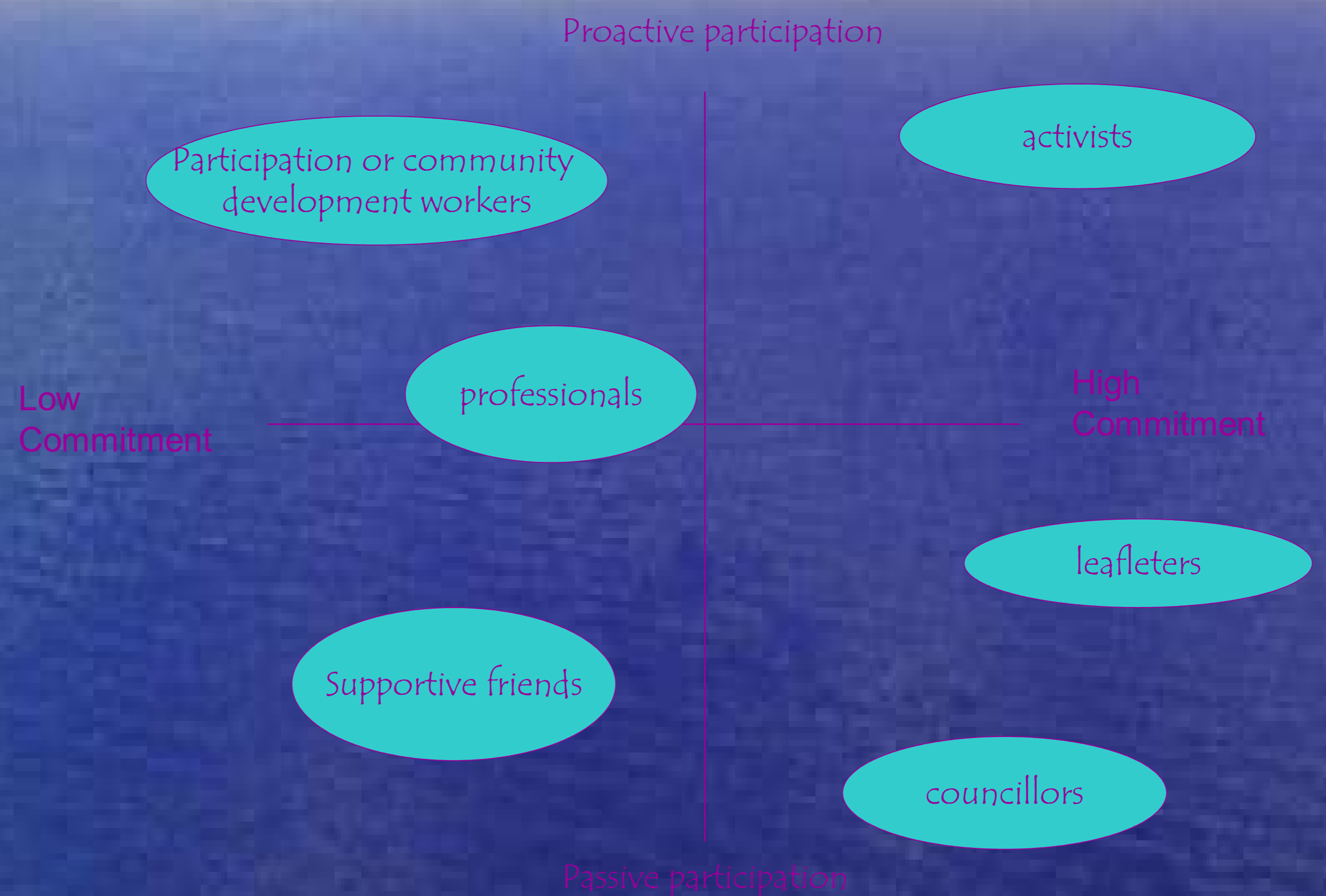


The psychological effects of active participation in communities. Carolyn Kagan, Sue Castile, Angela Stewart. RIHSC. Manchester Metropolitan University

je participe
tu participes
il participe
nous participons
vous participez
ils profitent????

The needs of individuals and communities are re-defined in the interests of welfare and policy professionals. The power relationships are set and not open to negotiation or change. In part this is because professional agencies are resistant to change and can contain changes to their status and power. It is also because 'change' that affects all parties is not an option. (Diamond, 2004 p.183)

We can think of participation in terms of levels of commitment and degrees of active participation. Community activists, who identify their own needs and set their own agendas, and often find their own strategies for achieving change are in the proactive participation, high commitment quadrant. Community members and representatives who work in partnership with agencies on policy agendas can also be situated in this quadrant, whereas those self-appointed community representatives who get co-opted into processes with agendas set by professionals could be situated in the proactive participation, low commitment quadrant. Professionals who are committed to working on community issues but who work weekdays only and go home at night can also be placed in this quadrant. This mapping of participation and commitment can be useful for exploring movement over time.



Over time:.....



Active participation is exhausting. Not all those who are willing to participate in community activities are 'resource strong' themselves and have different degrees of resilience. Community leaders find themselves not only liaising with and being positioned alongside professionals, they often have to give hours of emotional support to others in the group. The pressures are considerable and unrelenting. They have no supervision (despite working in complex human systems often with people with extensive personal difficulties). They have no colleagues to share the load when the going gets tough, no working hours, time off or holidays; no development activities built into the role. And they do not get paid. We need to find ways of enhancing supports, and of asking who participates and why – for whose benefit?