and calls us; that history is alive with the presence of God; that creation is purposeful, that the meaning of life is more than mere existence.

As Chittister explained it, the Good News is a multi-faceted phenomenon. As a result, although every religious community has proclamation of the Good News as its basic mission, each community will usually focus on one particular aspect.

To discover the focus of mission in a religious community, Gottomoeller (1980:29) suggested that the community ask itself the question: To whom are we sent? She claimed this is the question of mission, a question of dynamic identity. In this study of the mission of the Mercy community, the researcher asked the Sisters the following question: To someone who knows nothing about the Sisters of Mercy how would you explain the mission of your Mercy group? From answers to this question, the researcher identified the focus of the Mercy mission in each group and in the total Australian Mercy Order.

A further review of literature on religious organisations (Chittister, 1980; Gottomoeller, 1980; Neal, 1977) revealed the need to clarify the distinction between mission and ministry. According to Chittister (1980:84), the distinction is easily understood. She asserted that mission is a "continuing message that must be constantly and consciously translated for every age. Ministry on the other hand is the mode or manner in which this continuing proclamation is made throughout the world".

For Gottomoeller (1980:25-29), mission and the fundamental identity of a religious community are closely related, as are mission and ministry. She expressed it this way:

> The mission of a religious congregation is a dynamic stance with implications for every aspect of its life, prayer, life-style, and ministries. A religious congregation must be able to articulate its mission and then choose ministries in the light of this.

According to Chittister (1980:84), when mission and ministry become confused, people "absolutise" and "petrify" specific forms of service or witness and, make particular works equivalent to the charisms which inspire them. As a result, the religious community gets out of touch with the life questions of the age and so becomes unable to bring credible evidence to their resolution. Finally, in periods or places where mission and ministry are no longer seen as distinct, a specific service rather than an overarching commitment becomes the standard of dedication.

A similar view was held by Dondero and Frary (1979:32) on the basis of research into the work of modern religious communities:

> . . . the mobility and accommodation of religious of the twentieth century in responding to the needs of mankind are hindered to the degree to which the religious community identifies with its particular historical and accidental antecedents rather than with the more simple thrust of response to the suffering and needs of mankind in the present . . . religious life which once led in service, now, more often than not, follows.

Matters raised by Eldridge and Crombie (1974) about the vitality of organisational mission were relevant in this study of the mission of a religious community. First, as well as being liable to shifts in emphasis, missions may expand or contract in response to changing opportunities and the competencies of the members. Second, while organisational missions may be deflected or redirected, and expand to encompass wider functions or consolidate into more limited ones, they can rarely be changed completely. Third, the effective carrying out of the organisational mission entails the cooperative involvement of many individuals and groups, most of whom have responsibility only for carrying out limited sub-goals. The many

disparate courses of action that go into the accomplishment of missions are typically parcelled out among specialised roles and sections.

In this study, each of these matters opened up lines of enquiry into the mission of the religious organisation and its relation to commitment of the members. For example, the writings of Merton (1972:11), on the privileged access that particular groups have to certain kinds of knowledge, directed this writer to investigate the effects of increasing professionalism of Sisters on the direction of service of the total group. She also investigated the attitudes of individual Sisters to their relationships with clients and also with other members of the Mercy community.

The literature on human service organisations was helpful also in contributing insights into analysis of the way in which the mission of the Mercy Order is carried out. According to Sarri and Hasenfeld (1978:184), human service organisations have been distinguished from other types of formal organisations by the centrality of client-staff transactions as the core activity in such organisations. In addition to the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience taken by most religious communities, the Sisters of Mercy take a fourth vow, "service of the poor, sick, and ignorant". By doing this, the Sisters show that the people they serve hold a pre-eminent place in the Mercy mission.

Among efforts to improve the delivery of services to clients of human service organisations, the "network" concept has become increasingly important to professionals and to clients. The word "network" is used as a label reflecting the fact that each person has a wide array of relationships, the bases of which may be very diverse. Sarason et al. (1977:3) described how a network may be recognised:

> . . . each of us knows, has met, and has had commerce with countless people, but what the label "network" ordinarily suggests is that with a portion of these people we have a relationship permitting us to "approach" them. And we may approach them with the deliberate aim of asking them to help us establish a similar relationship with a person we do not know.

Eriksen (1977:74) claimed that, as professionalism among human service workers increases, policy in human service organisations is more and more geared to developing an integrated network of service. Some human service professionals experience difficulty in working with other professionals, although they understand how beneficial for clients the network approach may be. Sarason and Lorentz (1979:9) noted that a resource exchange network develops after the significance of limited resources and a process of redefinition of these resources are assessed. Quite often, people have become disillusioned with countless and fruitless efforts to coordinate resources more efficiently for the purpose of more humane service. As a result, countless groups (usually informal) have assumed responsibility for dealing with these issues in their own locales.

The "network" concept has particular relevance for the Mercy way of "serving the poor, the sick, and the ignorant". Wherever the Sisters of Mercy carry out their mission, they believe that it is important to work as closely as possible with the people they are serving. For this reason, they need to know people personally or to approach them through others who know them. When the Foundress set up a new Mercy centre, she expected that the group would recruit members from the surrounding area who would then serve their own people. Today, when there is a great deal of mobility for the Sisters and each group of Sisters in an area may be quite small, an integrated network of human services is becoming more and more important, so that maximum use may be made of the expertise in each group. At the same time, all Mercy groups make consistent demands for local autonomy.

Referring to the operation of human service organisations, Sarri and Hasenfeld (1978:2) voiced a concern, which they referred to as "a public outcry", about the increasing rigidity of service, as well as the lack of feeling and responsiveness by human service organisations. As human service organisations become increasingly dependent for their finances on governments and other bodies, human service workers often experience the sense of a loss of power in controlling their fate. This issue was raised with the Sisters in regard to their work in the Mercy organisation.

Steiner (1977:12) listed a further concern. When anyone brings up the subject of human services, a common expression of frustration is that there has to be a better way of managing the organisations. He suggested that such expressions were becoming increasingly common in human service organisations because survival -- not service -- had become the primary organisational objective. This is an issue of particular moment for the various avenues of human service in which the members of the religious community engaged. In the interviews with the Major Superiors and the delegates elected by each group, the researcher also asked questions about the management of the Mercy Order, in the belief that the respondents would have particular insights into this aspect of the human service organisation.

Further, Pollak (1976:5) asserted that human service organisations need to be conscious that the nature of distress which the helping professions assist has undergone considerable change. In this study of the process of change in the Mercy Order, the researcher asked the Sisters for their perceptions of change in the mission and ministries in their Mercy group and the effect of change on the nature of their commitment and on the way in which leadership was exercised.

As a result of the survey of relevant literature on organisational mission, the following questions were formulated to help direct the research.

1. What is the mission of the Mercy community?

2. Why does the Mercy community place such a high priority on mission?

3. How does the religious organisation decide on the kind of service it will provide?

4. In what ways has the fourth vow, that is, the vow of service, been interpreted during the period of the process of change?

5. What constitutes the critical element(s) in mission?

The focus on mission, which is summed up in the vow of service taken by the Sisters of Mercy, demands a particular kind of commitment by the members of the religious community. To assist in framing questions to pose to the Sisters, the researcher made a review of selected literature on the ways by which members may become committed to an organisation.

Commitment of Members

In studying definitions of commitment in organisations, Salancik (1977:3) made the following comment:

> The [prevailing] definitions refer to the attitudes and behaviour of committed individuals. A committed person is one who says he will stay on the job and work hard for the organisation's interests. But how do people come to do such things? And why?

To answer these questions, Salancik suggested that, at a minimum, a concept of commitment implied that behaviour, or action, be a central focus.

Salancik (1977:4-7) claimed that, while action was a necessary ingredient in commitment, all behaviours were not equally committing. He named four characteristics of behavioural acts which made them

binding and so determined the extent of commitment, that is, the explicitness or the extent to which an action could be said to have taken place; the revocability or reversibility of the action; the volition, or the freedom to act enjoyed by someone; and the publicity or publicness of the act. These claims by Salancik indicated that a line of enquiry for this research could be a study of the taking of vows which committed women to the way of life of the religious organisation.

The literature was rich in studies reporting research findings on membership commitment in different types of organisations but, for the purposes of this study, attention was given to literature concerning membership in voluntary organisations. A classic study by Gouldner (1960:468-490) distinguished different dimensions of organisational commitment among the members of a voluntary organisation. As her main hypothesis, Gouldner (1960:470-473) proposed that organisational commitment is not a homogeneous and unidimensional variable, but rather a multidimensional phenomenon. When she studied different dimensions of organisational commitment, she distinguished what she termed "cosmopolitan integration", that is, the degree to which a member is active in and feels a part of the varying levels of a particular organisation, and is active, as well, in other organisations; and "organisational introjection", that is, the degree to which the member's "ideal" self-image includes a number of qualities and values approved by the organisation. From her analysis, she also concluded that commitment to the specific values of an organisation was distinct from commitment to the organisation as a whole. These factors studied by Gouldner lent support to one of the assumptions of this thesis, namely, that the form as well as the degree of commitment of the membership in a religious organisation is a distinguishing

feature of that community as a special kind of human service organisation.

Further insights into commitment in a voluntary organisation were found in the Gouldner study (1960). She examined the hypothesis that the higher an individual's rank in a group, the more nearly his or her activities conform to the norms of that group. Her data indicated that commitment to some organisational values may be distinct from participation, office holding and integration -- an issue that is explored in this study of a religious organisation. Her data suggested, further, that it was among the organisational "elite" that some values, generally taken for granted, were discussed and might become issues. If the formal leaders in the present study were seen as the organisational "elite", their role in the initiation of the change in the structure of governance needed to be explored.

A further insight into organisational commitment was gained from study of the writings of Dalton and Lawrence (1970:377-390) describing their attempt to build up a theory of motivation among members of an organisation. Their findings pointed to the difference between "motive" which the authors described as a relatively stable personality characteristic, and "motivation", which was a situationally influenced action tendency. In a Mercy community, a strong motive for commitment to the mission of the organisation is found in members taking a vow of service. In such a religious community, where all members are in the same situation, it could be expected that motivation of the total group (despite personality differences) would lead to the same kind of behaviour, that is, a mission of service. In the present research, this element of motivation was analysed to assist in understanding the characteristic of membership commitment.

Bradley and Wilkie (1974:65) claimed that an important reason for studying organisations was that they shape people's behaviour. They did this in two main ways. First, people are in some way persuaded to act as members of organisations. Second, by behaving as members of an organisation, people, in a general way, might begin to act differently from the way they would have acted if they had not joined that particular organisation. Further, Bradley and Wilkie (1974:71) asked why people obeyed other people in organisations. In a religious community, the answer to this question is clear. Each member takes a vow of obedience which is expressed through the free and voluntary acceptance of the obligations of the Constitutions of the particular community. The Constitutions of the Institute of Sisters of Mercy of Australia (1982:63) stated that:

> The exercise of the principles of participation, collegiality, subsidiarity in government help [Sisters] to live out [their] vow of obedience with greater responsibility and freedom.

From this statement, it would appear that every member in the community of the Sisters of Mercy had the opportunity to experience a greater sense of freedom in behaviour than might be expected from the fact that she formally took a vow of obedience. In this research, questions were directed to the Sisters' understanding of the vow of obedience.

Other lines of enquiry for this part of the study were suggested by the writings of Mechanic (1964:136-137) on sources of power of lower level participants in complex organisations. He found a clear correlation between the prestige of positions within organisations and the extent to which they offered access to information, persons, and resources. He also found that it was not unusual for lower-level participants to assume and wield considerable power and influence not associated with their formally defined positions within

these organisations. They had considerable personal power but no authority. This personal power did not necessarily result from unique personal characteristics, although these might be relevant, but resulted rather from particular aspects of the location of the members within their organisations. In this study, an investigation was made of the role of Sisters who had at some time held formal positions in the religious community, and who had later resumed ordinary membership in the group. In an organisation in which there is limited tenure in formal authority positions, this seemed to be a worthwhile avenue of investigation.

A further issue was the relatively unexplored area of the relationship between the departure from an organisation of a large number of the members (as was the case in the Mercy group in the 1960's and the early 1970's) and the cohesiveness of the remaining group and their ability to meet the needs of their clients. While a great deal of research has been carried out on small group cohesiveness from the extensive work in the 1950's (Allport, 1962; Cartwright and Harary, 1956; Festinger et al., 1950; Gross and Martin, 1952; Homans, 1950; Newcomb, 1953; Stogdill, 1950) to more recent writings (Merton, 1972; Shaw, 1976; Stark and Bainbridge, 1980), relatively little study has been undertaken of cohesiveness in a group as large as the Mercy community in Australia. A review of selected literature on cohesiveness indicated that analysis of this aspect of a group would offer some guidance in studying the degree of commitment of members. Champion (1975:110) defined "cohesiveness" as the tendency of group members to "stick together". He claimed that cohesiveness could be measured by means of the number of times group members use "we" in referring to their group activities and by the degree of willingness of group members to remain with the group. In Sisters' responses to

interviews and questionnaires, the researcher searched for this kind of evidence of cohesiveness.

Two researchers, Ebaugh (1977) and SanGiovanni (1978) showed more interest in the reasons for the departure of members from religious groups than in the reasons for remaining as members. Ebaugh (1977:125) stated that:

> . . . religious orders will need to refocus their goals away from service tasks and toward an emphasis upon creating a supportive community for members. There is indication in contemporary orders that such a change in emphasis is actually occurring. The goal of religious orders, therefore, becomes group centred rather than service oriented. What members do jobwise becomes far less important than their sharing together a supportive group life that meets the needs of the members.

The findings of research on American religious communities raised interesting questions for the study of the Australian Mercy community which has been identified as a human service organisation, albeit one of a speical kind. For example, if, as Ebaugh (1977) suggested, the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy were to refocus its goals away from "mission as service" to "support for its members", it would be very difficult to sustain identification of the community as a human service organisation.

At this point in the literature review, the questions on commitment which seemed to have the greatest potential for studying the research problem were the following:

1. To what extent has there been a development in the Sisters' understanding of the vows of poverty, chastity, obedience, and the service of the poor, sick, and ignorant?

2. What relationship do the Sisters see between commitment to the vows and life in community?

3. What do the Sisters perceive as the strongest motivation for their commitment to the mission of the religious group?

4. What networks of support are there for Sisters' continuing commitment to the organisation?

The focus on mission by the Mercy community and the commitment of its members suggested that leadership in this type of human service organisation would show distinctive characteristics. The researcher found support in the literature for classifying this leadership as "servant leadership" or "leadership as service". This characteristic is examined in the next section.

Servant Leadership

In presenting what they term as a selective review of the literature concerning leadership, House and Baetz (1977:343) claimed that because of the unique context in which leadership took place it was necessary to define it as a specific subset of social influence phenomena. A significant part of the unique context of the religious community is its relationship to the Roman Catholic Church; it could be expected, then, that insights into leadership in the Church would give direction to a study of leadership in religious communities.

Bradburn (1971:252-264) drew attention to a basic difference between the Church and secular organisations, namely, the spiritual basis of the goal definition and of the motivation and structuring of member participation. He asked the following question: Does the special characteristic of the Church and its relationship to the Divine present any special problems for analysis of leadership that would not be shared by other organisations? The answer to this question was of some significance for the present research. He asserted that:

> In secular organisations there usually exists a definable locus of ultimate responsibility which has legitimate authority for controlling the organisation . . . . The special nature of the Church, however, in grounding itself on its relationship to

> a supra-empirical reality, raises a special problem about the nature of legitimate authority and the degree to which it is transferable or otherwise subject to alteration to conform with changing human demands.

In religious and in secular organisations, a distinction can be made between "formal leaders" -- individuals who are assigned formal or legal authority to direct others -- and "emergent leaders" -- individuals who exert considerable influence over others in task groups for which there is no formally located authority. With both groups of individuals, the same variables emerge as defining characteristics, that is, the traits, behaviour, and impact of the individuals. Again, both formal and emergent leaders are defined in terms of two dimensions: the degree to which behaviour is intended to influence others and the degree to which such influence attempts are viewed as acceptable to the person who is the target of the influence attempt.

In religious communities, as in all other organisations, there are patterns of authority which specify functional inter-relations between formal leaders and those who are subordinates. Champion (1975:110) stated that all people performing the role of formal leaders had a common characteristic, that is, the exercise of power, to varying degrees, over the behaviours of lower-level participants in the organisation. Further, according to Hodgkinson (1978:91), power and authority merged in the concept of leadership. They also ceased to be abstractions in that they became personified and embodied. While leadership itself is an abstraction, leaders are persons, fleshy creatures. Because the person of the leader is of particular importance in an organisation, each of the formal leaders in the Mercy organisation was interviewed at some length, and, for the purposes of this research, their understanding of the process of change was carefully analysed.

Levenson (1964) and Champion (1975) indicated that enduring organisations must cope with administrative succession, that is, the degree of turnover among administrative heads. The replacement of an individual in a key office was potentially a significant event in the development of an organisation, and might be an occasion of stress for members. For religious communities, in which there is no career structure nor promotion ladder, stress for members should be considerably reduced. In the Sisters of Mercy, leadership positions are of limited tenure. New leaders are chosen at a General Chapter by delegates of the total membership of the community. When a leader has completed the designated term of office, she resumes ordinary membership of the community, so that at any one time, among the group, there may be a number of Sisters with formal leadership experience. In the present research, a study was made of the pattern of administrative succession and its impact on the exercise of leadership in the Mercy Order.

In the earlier discussion of the relationship between the Roman Catholic Church and an individual community, attention was given to the appointment of Major Superiors and councillors, that is, the formal leaders of a religious community. When a Sister is elected to a leadership position in the Mercy community, the criteria used for selection are those found in the Mercy Constitutions (1982:31):

> Christ's lesson of servant leadership (Jn 13:15) teaches us to look for ways of exercising authority and practising obedience, that liberate and strengthen each sister, and enable the total body to work more effectively for the Kingdom . . . . In the spirit of servant leadership our leaders are called forth by the whole faith community as also the members are called to faithfulness by their servant leaders. (Mk 10:41-45).

This concept of leadership stresses the relationship between the leader and the members of the religious community, a relationship

which is of a nature different from that found in secular organisations, but not unknown in the Church. After the Second Vatican Council, His Eminence Cardinal Antoniutti, Cardinal Prefect of the Sacred Congregation of Religious, was speaking in Canada to women and men religious who were leaders of their Congregations. Antoniutti (1967:7) gave them the following advice:

> In the Church of Christ, from the Pope to the lowest Superior in the hierarchical order, no command must ever be motivated by a desire to impose one's own will on others . . . they must look upon the exercise of authority as an apostolate which must be carried out in a spirit of kindness, understanding and love. Each religious comes to place his or her abilities and his or her work at the service of the community. The Superior has a duty to serve the community by coordinating the personal efforts of each for the common good.

Another aspect of exercising leadership is participation by members in decision-making. Bradburn (1971:258) claimed that:

> An important criterion of participatory leadership style is the breadth of the consultative network included in the process leading to the final decision, no matter who actually "makes" the final decision. When consultation is wide, the decision gets shaped by the quality of the inputs of the various interest groups or individuals involved in the consulting or advising process.

Maier (1970:364) also argued that participation should improve decision-making, because, through the participative process, subordinates' knowledge and expertise could be utilised. Further, when decisions required subordinates' acceptance for their implementation, participation increased such acceptance. Because subordinates had an opportunity to influence the decision-making process, their feelings were more likely to be expressed and respected. These insights gave direction to the analysis of leadership strategies for membership participation in the process of change in the Mercy community.

In recent years, the concept of servant leadership has been the subject of some discussion in the literature. Greenleaf (1977:3)

used the term explicitly in reference to leaders of many different kinds of organisations. He came to the notion of servant leadership after a deep involvement with colleges and universities during the period of campus turmoil in the late 1960's and 1970's when both authority and leadership in many institutions were being strongly challenged by institutional members. The following quotation identified the major ideas behind Greenleaf's notion of the concept (1977:10):

> A fresh critical look is being taken at the issues of power and authority, and people are beginning to learn, haltingly, to relate to one another in less coercive and more creatively supportive ways. A new moral principle is emerging which holds that the only authority deserving one's allegiance is that which is freely and knowingly granted by the led to the leader in response to the clearly evident servant stature of the leader.

As the servant leader makes sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served, the dynamic nature of the concept makes it an appropriate tool for studying the human service organisation, particularly the kind which is the subject of this study.

In discussing what she called "servant spirituality", Grant (1979:521-7) recalled that through the centuries the facet of service had been a fairly constant motif in the Christian experience. She emphasised the point that in our times there was a need to limit traditional outpourings of service to an extent that would allow people to identify their own needs and seek appropriate ways of meeting them. In trying to assess the "success" of this kind of leadership, Greenleaf (1977:13) suggested that the best test, and one most difficult to administer, was:

> Do those served grow as persons? Do they, "while being served", become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants? And, what is the effect on the least privileged in society; will they benefit, or, at least, not be further deprived?

Here, important questions are raised in regard to the analysis of the

focus of the mission and the delivery of services in the special kind of human service organisation which is the Mercy organisation.

The concept of servant leadership is becoming more popular in the literature. Sergiovanni (1981, 1981a) developed the notion in his work on quality leadership when he said that it is the symbolic aspects of leadership which are key, not leadership behaviour or style. He believed that, contrary to what we think we know about leadership, it is really

> . . . more shadow than substance, more inferential than factual, more intangible than tangible, more subjective than objective, more cultural than behavioural and, indeed, more akin to social meanings than social fact.

He summarised his thoughts on leadership of the "quality" kind by saying that, perhaps, one way to compare the more instrumental and behavioural aspects of leadership with the symbolic was to differentiate between leadership needed to maintain an acceptable level of competence and leadership associated with going beyond routine competence to excellence. Sergiovanni (1981:4) spoke of sensitive leaders who had a nose for detecting emerging changes in organisations. The changes come typically from the members, are incremental as opposed to parts of grand schemes, and represent either attempts of members to maintain and extend their culture or attempts to modify this culture in response to external necessities. These ideas helped guide the analysis of the role of the leaders in the change process in this study.

Greeley (1971:266) gave a related viewpoint on leadership when he argued that the sort of leadership implied by the Vatican Council documents was a leadership which was struggling to emerge not only in the Church but in most large human organisations, a leadership that was also friendship, that was demanded both by Christian theology and by the functional needs of modern society. While Greeley shared the

view of leadership described earlier, he also analysed in some detail the functions of leadership as he saw them in the Church. Such leadership was symbolic in that the leader was seen as the personification of the organisation's strivings; was ideological in that the leader asked the right questions and pointed out the relationships between the group's values and the values and traditions which constitute the ideology of the organisation; was interpersonal in that he or she drew forth the talents of all the members of the group, and organisational, in that he or she would either do the administration himself or herself, or see that it was done. All of these remarks raised further questions (which will be dealt with later) for the investigation of the process of change leading to the adoption of the new structure of governance of the religious organisation.

In saying that leadership was a form of friendship, Greeley (1971) was speaking of the necessity for a certain amount of trust, confidence, respect and sensitivity, as well as affection, in the relationship. He believed that one of the reasons that this kind of leadership was emerging so slowly in modern corporate organisations was precisely that those who needed strong, domineering, inflexible and authoritarian leaders were not willing to permit it to emerge despite all their claims to the contrary. To what extent this may be true of an organisation which is composed entirely of women has not so far been the subject of serious research.

Gould (1980:237) deplored the fact that the role of women as organisational participants appeared infrequently in the literature. She made two points of some significance. First, she claimed that regrettably absent were descriptive case studies and interpretative analyses of the roles women played as creators and innovators in organisations. Second, she pointed out that pre-existing

models of organisations were uncritically and inappropriately used to explain the status of women in these complex structures because they failed to identify as important the varied dimensions of women's lives and experiences.

In this research, the role of the creator or the Foundress of the religious organisation, Catherine McAuley, was taken into account as part of the context of the study. Her ideas about the focus of mission of the Mercy group and the way in which leadership should be exercised within the religious community served as background to the research. In the research, too, cognizance was taken of the fact that all members are of equal status in the religious community, and that Sisters hold formal leadership positions for a limited time only. The issue of "status" was not addressed by the researcher, although the varied dimensions of the Sisters' lives and experiences, tapped through questions about their perceptions, were an important source of data for the research.

From insights gained from the review of relevant literature, the following questions on leadership in religious organisations were generated:

1. How did the Sisters describe leadership in their group?

2. What changes in leadership style had been perceived in the different Mercy groups?

3. To what extent had "servant" leadership been personally experienced by members of the Mercy congregation?

4. What did Sisters see as the type of leadership likely to be exercised in the future?

5. What factors did Sisters perceive as most significant at times of change in formal leadership?

From the analysis of the history of the Mercy Order, and as a result of the review of relevant literature, focus on mission, commitment of membership, and servant leadership were identified as three organisational characteristics which seemed to be of particular importance in understanding the Mercy community as a special kind of human service organisation. A study of these characteristics, however, did not explain fully how the Mercy organisation differed from other types of human service organisations. A fourth characteristic, which seemed to be part of the first three, and yet more pervasive than they were, deserved separate consideration. In the literature, this characteristic was identified as "ethos", or "culture". Writings about this concept contributed a great deal to a deeper understanding of the special character of the Mercy community as a human service organisation.

Ethos of the Mercy Community

In an introduction to a recent series of papers on culture, Jelinek et al. (1983:331) noted that culture per se was not a new idea, as it was found in anthropology and even in organisation studies through a related notion "organisation climate". They concluded, however, by saying that:

> . . . there is something new here: this time around researchers seem to be striving for some way to address the interactive, ongoing, recreative aspects of organisations beyond the merely rational or economic.

Barley (1983:393-394) added that culture appeared to have something to do with the way members of a group organised their experience. In analysing the way in which experience is organised, he asked three questions: "Of what is culture composed? How are its parts structured? How does it work?" These questions suggested one way of studying the ethos or culture of the Mercy organisation.

Earlier writers support the opinions expressed by Jelinek et al. (1983) and Barley (1983). For example, Pettigrew (1979:579-580) defined culture as

> the system of publicly and collectively accepted meanings operating for a given group at a given time. This system of terms, forms, categories, and images interprets a people's own situation to themselves.

For purposes of organisational analysis, Pettigrew believed that a potentially fruitful approach was to regard culture as the source of a family of concepts rather than as a unitary concept. He had in mind symbol, language, ideology, belief, ritual and myth. Handy (1976:176) supported him in this and argued that:

> . . . anyone who has spent time with any variety of organisations . . . will have been struck by the different atmospheres, the different ways of doing things, the differing levels of energy, of individual freedom, of kinds of personality . . . . They have differing cultures - sets of values and norms and beliefs - reflected in different structures and systems. And the cultures are affected by the events of the past and by the climate of the present.

Culture often takes visible form in the buildings and other material possessions of the organisation. The kind of people the organisation employs, their career aspirations, their status in society, degree of mobility, level of education, will all be reflections of the culture. Further, Handy asserted that in organisations there were deep-set beliefs about the way work should be organised, the way authority should be exercised, people rewarded, and people controlled. In the Mercy community, there are traditional ways of going about each of these so that a "Mercy" culture may be distinguished in governance, mission, leadership style and membership.

Eldridge and Crombie (1974:89) held a similar view of organisational ethos or culture, which they described as the unique configuration of norms, values, beliefs, and ways of behaving that characterised the manner in which groups and individuals in an organisation combined

to get things done. For Eldridge and Crombie (1974:88), while the uniqueness of individuals was expressed in their personality, the individuality of organisations might be expressed in terms of their differing cultures. They made a further point which was relevant to the development of the research problem. They asserted that the distinctiveness of a particular organisation was intimately bound up with its history and the character-building effects of past decisions and past leaders. They saw it manifested in the folkways, mores, and the ideology to which members deferred. In particular, they held firmly to the belief that individuality or cultural distinctiveness of an organisation was attained through the more or less constant exercise of choice. Eldridge and Crombie (89-91) expressed this quite forcefully:

> Even organisations with identical missions tend to devolve upon quite unique solutions to the problems of acquiring, combining, and making use of their resources . . . . The character of organisational choice is one of the major manifestations of organisational culture.

In this study, an important choice made by the community was the adoption of a new structure of governance. The process of change leading to this choice was the particular focus of research.

In this regard, the writings of most significance for this study were those by Burton Clark (1971:499) who spoke explicitly of the relationship between ideational elements and governance:

> My premise is that there are ideational elements in complex organisations that do not lie outside of matters of governance but rather exist as basic sentiments that help determine the structures of governance and how they work. In this approach, problems of governance are seen to vary with the quality of institutional self-conception. The key mediating elements in this relationship are loyalty and trust. In the causal flow, the organisation self-conception heavily determines the degree of loyalty and trust, which in turn affects in a major way the problems and forms of governance.

Clark (1972:183) believed that the genesis and persistence of loyalty was a key organisational and analytical problem. Enduring loyalty in any organisation may be expected to follow from a collective belief by participants that their organisation was distinctive. In a religious organisation to which members made a voluntary commitment for life and about which there was a credible story of uncommon effort and achievement, the level of loyalty should be both high and persistent. This line of thought is relevant to the investigation of the process of change leading to the adoption of the new structure of governance in the Mercy Order in that a high degree of loyalty and trust among members of the religious organisation would be expected to facilitate that adoption.

The elements of loyalty and trust also ease social bonding in the organisation. In speaking of other dimensions of social bonding in complex organisations, Clark emphasised the normative dimension, consisting of shared beliefs, attitudes, and values, that is, one facet of the organisational ethos or culture. He made much of this dimension which he termed the "organisational saga". Clark (1972:178) defined the term in the following words:

> An organisational saga is a collective understanding of a unique accomplishment based on historical exploits of a formal organisation, offering strong normative bonds within and outside the organisation. Believers give loyalty to the organisation and take pride and identity from it. A saga begins as a strong purpose by a man or woman (or a small group) with a mission, and is fulfilled as it is embodied in organisational practices and the values of dominant cadres, usually taking decades to develop.

In framing questions to ask about the religious organisation, the researcher found that Clark's definition provided valuable insights into one way in which shared beliefs, attitudes, and values of the Mercy Sisters contributed to the development of the ethos of the Mercy community.

Jönsson and Lundin (1977:157) developed one aspect of the saga as they explored the value of myths and wishful thinking as management tools. They asked two questions: What happens when the planner's imagination fails, when the planner only knows that something is wrong and that something else has to be done? What should the planner do when he or she realises that the assumptions on which present plans are based simply prove to be inappropriate? While discussing the role of crises in the policy formation processes of organisations, the authors advanced a tentative theory on the role of myths. They suggested that it appeared useful to think about organisational behaviour, over time, in terms of a wave pattern of enthusiasm -- each wave connected with a particular myth.

One conclusion drawn from their studies was that things happen in crisis situations that give new insights into change and development mechanisms in organisations. Tidal waves of enthusiasm and depression occurred around leading ideas or myths about what is essential for the organisation in its present situation (see Figure 2). In each phase of this cyclical process some elements of expertise or some procedures seemed to be retained, whereby the organisation, over time, formed its identity and historical heritage. In its focus on the crisis periods, this approach showed a strong resemblance to the model of change proposed by Greiner (1972:37-46) and discussed earlier in Chapter 2.

Jönsson and Lundin (1977) concluded their study of myths and wishful thinking as management tools by saying that the whole belief system of organisational members was not totally shattered by crisis. Neither was the formal and informal systems. Built up during the reign of the old myths, some were kept and sank like sediments to the bottom of the organisation. Therefore, a historical perspective was crucial

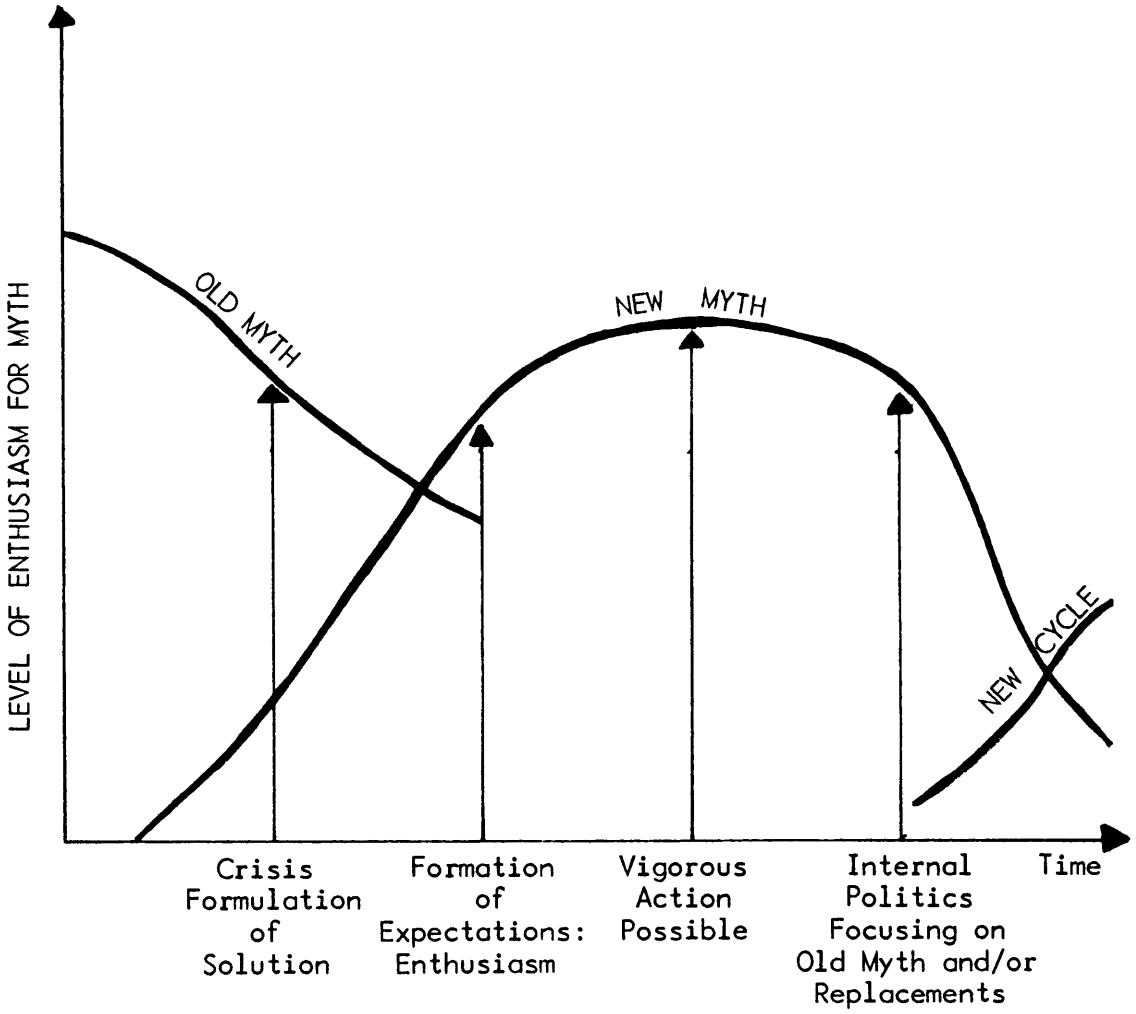

Figure 2

Typical Organisational Wave Pattern
of the Development of Myths
(Jönnson and Lundin,
1977:161)

for those seeking to understand the development of organisation. While these authors were thinking specifically of business organisations, their writings offered a rich source of insights to an understanding of the Mercy community. For example, in the process of change leading to the adoption of the new structure of governance for the Mercy community, the Mercy Assembly in 1977 was an occasion when old myths about Mercy values were examined, and enthusiasm for the future was

generated.

Dupré (1972:243-245), too, showed that, in attempting to understand the values of a religious organisation, particular cognizance needed to be given to the myths of the group. In fact, he showed that the myth -- or more properly, myth ritual -- brought order, meaning and structure to the world of the religious symbol. He suggested that the myth introduced a new saga of consciousness: it made reflective what before was only "lived". This first and most basic awareness of inner life still participates so much in the lived reality that its meaning must be felt rather than rationally understood. Although its forms are fully conscious, the form-giving roots are buried deep in subconscious soil. This concept of myth provoked questions concerning the matter of commitment of members to particular forms of service as well as to a particular form of governance in the Mercy community.

Some of the questions asked in the course of the research in order to determine the "sagas" of the Sisters of Mercy included the following: How did the Sisters build up a "Mercy" culture as a source of a family of concepts, such as symbol, language, ideology, belief, ritual and myth? What forms did normative bonds within and without the organisation take? In what ways did the Sisters give loyalty to the Mercy community? To what extent did the Sisters take pride and identity from the religious organisation? How was the purpose of the Foundress embodied in contemporary organisational practices?

A review of selected literature on organisational ethos suggested that the Mercy community could be expected to have an ethos which was different from that of other human service organisations. During its life of one hundred and fifty years, sets of values and

beliefs, myths, and norms which developed were reflected in the particular structure and character of the Mercy community. Choice of ethos or culture as an organisational characteristic promised to provide a way of studying the religious organisation that could lead to new insights about the Mercy community.

The preceding review of literature was designed to expand upon the context of the study and to help define further the research problem. The religious community in this study is a special kind of human service organisation with distinctive characteristics. It is now argued that a review of selected research on change helps to design a conceptual framework, the use of which is expected to assist in understanding how change occurred in the religious organisation, that is, in the community of the Sisters of Mercy.

FORMULATION OF CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

At this stage in the study, the researcher decided that there was something to be gained by formulating a model or a conceptual framework to guide the research. According to Phillips (1966:58-59), researchers often used models to deal with comprehensive systems as one way of encouraging the development of ideas for systematising the relationships among different aspects of phenomena. In this study, the researcher had an image of the organisational phenomena she wished to investigate, that is, the Mercy Order. She knew that her way of selecting certain facts and searching for order among them was guided, as Riley (1963:5) asserted, by prior notions about the organisational phenomena under study. She decided that the formulation of a conceptual framework would act as a guide in analysing the nature of the religious organisation and the process of change.

In formulating the conceptual framework for this research, a review of relevant literature, including Bennis et al. (1976),

Havelock (1979), and Lippitt et al. (1958), revealed a number of theories, propositions, models, and frameworks on the introduction of change into different kinds of organisations. The model proposed by Greiner (1972:40) offered insights into a way of studying historical development in a religious organisation and was useful as a guide in describing the context of the research problem. The focus of the study corresponded to the fourth phase of Greiner's (1972) model. Greiner's analysis of this phase, however, did not give sufficient detail to make it a productive approach for the present research. A model (Figure 3) proposed by Delbecq (1978:11) fitted in at this point. In his writings, Delbecq (1978:309-339) described an approach to the "politicking" of change through human service organisations, which helped explain issues related to impetus for change and provided process guidelines for the adoption of a particular change. Neither model was sufficient as a framework for analysis of the present research but, taken in conjunction, the models complemented one another.

With all models employed for research, the best test of their effectiveness, according to Dill and Friedman (1979:414) was their capacity for explaining the problem under investigation. Delbecq's approach to change is used here because it contributed maximally to an illumination of issues which permeated this particular work. (In the following paragraphs all page references will refer to Delbecq, 1978.)

Delbecq (p.310) suggested ways in which "on a temporary, situation-specific basis, structures and processes might be introduced to increase innovation in a human service organisation". His reflections on the introduction of change are presented in answer to questions he was often asked about process diagnostics and guidelines

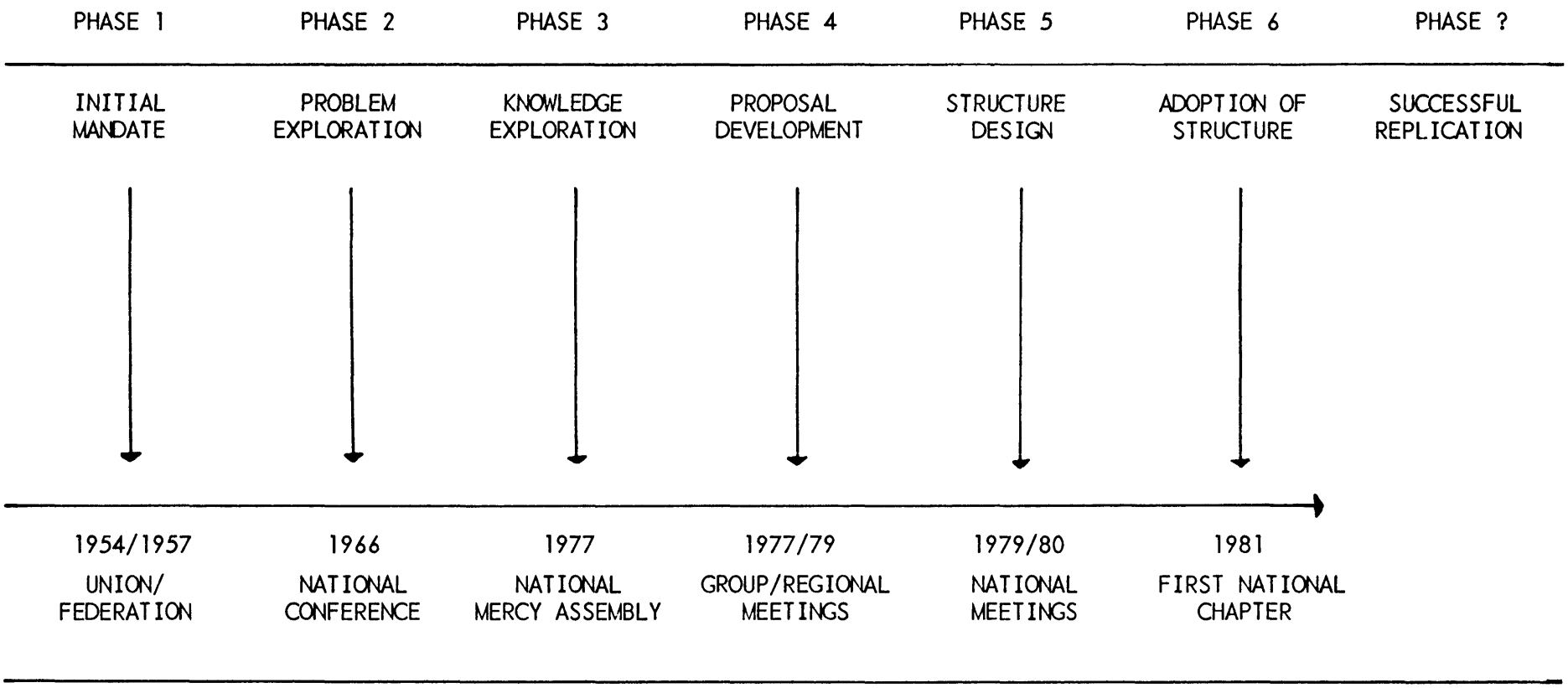

Figure 3

Phases in the Process of Introducing a Change in Structure in Governance in the Sisters of Mercy in Australia (Adapted from Delbecq, 1978)

which were sound both theoretically and practically. Delbecq did not say whether he was drawing conclusions from the experience of working with a number of human service organisations; he was, however, writing for administrators and others who wished to see change introduced into such organisations.

Several issues he raised gave valuable insights for this research. First, he pointed to complex and practical issues involved in planning for change. Second, he was concerned about large-scale programme planning change for human service organisations. Third, he drew attention to the role of elites, that is, those who actively participated in and influenced decisions, in this case, in bringing about change. Finally, the concept of phases through which the change process might be seen to develop offered an appropriate tool of analysis for the present research project.

The Delbecq (1978) approach drew attention to some very practical and basic concerns, particularly about the way a study might be conducted. He presented a number of variables that increased the complexity of planning for innovation, and demonstrated that increased complexity with respect to these variables would make the introduction of change more difficult. These variables included the number of groups affected, the degree of value agreement among groups, the impact of change on resource allocation, and technical difficulty, that is, the extent to which the change was of variance with existing structures or ways of doing things so that new structures or retraining was required. In the present research, to the extent that the new structure of governance was at variance with existing structures, the change process became complex.

While Delbecq argued that many people might see his approach as conventional wisdom, he believed that the research so far carried out suggested considerable differences between the ways in which planners showed sensitivity to complexities in organisations and made strategic choices under varying conditions. Delbecq's findings suggested questions about membership and leadership which could well be significant to the process of change in the religious organisation under discussion.

Delbecq (p.328) spoke of the need for cooperation and extensive funding when change was aimed at a number of groups -- an important consideration for this study as many findings in the change literature had come from studies of individual small groups or sections of organisations. In this research, some thought had to be given to the fact that the Mercy Order membership of more than three thousand was scattered throughout Australia and Papua New Guinea. The distribution of the membership was uneven, with heavy concentration in certain areas and with many small groups both in urban and country areas.

Delbecq (p.313) claimed that most members of human service organisations usually ascribed to a "high participation" ethic by virtue of the fact that their work was carried out in close personal relationships with other members and with their clients. For this reason, members expected to have a significant role in decision-making, particularly about change. As a result, decision-making bodies might become large and unwieldy. The researcher, using these ideas proposed by Delbecq, developed the following question about the new structure of governance and its influence on decision-making for the mission of the Mercy Order: In the

future, what impact do you expect the new structure will have on the mission (a) of your own Mercy group, and (b) of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy?

Although Delbecq's terminology was specifically suited to the introduction of a change of programming in human service organisations, the phases he suggested for the process of change were found to be appropriate for the study of the Mercy Order as a religious organisation.

For each of the seven phases, Delbecq presented detailed and well-documented support from a variety of research sources from which were developed questions to be asked during the investigation of the change in the structure of governance in the Mercy Order.

Phases in the Process of Change

Delbecq's purpose in presenting a planning process model (p.314) was "to review typical process phases compatible with the many process models available in the innovation literature". His review suggested important role and structural implications for the Mercy Order. Each phase of Delbecq's process is now cast in terms of its application to the present research problem.

Phase 1. Initial mandate resulting in establishment of Union (1954) and Federation (1957).

In Phase 1 of Delbecq's model, those wishing to promote a specific change needed to secure a mandate with organisational elites (in this research, the formal leaders) about the purpose of the change and the processes to be followed in carrying out the change. This being the case, early dialogue with elites was made prior to any requests for support. This phase in the study involved analysis of forces operating in the

initial mandate from which developed the Union (1954) and Federation (1957) structures. One outcome of this phase of the change process was a shared understanding in the total organisation with respect to values and timeliness of the change under consideration, identification of groups involved in designing the change, the planning steps and subprocesses, the form, the frequency, and timing of feedback regarding planning for change, and the level of resources to be devoted to planning the change. According to Delbecq (p.317), this shared understanding by members of the organisation about the complex factors just listed should lead to a shared diagnosis by the members as to how the factors should be treated.

A second outcome incorporated into the mandate should be agreement among members of the organisation concerning phases of the planning process. Finally, the change effort should begin with the appointment of a coordinating committee composed of elite representatives to review key decisions at interim points prior to requesting formal approval of the proposal. In research on the process of change in the Mercy community, this first phase in the Delbecq model offered a useful approach to find out who were the advocates of a change in structure, and how agreement was reached about the purpose of the change in structure and the processes that could be followed to achieve this change.

Phase 2. Problem exploration resulting in formation of National Mercy Conference (1966). In the second phase of Delbecq's model, the nature of the clients' or users' needs was assessed as a basis for improving the way in which clients were served. The purpose of this step was to bring to all members of the organisation the reality of clients' satisfaction or dissatis-

faction with the service they were being offered. In this study, the formation of the National Mercy Conference (1966) corresponded to this second phase. The Conference, with a biennial meeting of the leaders of each Mercy group, marked the point at which formal leaders of the Mercy community agreed that change in structure of governance was an important issue in relation to the way in which clients were served. In the Delbecq model, problem exploration was aimed at consciousness raising, dialogue, and education of the members of the human service organisation, avenues which were investigated in this research.

Phase 3. Knowledge exploration leading to the National Mercy Assembly (1977). In this phase, Delbecq (p.320-321) pointed out that change did not follow automatically from problem understanding, and that search for solutions should first be made in an orderly fashion from sources outside the organisation. By so doing, members of the organisation would benefit from the expertise of staff in other organisations; they would find that sharing experience with others was less costly than engaging in trial and error learning; and that new ideas from others would challenge their own ways of thinking. The National Mercy Assembly (1977), which was attended by representatives from every Mercy group in Australia, as well as from other Church groups and community organisations, was the stage at which the total Mercy community was seeking a process to help members arrive at a new structure of governance.

The Delbecq model provided insights for the researcher into the value of understanding multidisciplinary perspectives and of talking to people in organisations who had tried related changes in

other settings.

Phase 4. Proposal development through group and regional meetings (1977-1979). According to Delbecq (p.321), the development of a proposal to adopt a change in an organisation should proceed through two stages: a preliminary informal review of the concepts and approach to change as a basis for learning and dialogue; and only later, the development of a formal proposal about change that was the basis for the "decision to adopt". In the Mercy community, the proposal to adopt a new structure of governance proceeded through the two stages just outlined. In group and regional meetings, all members of the religious group had the opportunity to study a draft document of the new structure of governance and to have their suggestions incorporated into a further draft. As with the Delbecq model (p.323):

> . . . the outcome of the proposal review process [was expected to be] agreement concerning the conditions that must be met to obtain a formal adoption decision, the level of resources needed and available, agreements among those who must cooperate with implementation, and a shared sense of excitement about the forthcoming formal proposal.

Phase 5. Design of structure of governance formulated at National Meetings (1979-80) and in Rome. It was only at this point, Delbecq (p.323) claimed, that the advocates of change should proceed to write the formal proposal for the introduction of the change into the organisation. At this stage, in the change in Mercy governance, the draft of the new structure of governance was drawn up. The first steps of the design were presented at a National Mercy Meeting in Gunnedah (1979); the next draft of the structure was presented at Ryde (1979), and a further draft was worked on with members of the Sacred Congregation in Rome (1980). By that time, the

design of the structure was ready to present to the members of the Mercy Order in Australia.

Phase 6. Adoption of new structure of governance at First National Mercy Chapter (1981). In Phase 5 (p.323), Delbecq discussed the writing of the formal proposal for change. In Phase 6 (p.324), he discussed strategies related to the implementation of a particular change. He did not, however, write about the way in which such a change would be formally adopted by the members of the organisation. In the light of the relationship between any religious community and the Roman Catholic Church, the processes leading to the formal adoption of the new structure of governance were of particular significance for the Mercy community, and required careful analysis by the researcher. For this reason, Phase 6 in the process of change leading to the new structure of governance for the Sisters was identified as the stage at which the decision to adopt the change was formally taken.

Phase 7. Successful replication of the establishment of the structure of governance. The final phase in the Delbecq model of the process of change was the transfer and diffusion of a particular change. In this research, the question of the successful replication of the new structure of governance by other religious communities was raised as a possible final phase in the process of the introduction of change in the Mercy Order.

It was argued, then, that each phase in the Delbecq model (cf. Figure 3) might be accepted as an appropriate framework for analysis of a corresponding stage in the process of change in the Mercy Order.

Strategies for Introducing Change

While Delbecq provided a defensible framework by which to analyse each phase in the process of change leading to a new structure of governance for the Mercy community, other writers also had something to offer by way of insights on aspects of the introduction of change in the present research problem.

From the extensive literature on change, the writings, selected by the researcher as most apposite to study of the research problem, referred to

1. strategies for effecting changes in the ways the members of an organisation think and act;

2. ways of facilitating the process of change when several groups are involved;

3. management of the process of change through the timing of events and meetings; and

4. clarification of the value component of decisions and judgements.

The research findings in the literature on normative-re-educative strategies of change discussed by Bennis et al. (1976:31-39) offered insights for dealing effectively with the human aspects of change in the present research. The basis of these strategies was that people, at the personal level, were guided by internalised meanings, habits, and values, and, at the socio-cultural level, by alterations in normative structures and in institutionalised roles and relationships, as well as in cognitive and perceptual orientations. In summary, these strategies related to changing people's attitudes, values, skills, and significant relationships. As old patterns changed and people developed commitments to new ones, changes occurred also in practice or action. Margulies and Wallace

(1973:2) also believed that, in planning change, modern organisations must take note of the fact that any specific change involved a demand on the members of the organisation, because:

> . . . in the final analysis, all organisational change efforts, regardless of initial focus, must take account of the fact that people are being called upon to do things differently. In this sense, behaviour change is involved in all organiszational change efforts.

Bennis et al. (1976) claimed that there were common elements among variants within the family of normative-re-educative approaches to effecting change. Each of the following elements provided insights for a line of enquiry for the present research. First, each person must be involved in working out programmes of change and improvement for himself or herself. Second, if the problem was in the attitudes, values, norms and external and internal relationships of the members of the organisation, alteration or re-education of these, rather than more adequate information, might be a condition of its solution. Third, those members of the organisation seeing the need for change, or responsible for the management of change, must learn to intervene mutually and collaboratively along with a particular member into efforts to define and solve the member's problem. Fourth, unconscious elements which impeded problem solution must be brought into consciousness and publicly examined and reconstructed. Fifth, methods and concepts of the behavioural sciences were seen by researchers as resources to be used selectively, relevantly, and appropriately in dealing with problems.

Other writers had something to suggest about deciding upon ways of facilitating the process of change when several groups were involved. The following approaches were identified by the researcher as offering tentative guidelines for studying groups and change in the Mercy Order.

In making a plea for study of the "creation of settings", Sarason (1976:ix) defined the phrase by saying that it referred to "any instance when two or more people come together in new and sustained relationships to achieve certain goals". Sarason (p.31) claimed that:

> . . . the decision to create a new and independent setting usually reflects two considerations: the opinion that the existing settings are inadequate for one or another reason and, independent of this, the awareness that the conflicts that emerged in the process of arriving at a decision were of such strength and quality as to make a new and independent setting desirable.

Moreover, Sarason (p.30) noted that, when a new setting arose from and was added to an existing organisation of settings, it was expected that the new settings would perform better the functions previously performed by other parts of the organisation. This expectation was not ordinarily shared by the people from whom the functions have been taken. For each phase of the process of change leading to the adoption of the new structure of governance (in Sarason's terms, the creation of a new setting), the researcher tried to discover:

1. what problems caused pressure to create a new type of setting;

2. whether the felt need for the setting as well as the decision to create it was that of a single individual (who was the leader, the organiser, and the mover) or a group of people;

3. what guiding idea lent distinctiveness to the proposed setting and was considered to be better than ideas behind existing settings;

4. whether the competition between the new and existing settings was viewed less in terms of limited resources than in the realm of ideas; and

5. how high the chances of success for the new setting may have been given the legal relationship between the Mercy organisation and

the Roman Catholic Church.

These insights, gained from Sarason's writings (1976:32-33), strengthened the researcher's conviction that each phase of the process of change should receive careful investigation to discover its contribution towards the decision to adopt the new structure of governance for the Mercy Order.

Given the identification of the Mercy community as a special type of human service organisation, attention was also directed to areas of literature which documented the importance of network intervention (Sarason et al., 1977) and resource exchange (Sarason and Lorentz, 1979) for the improvement of services to clients in human service organisations. The network studies showed that helping, as it occurred in the "real world", typically involved many individuals from diverse settings. Sarason et al. (1977:170) reported on "intervention in natural networks", that is, networks of natural relationships in which individuals seeking non-professional care find it without direct professional involvement. For intervention strategies to be developed, there is a need for integrated networks of human service organisations. Professional care workers, then, locate key helpers in natural networks and establish a relationship with them for the purpose of helping to increase the numbers of people served and the quality of the service. The researcher used the concept of network intervention to guide her investigation of the use of personnel and physical resources by various Mercy groups during the process of change.

Sarason and Lorentz (1979:17) also stressed that human resources were not limitless, and that they might no longer be able to be defined in very narrow ways. In the human services sector, for example, many people were not receiving the quantity and the quality of services

public policy said they should receive; additional money was needed to hire more personnel; and a major obstacle to providing more services was inefficient and uncoordinated modes of "delivering". In the present research, insights from Sarason's writings provoked analysis of change as it applies to the human resources of the Mercy organisation. A study was made of new ways of coordinating Mercy services, of cooperating between different Mercy groups, and of enlarging the horizons, experience, and skills of the Sisters.

Another approach to facilitating the process of change when a number of groups was involved was proposed by Weick (1976:1-19) in his writings on the concept of "loose coupling". He argued that, by "loose coupling", he intended to convey the image that coupled events, in one or more organisations, were responsive to each other, but that each event also preserved its own identity and some evidence of its physical or logical separateness. In this research on the Mercy organisation, the concept of loose coupling served as a sensitising device for the researcher, by alerting her to notice and question things that had previously been taken for granted. For example, as Weick (1976:3) pointed out:

> . . . it is conceivable that preoccupation with rationalised, tidy, efficient, coordinated structures has blinded many practitioners as well as researchers to some of the attractive and less tightly related clusters of events.

The concept of loose coupling was a reminder to the researcher that many parts of the Mercy organisation might prove intractable to analysis through rational assumptions, and that she should pursue the question: What <u>does</u> hold the Mercy organisation together?

Each phase of the process of change towards adoption of the new structure of governance by the Mercy Order was marked by an event or a meeting recognised as significant by members of the Mercy community. These events and meetings corresponded to what Beckhardt

(1970:270) termed "critical incidents and interventions" in the process of change. Beckhardt opened up a very wide range of questions to be asked of the members of the religious organisation about the ways Mercy groups and the whole Mercy community went about the introduction of the new structure of governance. He pointed out that one of the continuing problems facing the top management in times of major change was the difficulty in knowing how to assess accurately the state of the organisation. Questions which might be asked by members of a management team included the following: How are people reacting to the change? How committed are subordinate managers to the new conditions? Where are the most pressing organisation problems? Beckhardt's response to such questions was the activity which he called the "confrontation meeting", designed to include the entire management of a large system in a joint action-planning programme. The approach used in this activity shed light on the National Mercy Meeting held at Gunnedah in 1979. The formal leaders of each Mercy group came together to find ways of dealing with the problems which the members of their communities could see arising from the adoption of the new structure of governance.

Warwick and Kelman (1976:470) proposed that the

> concept of social intervention seems more helpful in considering the ethics of social change than the concept of planned change, which tends to exclude from ethical review a host of activities with serious personal, social, and political implications.

Although they defined social intervention as "any act, planned or unplanned, that alters the characteristics of another individual or the pattern of relationships between individuals", Warwick and Kelman (1976:471) focused on deliberate interventions, as they claimed that a heightened awareness of the consequences of social intervention was at the heart of ethical responsibility and concern. They drew

attention to four aspects of any social intervention that raised major ethical issues: the choice of goals to which the change effort was directed; the definition of the target of change; the choice of means used to implement the intervention; and the assessment of the consequences of the intervention.

For each of these aspects, the ethical issues that arose might involve conflicting values, that is, questions about the values to be maximised at the expense of other values. In a religious organisation, issues of values and value judgements are of paramount concern. At each stage in this study, the researcher asked questions about the values which the Sisters of Mercy held in relation to the focus on mission, the commitment of the members, servant leadership, and the ethos of the community. Responses to these questions were of considerable help in arriving at informed statements about value judgements made during the process of change leading to the adoption of the new structure of governance.

The review of literature discussed in this chapter provided support for the approach to the analysis of the process of change in the Mercy Order by means of the conceptual framework shown in Figure 4.

The whole model shows the Mercy Order within the context of the Roman Catholic Church and the wider community. For the purposes of the study, the researcher referred only to those aspects of the context, such as the influence of the Sacred Congregation for Religious upon the Sisters' choice of a new structure of governance, which she believed had an immediate impact upon the study.

The framework also shows that the focus of the research was on four selected organisational characteristics and their relationship to the process of change leading to a new structure of governance for the Sisters of Mercy in 1981. For the period of time between the

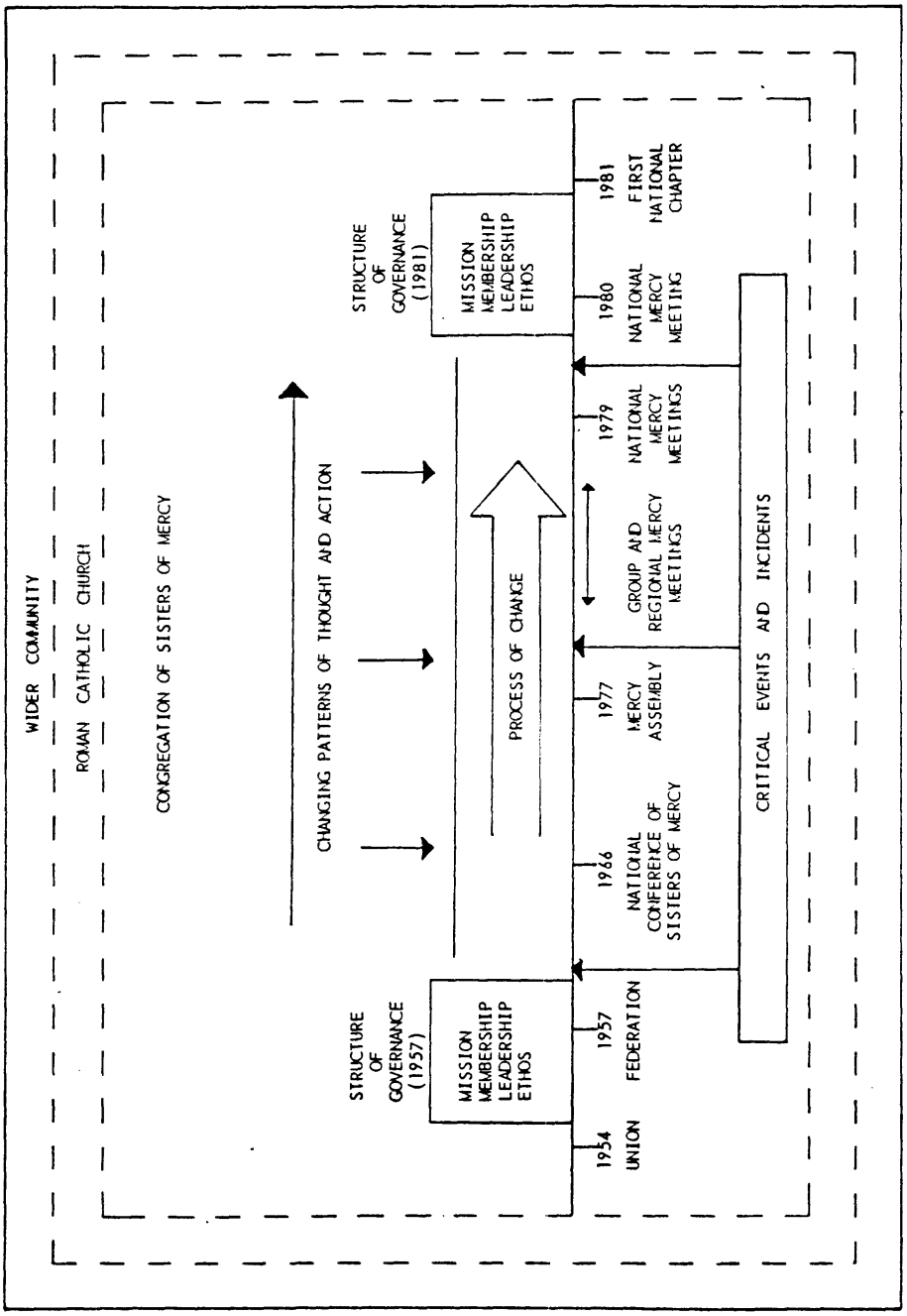

Figure 4

Conceptual Framework for Study of Organisational Characteristics and their Relationship to the Process of Change Leading to a New Structure of Governance in the Sisters of Mercy (Australia), 1981

establishment of the Federation in 1957 and the adoption of the new structure of governance in 1981, the researcher questioned the Sisters about their perceptions of the four organisational characteristics and the process of change.

To complete the framework as a guide for analysis of the research problem, the researcher included the critical events and incidents which occurred during the process of change leading to the adoption of the new structure of governance.

Although the researcher believed that she was justified in adopting this conceptual framework as an appropriate guide for the analysis of the research problem, she recognised the limitations inherent in any such framework, and took notice of the caution given by Daft (1980:626):

> A conceptual model is only a crude, inadequate description of organisations, but the choice of variables and expected relationships in the model reveal the investigator's assumptions (often implicit) about organisations. An investigator may view the organisation as a geographical territory, with static elements to be located and charted and mapped, or as a flowing, dynamic, unpredictable cluster of human interactions that have to be experienced first hand.

In formulating the conceptual framework for this study, the researcher took account of the identity of the Mercy community as a special type of human service organisation which, as a member, she had experienced at first hand. She viewed the organisation more as a cluster of human interactions than as a static identity. This view gave a particular direction to the formulation of the conceptual framework, namely, a focus on selected organisational characteristics and their relationship to a process of change leading to a new structure of governance for the Mercy community.

After completion of the review of literature and formulation of the conceptual framework to guide the research, an account is

given, in the next chapter, of the research plan and methodology selected as most appropriate for investigation of the research problem.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH PLAN AND METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The preceding chapter focused attention on a review of literature relevant to the research problem, that is, an investigation of the relationship between selected organisational characteristics and the change process which led to the adoption of a new structure of governance for the Sisters of Mercy (Australia) in 1981. The researcher gained insights from this review which helped to define the research problem still further and to generate the following subproblems.

1. What did the Sisters of Mercy perceive as the distinctive characteristics of their organisation?

2. What was the change process that led to the adoption of the new structure of governance for the Sisters of Mercy (Australia) in 1981?

3. What was the relationship between the distinctive organisational characteristics and the process of change which led to the new structure of governance?

In classifying the religious community as a special kind of human service organisation, four characteristics were seen as crucial to understanding the organisation. In the last chapter, it was argued that the focus of the Mercy community is on mission, the members demonstrate a high level of commitment to the community and to its mission, leadership has a marked "servant quality", and the ethos or culture of the community is unique to the Mercy Order. Moreover, from the literature on change, insights were gained into strategies

for affecting the ways in which members of an organisation think and act; into ways of facilitating the process of change when several groups are involved; into management of the process of change through the timing of events and meetings; and into clarification of the value component of decisions and judgements. Finally, as a result of the literature review, a conceptual framework was formulated to guide the research.

The next task in this research was to address questions of research plan and methodology. This chapter is divided into four sections. In the first section, the research plan for the project is described. The second section deals with selection of the research methodology. The third section outlines the methods of data collection. In the final section, the method for the treatment of data is presented.

RESEARCH PLAN

According to Kerlinger (1973:300), the research plan is the overall scheme or programme of the research, and includes everything the researcher will do from the initial proposal of the research problem to the final analysis of data. Miller (1970:40-41) claimed that the plan should not be highly specific, but rather a series of guideposts to keep the researcher headed in the right direction. Silvey (1975:10) supported this claim when he asserted:

> . . . a research plan is, at best, a considered and calculated set of compromises based on the aims of the research, the resources available, and the social realities of the field of investigation. Ideally, only the first should determine the research procedures.

For this study, the researcher selected a sequence of activities (Figure 5) which seemed to offer an appropriate way of describing the total research task. Following the statement of the general research problem, the researcher described the context of the

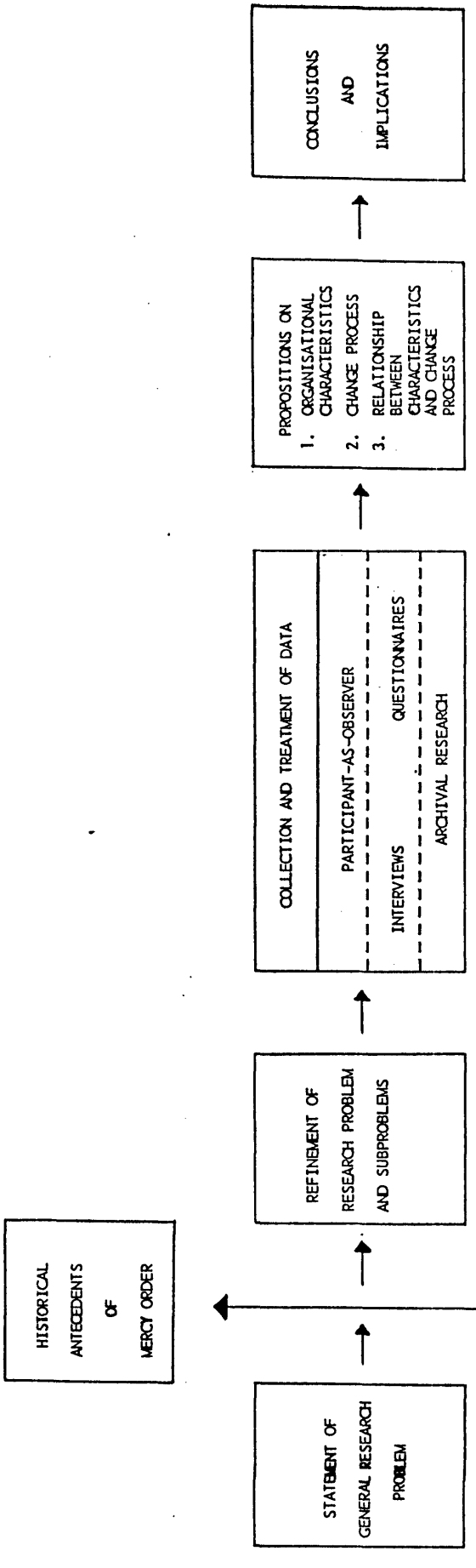

Figure 5
Sequence of Activities
in Research Plan

study which emphasised the particular nature of the Mercy community and established a frame of reference for the research problem. As a result of an analysis of the historical antecedents of the Mercy Order, and after a review of the relevant literature, the researcher formulated a conceptual framework to help guide the research. At this point, the researcher refined the research problem and developed the subproblems.

The next activity in the sequence was selection of research methodology appropriate for investigation of the research problem. This included selection of the methods by which data were collected and treated. On the basis of findings from the data, conclusions about the relationship between the selected organisational characteristics and the process of change were drawn. The final activity was a statement of implications for further research. In carrying out the study, the researcher followed the above sequence of activities as they were presented in Figure 5.

The next section takes up the question of methodology, defined by Bogdan and Taylor (1975:1) as the process, principles, and procedures by which the researcher approaches the research problem and seeks answers to it.

SELECTION OF RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In selecting research methodology appropriate for investigation of the research problem, the researcher recognised that the study was restricted to one organisation, a religious community, which was identified as a special type of human service organisation. The research approach had to be suited to studying what appeared to be a complex, dynamic, but restricted social system. The researcher kept in mind the advice given by Mills (1959:224): "Avoid a rigid set of procedures. Above all, seek to develop and to use the sociological

imagination. Avoid fetishism of method and technique."

As very little research had been undertaken on change in the structure of governance in religious communities, the researcher chose, as basic aims of the study, exploration, description, and analysis, which were consistent with those advocated by Riley (1963:14-15) for relatively uncharted areas in organisational studies. Phillips (1973:8) also stressed the significance of these aims when he said that:

> Clearly, a description of the phenomenon being investigated is a necessary part of any explanation; we need to know what happened, what are the facts to be explained. In addition to the description (the what), we require an interpretation of it; we need to know why it happens or occurs. We need to account for or make sense of the phenomenon.

According to Selltiz et al. (1976:97-98), where there is little experience to serve as guide, intensive study of the phenomenon being investigated is seen as an appropriate approach. In the research, a case study approach was used to make an intensive study of the process of change leading to the adoption of a new structure of governance in the Mercy community. As Simon (1978:50) asserted, the choice of the case is particularly appropriate when a researcher wishes to obtain a large amount of detailed information about a certain subject.

The Case Study: Strategies and Techniques

Focus of the case study. According to Stake (1978:5-8), the principal difference between the case study and other research approaches is one of focus. With the case study, focus is on a single actor, a single institution, a single enterprise, usually under natural conditions, in order to understand the "bounded system" in its own habitat. Walker (1980:33) emphasised that the case study reveals

what institutions mean to individuals and, in this way, helps to get beyond form and structure to the realities of human life. In this research, the focus was on one organisation, the Congregation of the Sisters of Mercy, and through responses from interviews and questionnaires, the study revealed what the Mercy religious community meant to the Sisters.

Best (1959:118-119) wrote of the personalised nature of the process when the focus of attention was directed towards a single case and when concern was with everything that was significant in the history or the development of the case. Further, he stressed that the case study allowed the researcher to probe deeply and to analyse intensively interaction between the factors that produce change or growth.

In the experience of Selltiz et al. (1976:98), the case study approach was also an appropriate procedure for the researcher who was seeking insights about the research problem. First, the attitude of the researcher is one of alert receptivity and of seeking information rather than of testing hypotheses. Second, the study of the event or situation must be such that sufficient information is obtained to characterise and explain the unique features of the case being studied and those which it has in common with other cases. Third, this approach relies on the integrative powers of the researcher and her ability to draw together many diverse pieces of information into a unified interpretation. For this study, these three reasons gave additional support to the choice of the case study approach as offering a useful way of addressing the research problem.

Unitary character of the case study. Goode and Hatt (1952:330-333) gave a traditional view of the case study when they defined it as a way of organising social data so that the unitary character of the social object being studied may be preserved; that is, it is a method of looking at social reality. The case study gives the researcher a greater opportunity to grasp the pattern of the life of the individual or of the organisation as a substantial body of data about many facets of that life are collected.

Yin (1981:59) held a similar view of the case study. He asserted that the distinguishing characteristic of the case study was that it attempted to examine a contemporary phenomenon in its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context were not clearly evident. This research study meets Yin's criterion of a case study in that it is the study of an experience in its real setting, that is, the process of change leading to the adoption of a new structure of governance within a religious community, the Mercy Order.

McKinney (1966:65) described the case study in greater detail as he emphasised its unitary character. He pointed out that the major function of the case study is to describe the case in terms of uniqueness and its observable particularities. This means the intensive examination of the specific factors implicated in the case. McKinney (1966:65-66) claimed that the unit chosen was temporally and spatially bound; it had a particular historical development and was a unique configuration. Such a unit may be described as a case by an indefinite number of facts which may be obtained from many diverse sources, depending upon what the case is. For example, they may be obtained from documents, life histories, an individual, informants in a group, or from participant observation. These facts merely

describe the case; they do not have explanatory value.

In this research, the case study placed emphasis on a longitudinal approach, and showed changes in the structure of governance in the Mercy community over a period of time from 1957 to 1981. Boundaries about matters, such as the limited period of time to be analysed and the type and number of people involved, were clearly defined. By 1957, the Sisters of Mercy in Australia belonged to one of two groups, either the Union or the Federation. In 1981, these two governing structures were replaced by the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy (Australia). The period of time between 1957 and 1981 was chosen because the process of change to be analysed occurred during this time. The case was limited to particular kinds of data -- experiences and perceptions of the change progess described by members of the religious community, including the researcher as participant observer, and written records of matters relating to the changes of structure found in archives of the Mercy community.

Use of multiple research techniques. To gain a comprehensive picture of a complex, dynamic organisation, the researcher who adopts the case study approach may use several research techniques to clarify various facets of the life of the organisation. In this research study, the researcher chose interviews and questionnaires as techniques to gain qualitative data relevant to the research problem from the members of the Mercy community.

Bogdan and Taylor (1975) made a strong claim for "going to the people" for their perceptions of the organisation. A similar view was put forward by Van Maanen (1979:522):

> the people we study . . . have a form of life, a culture that is their own and if we wish to understand the behaviour of these people and the groups and organizations of which they are

> a part, we must first be able both to appreciate and describe their culture.

Wilson (1977:25) supported these claims and pointed out that:

> . . . it is not enough to know merely the fact that feelings, thoughts, or actions exist without also knowing the framework within which these behaviours fit. The social scientist must come to understand how all those who are involved interpret behaviour in addition to the way he or she as scientist interprets it from his objective outside perspective.

In this study, the researcher "went to" the Sisters of Mercy, who are "the people" in the religious organisation, to gather their perceptions of the organisation. Through their responses to interviews and questionnaires, the Sisters expressed what they thought and felt about the community and the process of change. The researcher, herself a Sister of Mercy, had special insights into the organisation. For this reason, she knew the organisational framework within which the Sisters' feelings, thoughts, and actions existed. In her role as participant, however, she was also an observer so that she was not able to interpret the Sisters' perceptions with the same kind of objective perspective as a researcher who was not a Sister of Mercy.

Interviews and questionnaires, as well as the observations of the researcher (to be dealt with later), were the research techniques used to collect data about the perceptions of people in the organisation. Archival documents were also used to gather further data about the process of change in the Mercy community.

In this research, the data developed by qualitative methods originated, as Van Maanen (1979:522) expressed it, "when the researcher figuratively put brackets around a temporal and spatial domain of the social world", that is, around the process of change in the Mercy community between the establishment of the Union (1954) and Federation (1957) and the adoption of the new structure of governance in 1981.

In a case study in which a large quantity of qualitative data is accumulated, Miles (1979:590) reminded the researcher that collecting and analysing the data are highly labour-intensive activities. The sheer range of phenomena to be observed, the recorded volume of data from interviews and questionnaires, the time required for writing notes from archival material, as well as coding and analysis, can all become overwhelming. At the same time, Miles acknowledged the attraction of "rich, full, earthy, holistic, real" data, with seemingly unimpeachable face validity.

In this study, the researcher found that both collecting and analysing data were lengthy methodological tasks. These tasks included preparation of the interview guide, interviewing some fifty Sisters of Mercy (with each interview between 45 and 50 minutes), formulation and distribution of the questionnaire, and collation of the responses. While she collected and analysed data from interviews, questionnaires, and archival records, the researcher experienced the additional methodological problem of trying to remain objective while taking into account the value of her insights gained from her role as participant and observer in the Mercy community. According to Miles (1979:59), these difficulties in handling the data are typical of those encountered in many research projects which use the case study approach.

By bringing together the data gained from the use of the research techniques just discussed, the researcher clarified aspects of the process of change and gained a comprehensive picture of the complexities of the Mercy organisation.

DATA COLLECTION

With the research problem formulated specifically enough to indicate what data were required, the methods of data collection were selected. According to Margulies and Wallace (1973:27), the most critical criterion of choice of methods is applicability to the problem and to the organisational setting. Downey and Ireland (1979:63) also supported the view that methodological issues must always be answered within the context of a particular setting. They said that

> . . . methodologies are neither appropriate nor inappropriate until they are applied to a specific research problem. This perspective treats methodologies as tools of inquiry; each inquiry requires careful selection of the proper tools.

Kaplan (1964:214) stressed the importance of using the most appropriate tool for the task when he warned: "Too often, we ask how to measure something without raising the question of what we would do with the measurement if we had it".

In this research, an investigation of the process of change in the Mercy community was undertaken. To preserve the character and totality of the case, and following the advice of Selltiz et al. (1976:105), a broad array of data about the community was collected. Goode and Hatt (1952:333) presented the view that:

> Although mere quantity of data is not sufficient, since the collection must be guided by the research problem, there is a greater opportunity to grasp the pattern of the (organisation's) life if a substantial body of data concerning many facets of that life is available.

For this reason, four research techniques were combined to study the same phenomenon. Participant observation, interviews, questionnaires and archival research were used as complementary to each other, in the research strategy known as "triangulation".

Triangulation as a Research Strategy

Denzin (1978:291-2) broadly described triangulation as "the combination of methodologies in the study of the same phenomenon". He explained that:

> . . . each method implies a different line of action towards reality - and hence each will reveal different aspects of it, much as a kaleidoscope, depending on the angle at which it is held, will reveal different colours and configurations of objects to the viewer.

This form of research strategy which advocates use of multiple methods has a distinct tradition in the literature of social science research methods (Bouchard, 1976; Campbell and Fiske, 1959; Denzin, 1978; Smith, 1975; Webb et al., 1966). As Jick (1979:602) noted, organisational researchers found that they could improve the accuracy of their judgments by collecting different kinds of data bearing on the same phenomenon.

In his extensive writings on the use of triangulation, Denzin (1978:302) labelled the most popular form as the "between (or across) methods" type which is largely a vehicle for cross validation when two or more distinct methods are found to be congruent and yield comparable data. This is the type of triangulation on which this research heavily relies. For example, the organisational characteristic, leadership as service, was studied by interviewing formal leaders in the religious community, questioning members of the same community, evaluating performance records in community archives, and through the researcher's observation of the way in which leaders acted. The focus always remained on the way in which leadership was exercised, but the mode of data collection varied. Multiple and independent measures, if they reached the same conclusions, would provide a more certain portrayal of the leadership phenomenon in the religious organisation.

Denzin (1978:301) also recommended the "within method" kind of triangulation in which multiple techniques are used within one method to collect and to interpret data. In this research, Sisters holding positions at different levels of the hierarchy in the religious community were interviewed about the organisational characteristics, such as leadership as service, so that the researcher could crosscheck for internal consistency. The responses about leadership from those Sisters in the Mercy Order were compared so that conclusions could be drawn about leadership in the religious organisation. This approach to data collection reflected the "multiple comparison groups" used by Glaser and Strauss (1965:7) to develop more confidence in an emergent theory.

Jick (1979:603-4) claimed that the use of multiple measures in triangulation also captures a more complete, holistic, and contextual portrayal of the phenomena under study than may be gained by use of a single method. In this study, the researcher, through the interviews, was able to pursue new avenues of enquiry, where necessary, from the verbal responses given by the Sisters. With the questionnaires, the respondents had the opportunity for lengthy consideration before they wrote answers to the questions. Evidence from archival records and insights of the researcher into the life of the Mercy community provided further data on the same phenomenon so that the many "pieces" of the organisation came together in a coherent whole.

Jick (1979:603-4), in supporting the use of triangulation, argued that, through its use

> Elements of the context are illuminated. In this sense, triangulation may be used not only to examine the same phenomenon from multiple perspectives but also to enrich our understanding by allowing for new or deeper dimensions to emerge.

He also argued that "the effectiveness of triangulation rests on the premise that the weakness in each single method will be compensated by the counter-balancing strengths of another".

Webb et al. (1966:3) argued that, if a proposition can survive the onslaught of a series of imperfect measures with all their relevant error, confidence should be placed in it. This confidence is increased by minimising error in each instrument and by a reasonable belief in the different and divergent effects of the sources of error.

In summary, Jick (1979:608) identified three strengths of triangulation. First, the multi-method strategy allows researchers to be more confident of their results. Second, different viewpoints are likely to produce some elements which do not fit a theory or model, so that divergent results from multi-methods may lead to an enriched explanation of the research problem. Third, the use of multi-methods may also lead to a synthesis or integration of theories. Against these strengths are balanced the shortcomings of the strategy. First, replication is exceedingly difficult. In this research, replicating the role of the researcher in reaction to the religious community and to the process of change, and the accessibility of the leaders of the community for face-to-face interviews, would be impossible tasks. Second, if the research is not clearly focused theoretically or conceptually, the multiple methods are unlikely to produce a satisfactory outcome. In this research, the researcher made a judgment that the data collection methods were equally sensitive to the phenomena being studied, and that the theoretical and conceptual focus of the research was clear.

Sources of Data

In this study, the researcher wanted to make statements about the process of change in the Mercy community throughout the whole of

Australia. Data were collected from several sources. First, the experience, knowledge, and insights of the researcher in her role as a member of the religious community provided evidence not available from other sources. Second, from questioning members of the Mercy community through interviews and questionnaires, the researcher was able to gain some idea not only of what happened during a specific time period but of the thinking, feelings, and perceptions of people of the change within the organisation. Finally, archival records yielded special insights into the story of the process of change leading to the change in structure of governance. These insights were gained from a study of records of events, meetings, and other Congregational happenings. In several instances, the details of these matters had been forgotten by members of the Mercy Order, or had not been known by all Sisters.

Obtaining and processing data from every member in the Mercy organisation presented major technical problems. For this reason, the researcher decided to take a sample of the total group. Selltiz et al. (1976:105-7) gave the assurance that it was rarely necessary to study all the people in a group in order to provide an accurate and reliable description of the attitudes and behaviour of its members. More often than not, a sample of the population to be studied was sufficient. They also said that study findings based on a "representative" sample (that is, on only part of the group about which statements are to be made) should be a reasonably accurate representation of the state of affairs in the total group or population.

Warwick and Lininger (1975:69) were of the opinion that, while not every research technique that used proper sampling techniques would provide adequate data, a study that did not do so would be seriously

impaired from the outset. For a sample to be useful, it should reflect the similarities and differences found in the total group.

There were 3,146 women in the Mercy Order at the time the research was undertaken. Fewer than half this population belonged to the Union, with a centralised type of government, and the remainder to the Federation, with a decentralised form. At least two groups of Sisters of Mercy were found in every State of Australia. Difficulties in choosing a representative sample from the total population was compounded by the following facts: the 17 groups ranged in size from sixty to five hundred and fifty members; within the groups there were emphases on different types of ministries; and different groups were concentrated in different parts of the country.

The Sisters themselves were obviously the best source of information about the process of change leading to the new structure of governance in the Mercy organisation. For this reason, representative samples were sought from two groups in the total population. First, the Major Superior of each of the 17 groups, two Sisters from each group elected by the members of that group, and the three members of the Union Executive, assembled for the First National Mercy Chapter in Sydney, December, 1981, were a valuable source of data. These Sisters were responsible for the formal establishment of the new structure of governance during the meeting, and were interviewed in order to gain the insight that each of them had into the process of change in her group (Appendix C: Interview Giude).

Second, a questionnaire (Appendix D) was distributed to a randomly-chosen stratified sample of one hundred and seventy Sisters (ten from each of the 17 Mercy groups), in order to gain the perceptions of a wider group of Sisters. The choice of ten Sisters from each group was made on the basis that in all national Mercy

meetings, each group, no matter what its size, was represented by an equal number of Sisters.

In addition to the data derived from representative samples of all members of the Mercy Order, the experience and insights of the researcher contributed in a particular way to the analysis and the interpretation of the data collected for this study.

ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER AS PARTICIPANT AND AS PARTICIPANT-AS-OBSERVER

In this research, the researcher was in a unique position as a member of the religious group. She had become a member of the Mercy community in 1958, 12 months after the establishment of the Federation. She subsequently held leadership positions in both her own Mercy group, in the Federation, and at national level. She was closely involved in the development of the draft of the new structure of governance.

The significance of full membership of a group being studied was expressed graphically by Cusick (1973:232) in the following observation:

> As one lives close to a situation, his description and explanation of it have a first-person quality which other methodologies lack. As he continues to live close to and moves deeper into that situation his perceptions have a validity that is simply unapproachable by any so-called standardised method.

Further, Becker and Geer (1970:133) argued that:

> The most complete form of datum . . . is the form in which the participant-observer gathers it: an observation of some . . . event, the events which precede, and follow it, and explanations of its meaning by participants and spectators, before, during, and after its occurrence.

In this study, during the events that led to the adoption of the new structure of governance for the Sisters of Mercy, the researcher was a participant in many of the meetings held in different Mercy groups.

Babchuk (1962:226) contended that the role of participant as observer permitted a researcher to participate, often quite actively and in a special way, with persons in the system.

In this research, the researcher was a full participant in the life of the group, and did not begin formal observation of members of the group and of the change process until she attended the Preliminary Meeting of the First National Mercy Chapter (1981). For her, the practical and technical problems of participant observation as a means of gathering data were minimal. She had access to members of the religious community and to the archival materials in all the Mercy groups. In her various roles in the religious community, she also had the opportunity to be present at all the Mercy meetings at which the new structure of governance was discussed.

Her membership and role in the Order, in turn, posed certain difficulties related to the images which respondents must have held of her. In a general sense, the position which the researcher held in the Order determined what she was likely to see, while the way in which she saw and interpreted the data was largely conditioned by her theoretical preconceptions and her assumptions concerning the research problem. Anguera-Argilaga (1979:478) warned that:

> . . . Personal deformation on the part of the observer can also occur due to the sympathy he feels toward the group under observation, which will obviously lead him to favourable interpretations.

At the time of the National Chapter meeting, the researcher was conscious of Anguera-Argilaga's belief that the more integrated a group is, the harder it is for them to admit reports that are not favourable to them, so that results obtained from an observation by members of a group should be taken with some reserve.

There were, however, special advantages in being in the position of a participant-as-observer. Vidich (1955:354) pointed out

that participant observation enables the research worker to secure data within the mediums, symbols, and experiential worlds which have meaning for his or her respondents. However, what an observer will see depends largely on his or her position in a network of relationships, in this case, within the Mercy community.

According to Wilson (1977:261), one of the most important issues about the use of participant observation is that there is no one right method; the method should match the study. Over a long period of involvement working towards the new structure, the researcher as participant observer "in the field" experienced a continuous redefinition of her position. For this reason, analysis of data had necessarily to include a thorough comprehension of the major social dimensions of the situations in which data were collected. For example, in carrying out the interviews, the researcher took account of the fact that the Sisters being interviewed were aware that she had been working for some years to help develop a new structure of governance. They could have been hesitant to present views which showed their opposition to the new structure or their criticism of the way in which different groups had worked towards it. The researcher attempted to minimise the possible effect of her position on the Sisters' responses by assuring the interviewees that their responses would be treated with confidentiality, and by ensuring that respondents to the questionnaires would remain anonymous, unless they wished otherwise.

In summary, the social position of "the observer" and "the observed" and the relationship between them at different times had to be taken into account when the data were analysed. The researcher saw her task as trying to balance an external objective report with an insight into the Sisters' own view of the situation which could

only be obtained, according to Stephenson and Greer (1981:123), through the kind of intimate knowledge provided by being part of the "scene".

In working out a plan for collecting data from the Sisters, the researcher turned to the relevant literature for guidance. Wolcott (1975:113) claimed that some researchers like to feel free to "muddle about" in the field setting and to pursue hunches or to address themselves to problems that they deem interesting and worthy of sustained attention. This researcher found that the widespread geographical distribution of the group to be studied and the "contained" nature of the problem called for the choice of an initially clearcut plan for data collection and an evolutionary approach thereafter to both selection of data and the order in which data would be collected.

As initial steps in data collection, the researcher selected two research techniques, namely, the interview and the questionnaire, to question members of the Mercy community. The use of the interview technique is now discussed.

THE INTERVIEW

Definition

Patton (1980:196) remarked that the purpose of interviewing is "to find out what is in and on someone else's mind". He pointed out that:

> We interview people to find out from them those things we cannot directly observe . . . . We cannot observe feelings, thoughts, and intentions . . . . The purpose of interviewing, then, is to allow us to enter into the other person's perspective. The assumption is that that perspective is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit.

Murphy (1980:75) added that interviewing is also the most appropriate method when the researcher is interested in examining issues of process, for example, how decisions were made, the reasons for complex events, the context in which a project was put into operation, and what an event or programme meant to key participants and influentials. In this study, the researcher selected the interview as the most appropriate technique by which to collect data from the key participants and influentials in the Mercy community, namely, the Major Superiors and the delegates elected by the Sisters to represent them at the National Meetings.

Strengths of the Interview as a Data-Collection Technique

McCall and Simmonds (1969:63) claimed that, in general, interviewing, of whatever kind, was more flexible than observation, allowing the researcher "to circumvent the barriers of time, space, and closed doors".

According to Festinger (1953:330), when the focal data for a research project are the attitudes and perceptions of individuals, the most direct and most fruitful approach is to ask the individuals themselves. These data are "inside the individuals", and they alone are capable of communicating them. In this research, when all interviews were completed, the data revealed not only the attitudes and perceptions of individual Sisters about the process of change, but also patterns of responses.

Another strength of the interview, according to Sax (1968:202), is its flexibility in that the interviewer may change the mode of questioning if the occasion demands. If he or she does not understand the responses given by a subject, he or she can rephrase the questions to obtain answers which are clear and unambiguous. When she was

interviewing the Major Superiors and delegates at the First National Meeting, the researcher found that, as the interviews progressed, she became more skilled in asking questions which were clearly understood by the interviewees and which did not need rephrasing. Furthermore, how the subject responds may be as important as the content of the responses. During the interviews, the researcher observed that most interviewees expressed interest in the subject matter of the questions, and showed no hesitation in responding.

Limitations of the Interview as a Data-Collection Technique

Stacey (1969:51) was of the opinion that, in planning questions to be asked in his or her own society, a researcher is in fact calling upon a good deal of knowledge gained simply by being a member of that society. For the same reason, unwitting biases may be introduced. In this study, the researcher recognised that the kinds of questions she asked and the way in which the Sisters responded could be influenced by the different roles she had played as a member in the Mercy Order. These issues relating to the interview as a data-collection technique are dealt with in some detail in the next section.

Problems also arise, as Sax (1968:202-206) pointed out, when it is time to summarise, categorise, and evaluate the responses. Since each respondent may be using a different frame of reference, data interpretation becomes difficult.

In the following report of the conduct of interviews in the present research, further theoretical considerations of specific relevance are discussed.

CONDUCT OF THE INTERVIEWS IN THE PRESENT RESEARCH

In referring to the conduct of interviews, Bailey (1978:309) argued that:

> . . . a successful interview is a dynamic interpersonal experience that is carefully planned to accomplish a particular purpose. Creating a friendly, permissive atmosphere, directing the discourse into the desired channels, encouraging the respondent to reveal information, and motivating him to keep presenting useful facts require a high degree of technical skill and competence.

In this research, the interviewer approached delegates to the Preliminary Meeting of the First National Mercy Chapter, held in Melbourne in August, 1981, and discussed with them the objectives of this study. As these delegates were the Sisters most closely involved with the formal adoption of the new structure of governance, they were invited to be interviewed during the First National Mercy Chapter, in Sydney in December, 1981 (Appendix E). All the Sisters accepted the invitation to be interviewed and audiotaped. They agreed to allot one hour each for this purpose at a time not scheduled for meeting sessions during the Chapter.

In preparation for the interviews in December, a pretest interview schedule was drawn up and used with three Sisters who were not included in the main study. As Kidder (1981:162) emphasised, a valuable part of the pretest interview was discussion of the questions with respondents after they had answered them. Each respondent was asked what the questions meant to her, what difficulties were experienced in replying, what further ideas could not be brought out by the question, how the respondent would ask the question, and what her feelings were on questions she did not answer or found difficulty in answering. The researcher found that, while the wording of the questions presented little difficulty to the

respondents, there were too many questions. As substantial changes were not necessary, a second pretest was not conducted.

While adoption of the new structure of governance was under discussion at the National Chapter, Sisters were dealing with a very delicate issue for the Mercy community. In these circumstances, the researcher developed a list of open-ended questions which gave the Sisters the opportunity to respond freely and which generated a wide range of responses. Tuckman (1978:21) and Isaac and Michael (1979:96), in supporting this approach, agreed with Stacey (1969:75) that:

> . . . the focused interview, where the interviewer has a list of questions or topics [she] wishes to cover, but the way in which [she] asks the questions is largely left to [her] discretion, is the kind of interview which is particularly useful where experiences, feelings, reasons, and motives are involved.

While Goode and Hatt (1952:185-6) held a similar view, they also claimed that an interview guide permits the researcher to express questions in such a fashion that the respondent can answer it most easily, while the interviewer may probe more deeply should the occasion demand. Whyte (1960:352) stressed another advantage of the interview when he said that it is designed to provide the informant with freedom to introduce materials that were not anticipated by the interviewer. In this study, several Major Superiors and delegates did volunteer information which the researcher had not expected about their perceptions of the process of change in the Mercy Order.

Before conducting the interviews, the researcher had searched for ways to ensure that the interviewees would be well motivated in responding to her questions. Sax (1968:202), in writing about the advantages of the interview, stated that:

> Almost all interviews begin with an attempt to develop rapport between the interviewer and the respondent. Once the respondent accepts the interview as a non-threatening situation, he is more likely to be open and frank with the interviewer. This adds to the validity of the interview.

But Glazer (1972:11) warned that, regardless of the setting, prospective respondents and informants will be wary of the researcher's first overtures. They will want to know what kind of information is required and how the accumulation of that knowledge will affect them. In this study, as the researcher was a member of the Mercy community, and knew personally many of the respondents, the researcher had some misgivings about the Sisters' reactions to being interviewed for the study by one of their peers.

In addressing the issue of interviewing one's peers for research purposes, Platt (1981:76) defined the term "peers" in the following way:

> One's peers have a variety of relevant characteristics: they are in a diffuse sense one's social equals, they are one's equals in role specific senses, they share the same background knowledge and subcultural understandings, and they are members of the same groups or communities.

Implications arising from acknowledgment of these characteristics were seen for the present study. As the researcher was interviewing friends and acquaintances in the Mercy group, she was far from being a stranger or completely anonymous; she had a history as a member of the Order and perceived characteristics, some of which were directly relevant to the research topic. As Platt (1981:78) observed:

> Shared community membership is enormously helpful in some ways, but it implies personal relations which carry social obligations that can make the normal impersonal and instrumental use of the interview difficult. This can affect both respondent and interviewer.

The researcher perceived very little nervousness in the interviewees; in fact, there was an extraordinary degree of interest shown in being interviewed. The researcher believed that this interest was related

to the topical nature of the subject matter.

In interviewing one's peers, Platt found that personal and community knowledge are used as part of the information to construct a conception of what the interview is meant to be about, and often affect the content of what is said. The researcher had been closely and publicly involved in different aspects of working towards a new structure of governance. As a member of the Working Party on the draft of the new structure of governance, the researcher, with other Sisters, had analysed the strengths and weaknesses of the structure, and had expressed strong personal approval of the draft which was being studied by the Sisters at the National Meeting. There was the possibility, then, that those being interviewed might have been inclined to give answers which could be seen as supportive of the adoption of the new structure. In fact, the Sisters spoke very frankly of their attitude towards the new structure. In several instances, they discussed with the interviewer their reservations about issues such as the authority of the National President and the autonomy of each Mercy group.

Platt raised another question which has some significance for this study; that is, when the problem of social ease is solved, what counts as data in the relationship? In this research, the interviewer and the respondent agreed that the interview formally began with the turning-on of the tape-recorder. Any introductory discussion which was extraneous to the interview was then eliminated from the record. At the same time, an honest and reasonably full account of the rationale and purposes of the study was given to the respondents.

It was difficult, however, to do this without inviting discussion of the study rather than proceeding with the interview, and without providing so much information that it would bias the

course of the interview. The researcher pointed out that the spontaneous and personal responses of each Sister interviewed might be lost if too much information about the research was given.

In assessing the usefulness of the interview technique for this study, the researcher took into account the advice of Labovitz and Hagedorn (1975:75). They claimed that the flexibility of the interview makes it a particularly appropriate technique in a preliminary stage of a research project on an area of interest which has been studied very little. Although there were certain questions to be answered, the order of the questions varied from respondent to respondent and was dependent on the way in which initial questions were answered. The questions in the interview guide (Appendix C) are given as examples of the kinds of questions that were asked in the interviews. The questions were designed to provide the informant with freedom to introduce materials that were not anticipated by the interviewer, and for this reason, as Kerlinger (1973:487) claimed, were uniquely suited to exploration in depth. In this study, the results of the loosely structured schedule led to more structured questions for the questionnaire at a later stage of the research.

The researcher had selected two groups of Sisters to be interviewed about the process of change leading to the new structure of governance for the Sisters of Mercy in 1981. According to Stacey (1969:47-8), this choice of "key informants" was one way of obtaining information in depth:

> In the usual circumstances . . . the incumbents of certain formal offices are the obvious persons to use as key informants both because they have the knowledge and because their office makes them the acceptable persons to consult. In such cases it is necessary to check among the rank and file as to status and acceptability of the offices concerned and to balance the official view with the many popular views.

The Major Superior of each Mercy group was an obvious choice because of her chief executive role in the religious organisation. Other Sisters interviewed were the two delegates from each Mercy group, who had been elected by the Sisters of their particular group to represent them at the National Chapter. These Sisters were chosen by the researcher as appropriate people to be interviewed, not only because they had potential as transmitters of information, but also because they were elected representatives of the population under investigation.

In evaluating informants' statements, the researcher tried to distinguish between the subjective and the objective components. This effort followed the advice given by Dean and Whyte (1958:34-8), that it is important to find out whether the informant is telling the truth. The researcher acknowledged that she was getting the informant's subjective view of the world, but that this did not mean it was untrue. She also acknowledged that she was getting this view as the informant was willing and able to pass it on to her in that particular situation.

Keeping in mind research findings of Bradburn and Sudman (1980:3), the researcher was also conscious of the fact there could be questions which posed a threat to some respondents and that such questions needed special care in wording. For example, some Major Superiors could well have felt threatened by questions about experiences of leadership in their group. If this were so, there could have been a response bias which had little to do with the way in which the research question was asked. To help overcome this problem, at the beginning of each interview, the researcher reminded the respondent that she had promised all respondents complete confidentiality unless they expressed a wish to the contrary.

As far as the researcher could judge, the Sisters were relaxed, open, and thoughtful in the interview situation. She found that one Sister gave monosyllabic answers to the first few questions, and in later discussion found that this was because she felt that she could contribute very little to a discussion on the new structure of governance, as she had been overseas studying during the period leading to the adoption of the new structure. It did not seem to the researcher, then, that the interviewees employed any obvious defences against the interviewer.

Even though the Sisters saw the interviewer as gathering material for a study of the religious organisation, it did not seem that she was regarded as an outsider, which was a possibility, according to the view expressed by Argyris (1952:24) in his writings on perceptions of "insiders" and "outsiders" in different types of organisations. The researcher was aware, however, that, even as a member of the religious organisation and an insider, she might not always get to the truth.

In response to questions about events which occurred long ago, the researcher found that the respondents often expressed concern about the reliability of their memory. They spoke with more confidence of recent events. Bailey (1978:186) advised that, in such a case, the interviewer should compare the interview results with data collected by other means at a later date. In this research, information about events was checked against information from the questionnaires and from archival material. At the same time as the interview, however, the researcher was careful to ask as many questions as possible about different events occurring about the same period. She found that discussion of one event often led to recall about another event.

To discover the details of the communication process in the

interview (Banaka, 1973:1), the use of an audio-taped record of the interview had several advantages over a written interview. Recreating the interview situation in its verbal entirety enables a researcher, as Bucher et al. (1956:361) have claimed, to capture material of unanticipated significance. In the early interviews, several of the Sisters discounted the role of their Diocesan Bishop in the Sisters' decision to adopt a new structure of governance. Further, their comments on the part played by Church laywers suggested that they did not believe that this was a topic to be pursued in much detail. Much of this information might have been lost without an audio-taped report. It was as a result of close study of the interview transcripts that the interviewer was able to formulate precise questions to include in the open-ended questionnaire mailed at a later date to a representative selection of Sisters from each Mercy group.

The researcher found a number of limitations to the use of the interview technique in this research. As Kerlinger (1973:480) and Miles (1979:592) pointed out, the major shortcoming of the interview is practical: interviews take a good deal of time. In this study, each audio-taped interview lasted from 45-50 minutes; a typist needed six to eight hours to transcribe the material. This time could not be reduced very much without losing many of the direct quotations which made the data so useful. In this research, the interview was an appropriate data-collection technique to obtain information from the restricted number of Sisters assembled for the First National Mercy Chapter. However, it was not an appropriate technique to gain information from some three thousand Sisters of Mercy or their representatives throughout Australia. Given the large membership this represented, the researcher decided to sample the population. The use of a mailed questionnaire meant that all members

of the Mercy Order would have the possibility of being selected, and more Sisters could be contacted than would be possible with interviews.

THE MAILED QUESTIONNAIRE

From the beginning of the research, the intention of the researcher had been to obtain as wide a distribution of opinions from the Sisters as was possible on the adoption of the new structure of governance. To a large extent, the timing of the Preliminary Meeting and of the First National Chapter was fortuitious, as the presence of the Major Superiors and delegates provided a "captive group" for carrying out a large number of interviews. But a wider representation of Sisters was needed to gain the perceptions of the Mercy group about the process of change leading to the new structure of governance. The researcher decided that the best means of obtaining the views of a sample of the total membership would be through the use of a mailed open-ended questionnaire.

In speaking of the value of the mailed questionnaire, researchers, such as Berdie and Anderson (1974), Bogdan and Taylor (1975), Moser and Kalton (1979) and Stacey (1969), claimed that the major issue is whether it is the most appropriate in a specific situation. In this study, the use of the mailed questionnaire had the following advantages: the researcher had access to many more respondents than she could possibly reach in interviews; time was saved, as mailed questionnaires could be sent to a large number of respondents at the same time; and each respondent received the same set of questions phrased in exactly the same way so that the task of summarising and comparing responses could be reduced.

According to Patton (1980:29), however, there are severe limitations to the kind of data collected through open-ended questions as were used in the questionnaires in this study. Among the

limitations, he cited those related to the lack of writing skills of some respondents, the impossibility of probing or extending responses, and the effort demanded of the person completing the questionnaire. In this study, there was no way of finding out why some people did not return their questionnaires. In the case of three Sisters who returned their questionnaires unanswered, two wrote to the researcher to say that they were ill in hospital and the third that she was taking up a new and quite demanding appointment when the questionnaire arrived.

The choice of the mailed questionnaire to a wide sample of Sisters was a more effective way of collecting very valuable data about the perceptions of Sisters drawn from their personal experiences and firsthand observations. Berdie and Anderson (1974:12) maintained that:

> . . . the problem of erroneous factual data can often be avoided by obtaining the information from record searches or other direct sources of information. For this reason, questionnaire use should be limited to asking for information which is not directly available from other sources.

For this reason, each study using questionnaires is unique and must be tailored to fit the individual circumstances of that study.

For this study, the open-form questionnaire was developed. Van Dalen (1962:303) asserted that, rather than forcing respondents to choose between rigidly limited responses, the open-form questionnaire permits them to answer freely and fully in their own words and their own frame of reference. This method of collecting data gives the subjects an opportunity to reveal their motives or attitudes and to specify the background or the provisional conditions upon which their answers are based.

As the researcher interviewed the Major Superiors and the delegates, she found that the data generated from the research

questions in the interviews provided evidence which appeared to account for much of the change process leading to the new structure of governance for the Mercy Order. From that data, the researcher constructed a questionnaire which included specific questions about the organisational characteristics, that is, focus on mission, commitment of the members, servant leadership, and the ethos of the community, and also on the process of change leading to the adoption of the new structure of governance.

In the terms used by Bogdan and Taylor (1975:26), the questions fell into two broad categories: one substantive and the other theoretical. The first included questions related to specific substantive issues in a specific setting. For example, Sisters were asked the following question about the mission of the Mercy community: "To someone who knows nothing about the Sisters of Mercy, how would you explain the mission of your Mercy group?" The second category is more closely tied to basic organisational problems and broader theoretical issues. An example of a question in this category included in the questionnaire was the following: "What kind of influence do you expect the national structure of governance will have on the exercise of leadership in your group?"

Towards the end of the First National Chapter (1981), the researcher approached the Major Superiors of the 17 groups and ascertained their willingness to cooperate in the next stage of the research. They were asked to make a random selection of ten Sisters from their group, and to distribute to them a copy of the questionnaire. All Major Superiors were prepared to assist in the next stage of the research.

In order to identify and correct questionnaire problems, Johnson (1975:153) strongly advised the use of a pretest or pilot

study, which involved a smaller sample of individuals. Each person in the pilot study was asked to respond to all items on the questionnaire, noting any items where the meaning was unclear or where information was not easily available. The respondent was also asked to suggest additional information that should be requested.

The researcher, on the basis of this advice, carried out the following procedure. She prepared a first draft of the questionnaire which was used as a pretest in personal interviews with four members of the Mercy Order not included in the study. Kidder (1981:162) stressed the need for a pretest in using the questionnaire technique of data-gathering so that unforeseen problems on the administration and framing of the questionnaire might be seen and solved. The pretest indicated the need for more precise phrasing in two questions. After a second pretest, the questionnaire was ready for use.

In the preparation of the questionnaire, the researcher took heed of the warning given by Duverger (1964:144) that it is a complex and delicate operation in which the nature, form and order of the questions are of great importance to the results of the inquiry. To encourage the Sisters to write freely and at length about their perceptions, the questions were brief. The most general question was asked first: "During your time as a Sister of Mercy, what major changes in religious living have you experienced within your group?" The last question was the most direct: "In the future, what impact do you expect the new structure of governance will have on the Mission (a) of your own Mercy group, and (b) of the Institute of the Sisters of Mercy?"

After the researcher had prepared the questionnaire (Appendix D), she composed a covering letter (Appendix E) for enclosure with each copy. Sax (1968:229) emphasised the importance of

this letter by saying:

> When questionnaires are sent through the mail, it is usually necessary to motivate respondents to fill out the questionnaire and to return it within a reasonable period of time. Unless respondents believe that the questionnaire is of value, that it is sponsored by a recognized organization, that their personal attention to the questionnaire does count and is important, and that not too much time will be required, the questionnaire is likely to be thrown into the nearest waste basket.

In common with most mailed questionnaires (Bailey, 1978:140), this letter explained the nature and purpose of the research project and enlisted the cooperation of the respondent. Bachrach and Scoble (1967:271) reminded researchers that a mailed questionnaire is an imposition on the receiver. Overcoming resistance to this kind of imposition requires persuasion, persistence, and attention to procedural techniques and details calculated to activate a potential respondent.

The researcher then forwarded ten packets to each Major Superior. Each packet and its contents were numbered to assist in checking returns of the questionnaire. The packet was stamped and labelled with the address of the researcher. Although she knew by the number the Mercy group from which any questionnaire came, the researcher preserved the anonymity of the respondents by not asking for names or other information which could reveal the identity of the respondents. The researcher included a covering letter to the Major Superior (Appendix F) explaining the procedures for distributing and collecting the questionnaire. Because of the close personal relationship between the researcher and the Major Superiors, this letter had a degree of informality not usually found in covering letters.

In this letter was a request for information about the formal leaders in each of the groups, a request which was prompted by comments during the interviews. The researcher had not been able to

find very much information about the formal leaders, both before and after their term of office. She was particularly looking for any information which could throw light on the service role of the leaders, such as their holding other leadership positions in the mission of the community. In the letters which accompanied the return of the information from each group, she found that no groups had collated such information about their leaders.

The questionnaires and other material were mailed out to Major Superiors in the last week of February, 1982. Although in the covering letter to each respondent (Appendix G) the researcher had guaranteed that the respondent would remain anonymous and her comments would be treated as confidential, one hundred and twenty Sisters enclosed a personal letter to the researcher when they returned the questionnaires. By the end of April, 134 replies had been received. At that point, the researcher sent a letter (Appendix H) to Major Superiors of communities who had not returned all their questionnaires to remind the Sisters that their contribution to the project would still be appreciated. This request resulted in the return of only seven more papers. The final response rate, then, was 83 percent.

In several of the personal letters sent by respondents to the researcher, strong approval was given to the open-ended questions. One Sister, a member of the Mercy community for more than fifty years, said that it was the first time her opinion had ever been sought on many of the topics in the questionnaire, and she intended to make the most of the opportunity. She did this by writing on all the pages sent to her, and then by adding several more pages of comments.

When the researcher was drawing up the initial research plan, she looked for ways of ensuring that the plan was cohesive. In the literature, Bailey (1978:93) highlighted the need for links in a

research chain. In this study, the questions in the questionnaire came directly from the material studied in the interview transcripts so that there was a direct link in the research chain between the first and second data-collecting activities and the conceptual framework. Although there was a place for using the interview as a preparatory step to preparing the questionnaire, both activities were important stages in their own right in this research.

The researcher was constantly aware that the process of change was being studied, and that there was need to obtain information about it from the people themselves, by gaining access to that valuable source of information which Tuckman (1978:196) described as being "inside a person's head" in order to gain information, to discover values and preferences, and to uncover attitudes and beliefs.

After a preliminary study of the evidence gathered to that time, the considerable holdings of archival material in various Mercy groups were examined. Evidence was sought on the process of change leading to the new structure of governance as it was found in the records of meetings, in the extensive collections of correspondence, and in the reports of significant events in the life of the Mercy group.

ARCHIVAL RECORDS

During the interviews, and as a result of reading the completed questionnaires, the researcher made a systematic examination of records held in the archives of Mercy communities in order to tap a further source of information for the research. She examined correspondence and records of meetings, as well as various kinds of printed material about significant events in different Mercy groups. The analysis of documents was a productive source of information for collecting some kinds of retrospective data, for example, developments

in the drafts of the governance document.

As Murphy (1980:121) discovered in his work, this researcher also found that a thorough reading of selected documents filled noticeable gaps in the data which resulted from the fact that the researcher did not know enough to ask all the right questions. For example, the researcher did not ask the Major Superiors and the delegates if the members of their group told them to raise certain issues at the National Meeting. The researcher had to investigate the Minutes of the Meeting to discover this information.

Several Sisters who were interviewed said that they could not remember details of some events. From her personal experience in the Mercy community, the researcher found that some data were filtered through current norms. Documents written at the time of an event were not subject to recall problems and did reflect the contemporary climate; this was seen in many of the letters written about the time of the establishment of the Union and the Federation. Webb et al. (1966:110) reminded us, however, that

> . . . we should recognize that using the archival records frequently means substituting someone else's selective filter for our own . . . although . . . in any event, the Chinese proverb still holds: "The palest ink is clearer than the best memory".

Documents provided more detail on the chronology of events than was obtained through interviews and questionnaires. For example, minutes of meetings gave a record of the steps taken to arrive at certain decisions. Document analysis provided data that the researcher was not able to discover through other techniques. Moreover, documents were of considerable help in giving to the findings a certain amount of credibility; for example, a statement of what a member of the community saw or heard was made more convincing by the use of a quotation from an internal memorandum.

In the literature on data-collection techniques, the approach to analysis of documents is very similar to content analysis. Berelson (1952:13) stated that in the communication process a central position is occupied by the content, that is, that body of meanings through symbols which make up the communication itself. He suggested that since the content represents the means through which one person or group communicates with another, it is important that communication research be described with accuracy and interpreted with insight. Communication content is so rich with human experience, and its causes and effects so varied, that no single system of categorisation can be devised to describe it.

The analysis of the contents of the documents in this study had a particular thrust. It was directed towards obtaining data about the process of change which was not obtainable from any other source. According to Galtung (1967:71), while no inferences can be made either to the intention of the producer or to the effect on the consumer, in content analysis, it has one tremendous advantage, that is, it is much easier to bring in the time dimension. In this study of the process of change, the analysis of documents, carried out at selected points in the time span of the research, emphasised questions of the written communication of the particular period.

The researcher saw herself in the position of a qualitative researcher who examines official records to learn about the people who produce and maintain the records. According to Bogdan and Taylor (1975:136), official records, like personal documents, lend insight into the perspectives, assumptions, and purposes of their authors. Krippendorf (1980:Preface) supported this by saying that

> Potentially, content analysis is one of the most important research techniques in the social sciences; it seeks to understand data not as collections of physical events but as symbolic phenomena and to approach their analysis unobtrusively.

In this approach to content analysis, earlier concerns with quantitative analysis and manifest content by writers such as Holsti (1969:3), Kerlinger (1973:53) and Schutz (1952:119) were seen as of less importance.

From the establishment of the Union (1954) and the Federation (1957) to the adoption of the new structure of governance (1981), the Sisters of Mercy carefully documented important meetings and events which concerned the total group of Sisters in Australia and each individual group. The researcher was given access to all this material which included correspondence between the Mercy groups, with Church authorities in Australia and in Rome, detailed records of meetings of individual Mercy groups and of National Mercy gatherings, and the drafts of each stage of the new document on governance. These were most useful to the researcher. In many instances, respondents in the interviews and to the questionnaires could not remember the sequence of events to the acceptance of a particular draft of the new structure of governance; reference to the documents gave the researcher information not available from other sources. In other cases, as respondents gave their perceptions of what had taken place, the bare bones of an event were fleshed out.

After making a selection of data collection techniques which she believed were appropriate to the study, the researcher turned her attention to questions of validity and reliability.

VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

In dealing with questions of validity and reliability in this study, the researcher took note of the kinds of data which she collected. Although some statistical data, such as demographic information, were studied, most data were qualitative. This kind of data was described by Patton (1980:22) as consisting of:

> . . . detailed descriptions of situations, events, people, interactions, and observed behaviors; direct quotations from people about their experiences, attitudes, beliefs, and thoughts; and excerpts or entire passages from documents, correspondence, records, and case histories.

The difference between quantitative and qualitative data, according to Schwartz and Jacobs (1979:4), can be stated in terms of the "notation systems used to describe the world". While quantitative researchers "produce data by counting and measuring things", qualitative researchers "report observations in the natural language at large". Miles and Huberman (1984:215) claimed that "the hallmark of qualitative research is that it goes beyond how much there is of something to tell us about its essential qualities".

Schatzman and Strauss (1973:108), in speaking of strategies for analysing data, cautioned that:

> Qualitative analysts do not often enjoy the operational advantages of their quantitative cousins in being able to predict their own analytic processes; consequently, they cannot refine and order their raw data by operations built into the design of the research. Qualitative data are exceedingly complex, and not readily convertible into standard measurable units of objects seen and heard.

Furthermore, according to LeCompte and Goetz (1982:31), a common criticism directed at qualitative investigation is that "it fails to adhere to canons of reliability and validity".

In this section, validity and reliability, as they refer to the present research, are discussed in some detail.

Validity

Although there are many definitions of validity (cf. Filstead, 1970; Galtung, 1967; Kidder, 1981; Simon, 1978), the definition by LeCompte and Goetz (1982:32) is used in this research:

> Validity is concerned with the accuracy of scientific findings. Establishing validity requires determining the extent to which conclusions effectively represent empirical reality and assessing whether constructs devised by researchers represent or measure the categories of human experience that occur.

In the following discussion, the researcher will address the issue of validity by distinguishing the two types, internal and external validity.

Internal validity refers to the extent to which scientific observations and measurements are authentic representations of some reality. To support the claim that a piece of research has internal validity, the participants and the researcher must have mutual meanings of the conceptual categories used in the research. In the present study, a major task was identification of the dimensions of the Mercy Order which characterise it as a human service organisation. Through analysis of data from Major Superiors, delegates, and members of the Mercy Order, the researcher found that she and the respondents did have mutual meanings of the four selected organisational characteristics. This common understanding gave support to the argument that this research had internal validity.

LeCompte and Goetz (1982:44) warned that:

> . . . the extent to which phenomena observed at entry or at other initial occasions are the same as those observed subsequently becomes salient when process and change are the focus of the research project.

In this study, the researcher and the participants understood that the passing of time between the establishment of the Federation (1957) and the adoption of the new structure of governance in 1981 would affect the nature of the data collected. Changes that occurred in the Church and in the social scene, as well as spiritual and professional development in the Sisters, were distinguished by the respondents as intervening phenomena in the process of change in the Mercy community.

A threat to validity may be posed by observer effects in research projects, such as the present study. When data are being gathered through participant observation and informant interviewing, possible and probable effects on the nature of the data must be

considered. To control for distortions in the data, the researcher took the precautions outlined in earlier sections of this chapter. She selected participants from a wide range of interests and knowledge in the Mercy community; she also interviewed Major Superiors, delegates elected by other Sisters, and a representative sample of ten Sisters from every Mercy group. Independent corroboration from multiple informants, according to LeCompte and Goetz (1982:46), as well as sufficient residence in the field by the researcher, and coding participant responses according to situations expected to elicit contrived responses, are useful techniques used by researchers to control for distortions in data.

In this study, the researcher did not face difficulties associated with losses and gains in membership of the groups in the project. The interviews during the First National Chapter (1981) were followed in two months by the distribution of the questionnaires. For this reason, the researcher did not have to replace subjects lost from the study.

A further threat to internal validity, according to LeCompte and Goetz (1982:49-50), was the possibility of spurious relationships among the observed phenomena. They suggest that all plausible causes be delineated by examination of collected data and through discussion with informants. Schatzman and Strauss (1973:81) claimed that:

> It is sometimes very useful to tell informants -- perhaps obliquely -- about propositions that one is beginning to pull together. Such propositions may well challenge the understanding the informant has about what he or the orgnization is "really" up to. On the other hand, the researcher's understanding may also be challenged.

To discuss the findings of this study in a theoretically meaningful way, the researcher had to be able to say which organisational characteristics were related to the process of change. According to

Kidder (1981:7-8), the more complex the organisation and its analysis, the more difficult it is to specify the cause and to name the characteristics involved. In this research, the most difficult characteristic to identify and name was the "ethos" or "culture" of the Mercy community. This characteristic, to a large extent, embraced the other three characteristics, namely, focus on mission, commitment of members, and servant leadership, but it was greater than and, in many ways, separate from them.

Research has external validity when its conclusions are credible, and true beyond the narrow limits of the study. In regard to the credibility of the study, the researcher was concerned with presenting the "reality" of the Mercy community as a human service organisation and, in particular, giving a true representation of the process of change leading to the new structure of governance.

The researcher had to describe clearly the processes and the evidence used in arriving at her conclusions. Yin (1981:63) claimed that the case study researcher must preserve a chain of evidence as each analytic step is conducted, and warned against presenting "a lengthy narrative that follows no predictable structure and is hard to write and hard to read". The present case study report is built on a clear conceptual framework, with data collected from the responses to a series of research questions.

During the study, the researcher kept what she termed "working notes", a record of the relationships she found developing between pieces of evidence elicited from members of the Mercy Order and from archival material. The way in which she reached conclusions and formulated propositions was similar to the process that McCutcheon (1978:12) termed "structured corroboration". In Chapters 5 and 6 of this study, the researcher presents evidence from several data sources

and, through the strategy of triangulation, attempts to arrive at valid conclusions about the research reported in Chapter 7.

In referring to generalisability, LeCompte and Goetz (1982:51) were of the opinion that, for researchers studying special institutions, regions, or populations, one goal of the research is the development of findings that may be compared and contrasted with many other groups. In these cases, external validity depends on the identification and description of those characteristics of phenomena salient for comparison with other similar types. In this study, the researcher tried to establish the typicality of the process of change in the Mercy Order. To the extent to which this phenomenon was found to be typical of similar religious communities, bases for comparison could be assumed.

In certain respects, as LeCompte and Goetz (1982:35) pointed out, issues of validity and reliability overlap: what threatens reliability in research may also threaten the validity of a study. The following discussion will refer to the issue of reliability.

Reliability

Reliability refers to the extent to which studies can be replicated. It requires that a researcher using the same methods can obtain the same results as those of a prior study. LeCompte and Goetz (1982:35) argued that reliability poses a herculean problem for researchers concerned with unique phenomena. Because unique situations cannot be reconstructed precisely, even the most exact replication of research methods may fail to produce identical results. In this research, establishing reliability was complicated by the nature of the data and the research process, as well as by conventions in the presentation of the findings. There could not be exact replication of the National Mercy Meeting, and therefore no

exact replication of the study, regardless of the methods and designs employed.

Hansen (1979) and Pelto and Pelto (1978) suggested that, because of factors such as the uniqueness or complexity of phenomena and the individualistic and personalistic nature of some research processes, some research may approach rather than attain reliability. To enhance the reliability of data in this study, the researcher recognised and handled the following problems: researcher status position, informant choices, social situations and conditions, analytic constructs and premises, and methods of data collection and analysis.

First, as the researcher was a member of the group being studied, and had held formal leadership positions in the organisation, she acknowledged that the flow of information was peculiar to her in that situation. For this reason, no other researcher could replicate her findings.

Second, choice of informants was also an important consideration. Careful description must be given of those who provide the data, as different informants represent different groups within the organisation. As LeCompte and Goetz (1982:38) pointed out, reliability requires both careful delineation of the types of people who serve as informants and the decision process invoked in their choice. For this study, the researcher chose, as informed informants, the Major Superiors and delegates elected by the Sisters to attend the First National Mercy Chapter in 1981. All these Sisters were members of the Mercy community with some knowledge of its structure of governance. The researcher also administered a questionnaire to a representative sample of Sisters in the total Mercy community. From these Sisters, she gained insights into the perceptions of a large sample of

Sisters about the Mercy community and its structure of governance.

Third, the social context in which the data are gathered influence their content. For example, representatives of the Mercy community present at the National Mercy Chapter suggested that the occasion was an appropriate context in which to be questioned about the new structure of governance as the Sisters had prepared for the meeting by careful study of documentation on developments in the Mercy community and, in particular, on the possible new structure of governance.

Further, successful replication of a piece of research requires explicit identification of the underlying assumptions and definitions. In this research, definitions of the four organisational characteristics, crucial to the Mercy community as a human service organisation, were clearly expressed. To guide investigation of the research problem, the researcher used a conceptual framework formulated as a result of a study of the context of the research problem and after an extensive review of relevant literature. It could be expected that other religious communities of a similar nature could use the same approach in studying the process of change in a religious organisation.

Finally, the notion of replicability as in quantitative research is not a question in this research. In this study, the researcher presented a carefully prepared account of the way in which data were collected. Where possible, the researcher tried to minimise the effects of her presence, while not discounting the special insights which membership of the Mercy community gave to her study of the research problem. The researcher made interpretations with a degree of confidence, as a result of taking McCutcheon's advice (1978:12) to weave "a fabric of interrelated facts, anecdotes, quotes

and other bits of information".

Consideration of validity in the case study is of great significance, as the researcher attempts, in words of Dockrell and Hamilton (1980:45), to capture and portray the world as it appears to the people in it. In a sense, for the case study worker, what seems true is more important than what is true. In this study, the researcher tried to ensure, through the use of multiple methods, that what the Sisters believed to be the process of change leading to the new structure of change was the process of change. In her use of the triangulation strategy, the researcher tried to ensure, as Jick (1979:699) suggested, that each method of data collection was represented in a significant way in the study. At the same time, the researcher acknowledged that not all techniques were equally sensitive to her research problem.

Jick (1979:607) claimed that it is a delicate exercise to decide whether or not results have converged. In theory, a multiple confirmation of findings may appear routine. If there is congruence, it is presumably apparent. In practice, there are few guidelines for ordering data so that largely consistent and convergent results are produced. The next section of this chapter describes the procedure that was followed in this research to treat the data.

TREATMENT OF DATA

Because the purpose of this research was investigation of the relationship between selected organisational characteristics and the change process which led to the adoption of a new structure of governance for the Sisters of Mercy (Australia) in 1981, the researcher chose to collect the kinds of data which would give her different viewpoints from which to understand the research problem. The way in

which the multiple kinds of data were combined and synthesised was developed during the progress of the research.

Goode and Hatt (1952:231) were of the opinion that when the findings of a research study are to be evaluated, the criticism is that the reader does not "see" the order created by the researcher. Although the conclusions may be based on adequate data, the reader does not agree that the data had been interpreted correctly.

After several interviews with the delegates at the First National Mercy Meeting in December, 1981, the researcher realised that some matters, such as the length of time taken to agree on a first draft of the new structure of governance, were not considered by the Sisters to be matters of real significance in their view of the process of change leading to the new structure of governance. The first task, then, was to study the transcripts of the interviews (prepared as the interviews were completed) and from them to develop a descriptive account of what the Sisters saw as the process of change.

In this preliminary stage of the treatment of the data, the researcher was persuaded by the analysis of the logic of historical narrative as proposed by White (1963) that there was value in writing not "a" narrative or "the" narrative, but multiple narratives of the organisation, as it was perceived by the Sisters. The intention was to use the evidence elicited from the Sisters in the interviews to answer the research questions on the organisational characteristics found in the survey of literature to be significant features of the religious community as a human service organisation.

At this stage of the treatment of the data, the researcher was drawing up a very simple account of the Sisters' perceptions of the religious organisation. At the same time, she was trying to

detect any possible discrepancies in these perceptions; in particular she was beginning to build up a picture of the perceptions of the Major Superiors and compare their perceptions with those expressed by the elected delegates to the Chapter. She also compared the perceptions of the Major Superior in each group with the perceptions of the elected delegates from the same group. This approach is akin to that advocated by Schatzman and Strauss (1973:110), whose advice was that:

> . . . [the researcher] needs to analyse as he goes along both to adjust his observational strategies, shifting some emphases towards those experiences which bear upon the development of his understanding, and generally to exercise control over his emerging ideas by virutally simultaneous "checking" or "testing" of these ideas.

At this stage in the research, the researcher began to use her "working notes" to help her with later analysis.

After studying all transcripts, the researcher found that the matters of significance for the Sisters which she discerned in the first few transcripts were also evident in the remainder of the papers. For example, the way in which leadership as service was expressed in different groups was seen by the Sisters to have certain basic components, such as concern for the person of the individual Sister in a group; for the proper preparation, both personal and professional, for Sisters moving into a new area of the mission of the community; and as willingness to serve in other capacities in the community after the time of appointment as a Major Superior had come to an end.

Throughout the study, the researcher was very conscious of her role as a participant observer. In referring to this role, McCall and Simmons (1969) claimed that the key to quality control in participant observation is the thorough use of multiple indicants of any particular fact and an insistence on a very high degree of

consonance among these indicants, tracking down and accounting for any contrary indicants.

In this research, the role of the researcher as participant, and then as participant-observer, was analysed as each of the other data-gathering methods was evaluated. In the case of the interview, the researcher, because of her experience in the religious community and her knowledge of the respondents, believed that the data she received were unbiased, complete, comprehensible, consistent, and reliable. It was not possible to have tested the reliability of the interview instrument by having two different interviewers interview the same individuals, or by repeating an interview with the same questionnaire.

During the interviews, and from a later study of the interview scripts, the researcher took some of the significant issues just mentioned and framed questions for the questionnaire. The researcher then proceeded to distribute the questionnaire, derived from the study itself, to a representative sample of Sisters who had not been present at the National Chapter. As these questionnaires were returned, the researcher began an intensive analysis of the scripts, around each question, in much the same say as she had studied the interview transcripts. The questions, then, helped to cluster the data.

At this stage, the researcher examined the evidence from each of the 17 Mercy groups and compared the perceptions of the Major Superiors with those of the two elected delegates, and with those of the Sisters in their group who had answered the questionnaire. In Chapters 5 and 6, the findings from this exercise are reported. At this stage, it is sufficient to say that research questions used in the interviews and questionnaires which had been developed as a

result of the literature search were also found to elicit a great deal of information from which came appropriate evidence for the study.

Bailey (1978:154), in commenting on reliability and also validity of mailed questionnaires, pointed out that researchers generally assess each question or group of questions rather than the questionnaire as a whole. In this research, it was important to attempt to determine the extent to which each of the techniques affected the reliability and validity of the questions which comprised the technique. The researcher did not find that any particular question was so ambiguous that it was not reliable or valid when it was used in the interview study, the mailed questionnaire, or for the document analysis. Bailey also suggested that individual questions could be taken from one method and compared in a construct-validation test with questions from another method. For example, data on leadership were derived from questions in the interviews and compared with the data on leadership from the questionnaires. In the same way, the validity of the four characteristics of the organisation studied in this research was tested.

In several rereadings of the data, the matters of significance to the Sisters which the researcher noticed during the first few interviews were more readily perceived. The theme of local autonomy began to emerge. As the researcher gathered more evidence relating to this theme, she found that there was increasing support for the importance of autonomy in mission as a significant element in local autonomy. Other themes, such as implications for community life in groups with a large proportion of elderly Sisters, emerged as the later data were analysed. On the other hand, some themes which emerged early, such as the role of the local superior in local

community decision-making, were not developed later in the research.

Henerson et al. (1978:160) suggested that, in working with open-response data, some system for categorising the information be devised so that it may be looked at all at once and summarised. In this study, the most useful way of solving this problem was to treat the data in relation to the research subproblems. For example, it was important to hear of the experience of different Sisters who lived under a diversity of leadership styles. It was then the task of the researcher to abstract from the particular cases to a general comment.

In discussing the strategy of "direct" research, Mintzberg (1979:587) was of the opinion that:

> . . . while systematic data create the foundation for our theories, it is the anecdotal data that enable us to do the building. Theory building seems to require thick description, the richness that comes from anecdote. We uncover all kinds of relationships in our "hard" data, but it is only through the use of this "soft" data that we are able to "explain" them, and explanation, is, of course, the purpose of research.

The present study relied heavily upon Mintzberg's approach. For example, in collecting evidence to support the selection of ethos of the community as an organisational characteristics, the anecdotes from the Sisters during the interviews and in the questionnaires built up a very rich picture of the pattern of myths, beliefs, understandings, and values in the Mercy community. Mintzberg suggested that the researcher needed to be "in touch" with the spirit of the organisation. Reflecting on his own research experience, he recalled how impressed he was with the importance of phenomena that cannot be measured. He spoke, for example, of the impact of an organisation's history and its ideology on its current strategy, and of the role that personality and intuition play in decision-making. According to Mintzberg (1979:588), "To miss this [history and ideology] is to miss the

very lifeblood of the organisation".

In this study, the most pervasive of the organisational dimensions selected as characteristic of the religious community was the culture of the Mercy Order. Spradley (1979:92) described how cultural data must be analysed in a way that is distinct from other forms of analysis because:

> An informant's cultural knowledge is more than random bits of information; this knowledge is organised inside categories, all of which are systematically related to the entire culture.

He saw the task of analysis as a search for the parts of the culture and their relationships as conceptualised by informants. He stressed the central importance of cultural meaning which is created by using symbols. Spradley (1979:95) defined a symbol as "any object or event that refers to something", and said that:

> All symbols involve three elements: the symbol itself, one or more referents, and a relationship between the symbol and referent. This triad is the basis for all symbolic meaning.

In studying the culture of the Mercy community, the researcher followed Spradley's approach and, within a short time after beginning to collect data through the interviews, began analysis. She reviewed the interview transcripts to search for cultural symbols and to search for the relationships among these symbols. For example, she identified several terms, such as "Mercy charism", "Mercyness", and "option for the poor". She then began searching for relationships among these terms. In turn, the relationships were tested by checking what the informants knew. For example, she proposed that the terms noted above were different ways of expressing one aspect of the Mercy identity, that they were related in the way in which they stressed "Mercy in action".

Spradley then suggested that the researcher should go back and collect more cultural data, analyse it, formulate new prop-

ositions, and then continue to repeat these stages over and over again. The final propositions will come as a result of this refining process of analysis. In this study, the researcher followed these stages to arrive at the final propositions about the culture of the Mercy community. She also found it a useful approach in analysing and interpreting the other three organisational characteristics, as well as the process of change leading to the new structure of governance in the Mercy Order.

McCutcheon (1981:6), in supporting this approach to data, stressed the importance of interpretation to serve the function of allowing a researcher and an audience to make sense of what transpires in a setting, yielding a patterned, synthesised understanding of it. Diesing (1971:146) also advised a researcher not to rest satisfied with his or her first interpretation, but to think up as many interpretations as possible, sometimes quite rapidly. As each interpretation is tested, those that survive are tested further. In other words, the testing and revision of interpretations must be a continuous process. Schatzman and Strauss (1973:108-110) recommended "theoretical notes" which may develop as mini-propositions. As mentioned earlier, the researcher in this study used "working notes" which had a similar purpose.

In summarising the treatment of the data to this point, the stages which the researcher passed through were very similar to those described by Smith (1979:333). At the beginning of the treatment of data, the researcher allowed herself to be immersed in the evidence which she was collecting through the interviews. Gradually, she found that these data began to show signs of "clustering". A variety of ideas, insights, and associations of ideas, events, and people arose. In wondering about the meaning of this, the researcher

looked for patterning in the clusters, an exercise akin to the "grounded theory" process of Glaser and Strauss (1968).

At this stage, the researcher used the research problems to assist in the search for order. This conscious seeking for analytical or interpretative meaning moved concurrently with the data. This is the process which Glaser and Strauss (1968:45) called "theoretical sampling", that is:

> data collection for the purpose of generating theory whereby the analyst jointly collects, codes and analyses his data and decides what data to collect next and where to find them, in order to develop his theory as it emerges.

According to Patton (1980:328), closely related to the testing of alternative explanations during the process of analysis is the search for negative cases:

> Where patterns and trends have been identified, our understanding of those patterns and trends is increased by considering the instance and cases that do not fit within the pattern.

In this study, the perceptions of Sisters which differed from the general pattern emerging were carefully considered by the researcher. Several instances of alternative explanations were given, for example, by Sisters who were speaking of the relative values of changes in religious lifestyle.

The researcher found herself constantly moving backwards and forwards between the data in the interviews and the questionnaires and the evidence in the collections of archival material. Her role as participant and then as participant-observer demanded creative thinking and the realisation, all too often, that an avenue of exploration which she thought was essential to the solution of the research problem did not lead her to a productive conclusion. An example of this was her inclusion of a question about the influence of the Diocesan Bishops on the Sisters' choice of a new structure of governance. She omitted this question from the questionnaire after

finding from the Sisters interviewed that it was not seen by them as of any great consequence. Again, she found that she needed to refer constantly to the documents of meetings to clarify the story of the development of the document of the new structure of governance.

To bring some order to the analysis of the process of change itself, the insights offered by the survey of literature and the formulation of the conceptual framework (p.61) were of great assistance. The study of critical events gave a necessary focus to the emphasis in the research which was not only on the process of change in the Mercy community, but also on the process of change leading to the adoption of a new structure of governance in the community. The researcher had to keep in mind that the outcome of the analysis was to be an understanding of the relationship between the selected organisational characteristics and the change process in a religious community which was a special kind of human service organisation.

Jick (1979:608) concluded that, overall, the triangulating investigator is left to search for a logical pattern in mixed-method results. Intuition and firsthand knowledge drawn from the multiple vantage points are centrally reflected in the interpretation process. The following observation by Glaser and Strauss (1965:8) summarises how triangulated investigations seem to be crystallised:

> The fieldworker knows that he knows, not only because he's been there in the field and because of his careful verifications of hypotheses, but because "in his bones" he feels the worth of his final analysis.

While the researcher in this study was certainly "in the field" as a participant, there were no hypotheses to verify. The value of the triangulation method for this research lies in its ability to draw evidence from a wide variety of data sources so

that propositions about the process of change leading to the new structure of governance could be developed.

The timeline in Figure 6 illustrates the general approach which the researcher followed in this research project, and indicates that it was carried out in an ordered and, hopefully, scientific fashion. However, it cannot show the full extent of the triangulation process, nor the way in which the researcher developed the analysis.

In the next chapter, findings from the collection of data are used to provide explanations to the first subproblem, that is, the question phrased as follows: What did the Sisters of Mercy perceive as the distinctive characteristics of their organisation?

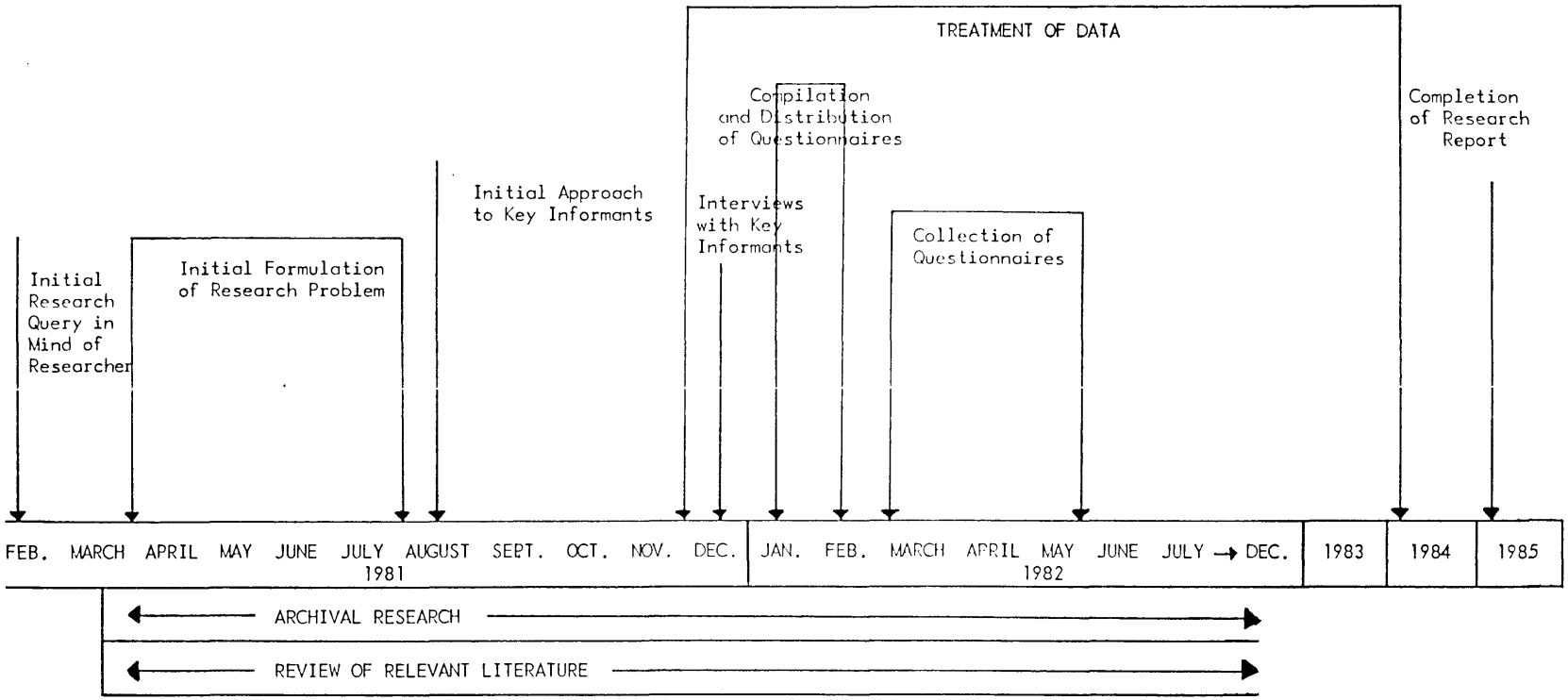

Figure 6

Timeline of Research Project