

Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen, Messers Boxer and Harrison, it is a great pleasure and honor to be debating here, at Oxford University, an institution founded in 1249 and where the modern history studies begin with the events of 1066. Like few others Oxford is an institution that symbolizes tradition and continuity, a fitting site for our debate which, too, addresses questions of tradition and continuity.

While the house proposes that THE WORK OF THE FUTURE FOR ISPSO IS THE PSYCHOANALYTIC STUDY OF ORGANISATIONS we are here to argue that, in fact, THE WORK OF THE FUTURE FOR ISPSO IS NOT THE PSYCHOANALYTIC STUDY OF ORGANIZATIONS. I think you will see why shortly.

You know, first, before I go on, I do want to say in the spirit of fairness and democracy that I would like to draw your attention, there is a bit of an uneven playing field here, and there are, as our esteemed President has established, and since you are a roomful of people skilled in discerning the nuances of organizational life finely attuned to the cues and the markers, that I would like to point something out, that we know that our President, who was barely a pup in 1066, clearly favors the affirmative – the tradition – we all know that. So. I think it is no coincidence that in these Oxford Halls we have these two fine English gentlemen with beautiful, rounded, plummy accents, the kind of people who actually know what pudding is, on the affirmative, and then on the negative, we have Mersky and Krantz. And so, I am just saying, okay, let's not let the optics sway the situation.

In any case, we invite you to consider the possibility that the proposition argued by our esteemed colleagues -- BOXER and HARRISON -- is one that, in fact, embodies not tradition but obsolescence; one that affirms not continuity but myopic rigidity.

The study of organizations from a psychoanalytic standpoint is, of course, absolutely essential to our vitality. As perspicaciously pointed out by Mr. Boxer, ongoing study is absolutely essential if we are to be relevant to the emerging world and if we are to avoid the pitfalls of simply copying ourselves over and over and over, becoming stale in the process.

No one is suggesting that the psychoanalytic study of organizations is not an essential aspect of our future, as it has been of our past. It is certainly not our intent. This is not about devaluing study but about the meaning of defining ISPSO's primary purpose as one of study.

Our proposition is that by DEFINING ISPSO in this manner – by describing it as an organization centered on STUDY – we misrepresent the reality -- to ourselves and the world -- and that we submerge our true purpose – which is to use psychoanalytically informed knowledge to make a difference. This debate is an opportunity to ask why we represent ourselves in this way. And whether our current self-identification – as an institution of study – sufficient.

Instead we see the future of ISPSO as the APPLICATION OF PSYCHOANALYTIC IDEAS TO ORGANIZATIONS. In fact, if you really look at our Society, this is the future that we are already in, to borrow a phrase from Eric Trist.

I offer an argument based on three main ideas:

1. Where have all the Howie's gone? and, Look who's coming to dinner?
2. Wake up, smell the coffee. The future is here.
3. What is this whole thing FOR, anyway?

1. Where have all the Howie's gone? And Look who is coming to dinner?

We are blessed to have amongst us people for whom the psychoanalytic study of organizations has been a central focus. I know I am going to mention both too many people and too few people in these comments, so my apologies for errors of omission or mis-categorization. The larger point I want to make is about the shifting composition of our Society and about the relationship between theory development and practice in ISPSO.

Some of us are researchers by trade. Howie makes it to the marquee because he is the ideal representative of that category. But he is far from alone. Burkard, from motivation as a surrogate for meaning to the psychotic organization and so much more. Mark Stein is putting our work into genuine dialogue with mainstream management studies.

At the same time, quite a few of our researchers have either left ISPSO altogether or are members only nominally. Many seem to have moved on, investing more in other settings more conducive to that frame of mind. Howard Stein, Michael Diamond, Yiannis Gabriel, Gilles Arnaud, maybe Gilles Amado, and others.

So, where have all the Howies gone? Well, they have gone to other organizations whose purpose are more aligned with the researchers' frame of mind

When you look around, there is a lot of it. Michael Diamond's Center for the STUDY of organizational change at the University of Missouri for example. Or so many conferences, where academics gather to present their thinking, such as the recent one on Lacan at Work, hosted by Gilles Arnaud. (Might add that it had one session on applied practice, offered by Boxer himself. It was not offered during the regular sessions but over a lunch break.)

Many other ISPSO members have studied more in the context of intervention practice and produced theory and ideas of extraordinary value. Where would we be without David Armstrong, Manfred Kets de Vries or Larry Hirschhorn? Gordon Lawrence? Just look around this room – it is quite remarkable. Susan Long's work on perverse organizations and on the associative unconscious. Richard Morgan-Jones' thinking about proto-mental systems and organizational health. Simon Weston who has introduced us to critical theory and critical theory to us. Victoria and James Grady's work on attachment theory. Lionel Stapley, Leopold Vansina. It goes on and on. Fraher comes to mind. And we can reach back to recognize the contributions others, including Harry Levinson and Harold Bridger, our first Honorary members. These ideas arose from active engagement with the field, ideas borne of applied psychoanalytic thinking. Application, and learning from it.

On the other side of the coin, guess who's coming to dinner? A little research into this question produced some interesting information. Of the new member applications I reviewed since 2012 nearly all identified themselves primarily as consultants or in applied practices. Of the nearly 35, 3 identified themselves primarily as researchers. A couple more mentioned it.

The vibrant tension and mutual enrichment between theory and practice that has characterized much of our history is shifting. The center of our membership gravity is moving decisively toward consultants and those working exclusively with application. This is something we need to think about, not pretend is

not happening. I believe anxiety about this underlies why we are having this entire debate. How do we keep theory building alive in light of this shift? Surely not by stamping our feet and demanding that the future is one of study. But the question is one of survival.

This leads to my second main point:

2. Wake up, smell the coffee. The Future is Here.

Many of us have been interested in the idea of emergent strategy. The shadowy, novel and creative aspects of organizations that emerge at the boundaries, as organizations interact with their evolving environments. That rather than being centrally conceived and directed by their venerable leaders, that the future is crafted at the margins, where the best growing conditions for novelty and creativity exist.

Let me offer an example. The articles of ISPSO incorporation say - and I quote – that the **object** and **purposes** to be transacted and carried on are to provide public forums for the presentation and distribution of papers in the field of psychoanalytic organizational studies.” Our PURPOSE is to provide public forums for presentation of studies and papers.

Today, the public face of ISPSO, our website, describes us as providing a forum for academics, clinicians, consultants and others interested in WORKING IN and WITH organizations UTILIZING psychoanalytic concepts and insights. See how we have changed without really noticing? It captures the emergent self-identification of the society. From its original exclusive focus on study to what is now centered more on application. On UTILIZING psychoanalytic concepts and insights. Ladies and gentlemen, the frog is boiled. Let’s face it.

3. This brings me to my third, and final, point – what is all this FOR, anyway?

Study is an activity. A task, not a purpose or a goal. And it begs the question of what this study is FOR – to what end? For what purpose?

To provide some context, let me point out that our historic roots are grounded in efforts to humanize the workplace. There were two main intellectual streams that fed into our Society. One was work of the Tavistock researchers, based on the recognition that industrial organizations were dehumanizing. They developed ways of thinking and modes of intervention that allowed for BOTH productivity and the quality of worklife, emphasizing the values of democracy, inclusion, collaboration, and belief that human values needed to become a central organizing principal. Task and sentient systems, socio-technical theory, putting the social system on equal footing with the impersonal task or technical arrangements.

The other feeder stream were academics in business schools, attempting to apply the insights of ego psychology to organizations. They were similarly involved in introducing the vicissitudes of humanity into the management and leadership equation. They were leaders in the discovery – how quaint sounding, a half century later – that people really mattered. They are resources. Assets, not liabilities.

Yet we persist in describing ISPSO by its activities, not its aims. By telling ourselves and the world that we are defined by the activity of study, we leave out the social values, underlying purposes, and ideals for which we stand.

Wearing the mask of STUDY obscures that ISPSO is a place where psychoanalytic, cross-disciplinary scholars and practitioners come together to make this a better world. And that we have something to contribute to the development of humane social systems in the 21st century information society.

One caveat is that being a diverse, heterogeneous group, with markedly different ideas of what is the “good” or how to express our underlying purposes or goals, poses significant challenges to our ability to articulate, and represent ourselves as other than simply activities. Perhaps the schismatic nature of psychoanalytic institutions or the competitive, envy-soaked, challenge of deciding which words to use contributes to our comfort with letting ISPSO be defined by an activity alone.

There are as many ways of thinking about ISPSO or psychoanalytic approaches to understanding organizations as there are people in this room. I am reminded of Leopold’s leadership in this connection, or the listserv comments of Chris Scanlon or Simon Weston. Or those I imagine that Howie would put forth to describe the most desirable aims. Though there is an underlying commonality of desire, the different ways it would be expressed boggle the imagination.

What I believe we can say, though, is that this Society, in its entirety, is aimed at the USE of psychoanalytic ideas to improve the social, economic and political world. In other words – application.

So, while the house asserts that: THE WORK OF THE FUTURE FOR ISPSO IS THE PSYCHOANALYTIC STUDY OF ORGANISATIONS.

We propose an alternative - that the future is NOT best defined as the STUDY of organizations but as the application of the fruits of that study – the application of psychoanalytic concepts to organizations, networks and communities with the aim of helping to better balance human needs with the requirements of organizations in order to make the world a better place to live.

Thank you very much. And with that I now turn the floor back to our esteemed, venerable President.