Meeting the Challenge of the Case: The Place of the Consultant

The Applied Section of The Institute of Group Analysis

offers

A Workshop in Three Weekends for those whose roles entail consulting to organisations

Led by Philip Boxer and Barry Palmer

Convened by Marlene Spero

12-14 February, 19-21 March and 7-9 May 1993

Friday 5.30-9.30 pm, Saturday 9.30-7.00 pm, Sunday 9.30-4.00 pm

at 1 Daleham Gardens, London NW3 5BY

Purpose

In this workshop we shall explore what it means to take up the place of a consultant in an organisation - from whatever formal role. In successive weekends we shall focus upon the activities of description, hypothesising, intervention and critical reflection, through which we endeavour to 'meet the challenge of the case'; and to face the questions which this may raise about our own practice.

We shall be examining how the consultant seeks to understand and work in relation to what is lacking in the client's account, and to create new possibilities. In doing this we will be working in the fields of systems thinking and psychoanalysis, and focusing in particular on where a concern with an ethic of intervention may lead us.

Participants will be asked to bring a case to present that they are currently engaged with, and will work on these cases in small groups. They will also have experience of adopting a "Plus One" position (+1), from which they formulate questions for the group about what it has ignored or bought into without question in its deliberations.

The workshop is part of a programme in the IGA to explore how group analytic insights may be employed in an organisational setting. However it makes no assumptions about the theoretical position of participants.

Process

We will be working in small groups of four to six people. For each small group session, the group will invite someone from another group to act as a "Plus One" for them. This +1 role will be used throughout the workshops. The person in this role will listen to what is going on in the group, but will not speak. When the group finishes working on a case, it will then be for the +1 to formulate questions for the group which draw attention to what the group might be ignoring and/or taking for granted. In reflecting back to the group in this way, the +1 should be calling the structure of the group's processes into question in a way which is rooted in the desire of the group rather than coming from some supposedly Ideal position.

Programme

There will be two kinds of plenary session: the introductory plenary for each weekend will present the key theoretical ideas for the weekend; and the review plenary will be used to 'debrief' the +1's in order to discuss how this role is being used, to develop a shared understanding of what is problematic about this role, and to reflect on the series as a whole. The journal sessions will be for individual writing and reflection, and the fieldwork between weekends will form an essential part of the work on the participants' cases.

Fri eve	
6.00 – 7.30	8.00 – 9.30
introductions	introductory plenary

Sat am		Sat pm		Sat eve
9.30 – 11.00	11.30 – 12.30	2.00 – 3.30	4.00 – 5.00	5.30 – 7.00
small group +1	review plenary/ journal	small group +1	review plenary/ journal	small group +1

Sun am		Sun pm	
9.30 – 10.30	11.00 – 12.30	2.00 – 3.00	3.00 – 4.00
review plenary/ journal	small group +1	review plenary/ journal	Preparation for fieldwork

First weekend: Reading the Situation

> *"Effective managers and professionals in all walks of life, whether they be business executives, public administrators, organisational consultants, politicians, or trade unionists, have to become skilled in the art of 'reading' the situations that they are attempting to organise or manage."* Gareth Morgan

Participants will be asked to come with a short description of a case they want to work with. During this first weekend, the focus will be on describing this case, and recognising how the different stories are slanted according to the assumptions they (and those listening) become committed to.   By the end of the weekend we will have learned something about the relationships between power and knowledge, and between speaking-and-listening. As a result there will be new questions about the cases to be pursued before the second weekend.

Second weekend: Understanding the Logic of the Situation

> *"Real failure can only be stated in terms of a <u>failure to meet the challenge of the case</u> .... the need in each case for someone to meet someone at a deep level... The case conference is of no value unless afterwards someone carries over into a personal relationship the new understanding that the discussion has brought."* Donald Winnicott

Participants will come with further analysis and insight into the situation they described last time.   The focus this time will be on hypothesising about the theory-in-use in the client system - identifying the structure under which the process appears to be

unfolding - in order to arrive at an 'as if' formulation of what that client system is taking as being problematic. The aim will be to leave the second weekend with a hypothesis which not only states the client's theory-in-use, but also 'what is left to be desired' - ie some explanation of why it is that the client is unhappy now, wants change, has called in a consultant (or the manager has taken on a consultant position in relation to his/her own department). In effect this is formulating a new problematic. 'Homework' will be concerned with finding an intervention which 'surfaces' this new problematic for the client system in a way which they can take up.... which speaks to the client system's desires.

Third weekend: Encountering the challenge of the case

> *"The [consultant] automatically selects the ideal clientele in which to study himself or herself vicariously..., though the knowledge cannot benefit us... until we acknowledge the fact that our work, however useful, has also been an evasion of the truth about ourselves." Robin Skynner*

People may come in with news of change.   And they may not.   This weekend brings in the question of the place taken up by participants as consultants, and their own 'theories in use'.   The precise form of this weekend will be determined by the work so far. Although the overall process for this weekend will probably be the same, the balance in the small groups will be different. This time there will be a shift in emphasis towards the +1 process within the group, the aim of which will be to help the challenge of the case for the consultant to emerge - the participant's 'crucial question'.

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Part I - Some Background Theory

The ideas we bring to this workshop are still evolving, so by way of background reading we shall give you more fragments of work-in-progress than references to, or off-prints of, published material. We hope that the three following excerpts from current pieces of writing will help you in orienting yourself towards the workshop.

What do consultants do?

A year ago we ran a one-day workshop for IGA which some of the participants in this workshop attended. This opened up some of the questions about consulting which we hope to explore with you. Our introduction to that workshop is still relevant:

> What we shall invite you to do, with us, is to examine what we understand consultancy to <u>be</u> - what consultants are up to, and to seek to clarify our own intentions in (accepting) consultancy work - whether from a base external or internal to an organisation, whether in the public, private or voluntary sector, and whether for a large-scale advisory assignment, or as a consultant to a staff group, or for a team-building away-day.
>
> We shall give you a simple schema (not ours) for distinguishing between three basic postures:
>
> - the bird consultant, who supplies know-how which he or she is known by the client to have, to solve a problem identified by the client.
> - the guru, who is asked by the client to use his or her insight and theory to clarify what the 'real' problem is 'behind' the 'presenting problem' which is identified by the client, <u>and</u> to formulate what can be done about it.
> - the consultant who was called the process consultant by Mintzberg, and who we want to call the fool, who, in response to the 'identified problem' put forward by the client, like the client is accepted to know neither what the 'real' problem is, nor its solution, but who goes into the darkness of this shared ignorance with the client and, with the client, learns with him or her the hard way how things can be different.

		Client	
		knows	doesn't know
Consultant	knows	bird	guru
	doesn't know		fool

> We shall in particular try to open up this third mode, which we believe provides a stance from which to sort out the ambiguities into which consultants repeatedly wander, and in Winnicott's phrase is a necessary condition for 'meeting the challenge of the case'. This will lead us into intellectually and emotionally deep waters - it entails
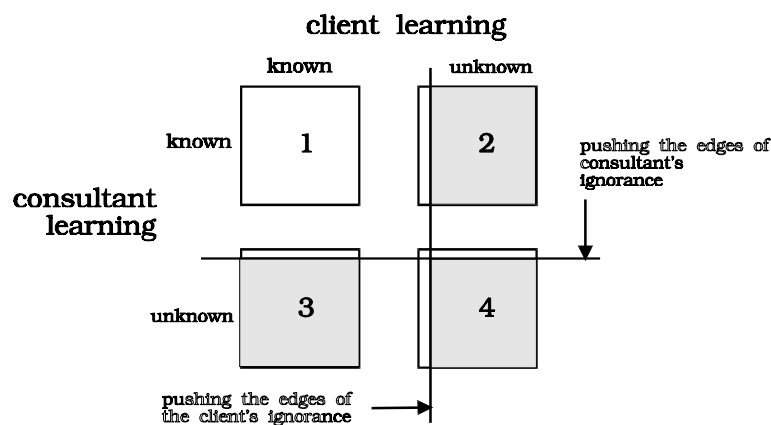
identifying the sources of our <u>certainties</u> and relativising them, hence steering into the <u>unconscious anxieties</u> from which we and our clients defend ourselves.

So what do consultants do? Crucial to the overall success of the process is the nature of the client's commitment to it. Significant in the way this commitment operates is the distinction maintained between the *client system* and the *sponsoring system*. The distinction means that, while the consultancy must succeed on its merits in the eyes of the client system, it can only have the opportunity to do so within a context established by the sponsoring system. The sponsoring system is another way of looking at the nature of the consultancy relationship between consultant and client which emphasises the context in which the consultancy takes place:

These different kinds of relationships therefore are symptomatic of different kinds of sponsoring system... In the bird contract, everyone knows what needs doing, in the guru contract the consultant knows but the client doesn't, and in the fool contract, no-one knows. **It is in understanding the nature of this last kind of contract and how to get to it that we arrive at working interpretively in the fullest sense of the word.**

If we consider the consultant-client relationship as one in which both sides have the possibility of learning, then what we are looking at is a version of the Johari window, describing different kinds of learning contract:

Box 1 is where everyone knows what is going on, Boxes 2 and 3 are where either the client or consultant is learning from the other, and Box 4 is where everyone is learning.[1]

The consultant who pushes the edges of his own ignorance as well as those of his client moves towards the 'unknown' box 4. We have called this the place of the fool. If the consultant doesn't call the client's understanding into question, then the danger will be that the client learns nothing, even though the consultant learns a lot (box 3). We haven't given this box 3 a name because it isn't really consultancy - more like action learning. The guru, as the term is used amongst the Anglo-Saxons, ensures that the client learns what he already knows (box 2). This is more common in the relationship between consultants and their clients where the consultants have "seen it all before". Perhaps more common, however, is the role of the consultant in box 1 - the bird

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[1] A name for the bottom-left box is 'apprentice', because once the guru has sold a particular 'solution' to the client, so that the client can now claim to know as well as the consultant, the consultant's apprentices can come in to implement the solution for the client, in the process learning how it works (and in many cases doesn't!).

consultant, where both the consultant and the client know what they are going to do - its just cheaper to buy in the expertise rather than hold it in-house.

We wish to try to open up the third 'fool' mode of consultancy, which we believe provides a stance from which to sort out the ambiguities into which consultants repeatedly wander, and in Winnicott's phrase is a necessary condition for 'meeting the challenge of the case'.

This entails being willing not only to learn from experience, but also to problematise the values and theoretical frameworks (psychoanalysis, group analysis, socialism, feminism, common sense) upon which we take our stand in making sense of our experience; to accept that the torch (psychoanalysis etc) we shine into the darkness not only helps us to see things and choose our path, but also makes sure that we <u>don't</u> see things and fall down holes (because of the narrowness of its beam, and the restricted wavelength of its light).

What one consultant does

In December 1992 Philip gave a paper at a seminar - Institution as Symptom - which covered some of the same ground, and also drew upon his own consulting experience to clarify what consultants do:

I prefer to think of myself as a strategy *analyst* because of the way I work. If you use the following 4-box model, then you can describe this as follows:

	client knows	client doesn't know
consultant knows	Box 1 (bird)	Box 2 (guru)
consultant doesn't know	Box 3 (apprentice)	Box 4 (analyst)

Most people think of consultants as operating in Boxes 1 or 2 - working as knowledge outworkers who the client doesn't want on the payroll (Box 1) or as in some way knowing better than the client what s/he should be doing because of their superior knowledge and experience (Box 2).

In practice, consultants spend much of their time in Box 3 - often learning at the client's expense. The politics of the consulting process is such that the client - often senior management - is prepared to allow *learning* about what is going on to take place amongst the consulting team, depending on them to bring that learning to them at the top so that they can pass on its benefits to the organisation *top-down*.

What interests me is working in Box 4, where both consultant and client know that they don't know, but in which the consultant's participation in a *learning process* is valued. At this level, *strategy* ceases to be a long-term vs short-term perspective, and becomes rather a *policy* perspective - the definition of strategy which I like is that **strategy is the management of ignorance**. In this mode, my work is focused around working interpretively in relation to the client system.

We can already begin to see some psychoanalytic parallels here – if we start by asserting that the prime function of a business was to support the identities of its

managers, which would lead us to a *pleasure principle* modified, of course, by a reality principle. But the cynic would say that this was to a far lesser extent than you might expect.

So what do I actually <u>do</u>*?* In every case, the client is *stuck* in some way which calls into question the viability of the organisation as a whole - is it going to continue to exist. So we come to *repetition* and the *death drive*: there is something about the way their business works which keeps repeating itself - despite all their attempts to change - and it is beginning to scare them:

	stuckness
Retailer	centre-OpCo split
Defense contractor	fragmentation of marketing
Chemical manufacture	functional business
Doorstep delivery	declining sales
Computer services	loss of margin
Professional services	impossible-to-govern

In the Table above, I list some organisations and their presenting problems. It is very difficult to say how this work arises. It is always in the context of an ongoing dialogue in which a conversation is taking place about the history of events. It is always after a lot of other 'quick fixes' have been tried and failed. And there is always a recognition of the fact that there is something problematic about the ways in which people are working in relation to each other - there are issues of *power* and *governance*.

In the UK and the States, a number of approaches have developed to understanding the nature of the consulting process. These have a lot to contribute, but it is my opinion that they leave something to be desired. The Lacanian return to Freud offers a way of approaching this existing work, and raising a new generation of questions. Approaching this from the point of view of the Institution approaches this work in terms of power and governance.

How does a consultant start?

Barry is working with another colleague, Nano McCaughan, on a book which may be called 'Systems Thinking for Harassed Managers'. Here is part of a draft of the first chapter:

So how do we respond when someone presents us with a more or less clearly defined problem and asks for our help in tackling it? In the next chapter we discuss how we can begin to uncover what we are being asked to address, through skilful questioning. For now we are simply concerned with the consultant's essential stance. If we are naive at the beginning we may find ourselves in a morass later. (Even of we are smart we may find ourselves in a morass later, but if we understand what is going on when problems are defined and addressed, we have a better chance of extricating ourselves.)

In a nutshell, the challenge is to attend to several things at once: to the picture of the client's situation as it unfolds; to the way the client builds up this picture, in their initial statement and in the continuing conversation; and to the way we respond and contribute to this process. We probably cannot think about all these things simultaneously, but we can learn to keep an eye on each of them as the consultation continues.

To illustrate what we mean (using an example from our workshops): a project leader in a voluntary organisation states his problem in this way: 'How can I enable the

members of my staff to talk to one another and trust one another?' So we register first of all the beginnings of a picture being presented. All is not well between the staff: they are not talking to each other and do not trust each other. Secondly we register that this is the client's picture of what is going on: we do not know whether other members of the project would say this, or whether we would say this if we visited them. The client's story in some way reflects his concerns, which as yet we don't know much about. It may also reflect his view of us and what he thinks will arouse our interest and sympathy. he is talking about a malfunction, but what we are hearing is a complaint.

Thirdly, if we are alert to our own responses - to what we feel about the client and his story, and to what we say or ask about it - we may also register how we are perhaps getting drawn into the story, accepting that the staff are mistrustful and agreeing that this is a bad thing, or rejecting the client and his story and taking a critical posture. It will be by being alert to this level of the drama that we are enabled to adopt a systemic approach to the client's situation.

The tension between listening and intervening

So at this stage we are as consultants seeking both to listen to the client's description of his or her situation, and also to position ourselves in relation to it. If we are too busy asking questions and proposing formulations of the problem, we may muffle the voice of the client's concern, which we should not equate with the problem they initially pose to us. In one workshop two of us worked hard on a problem posed by a social services manager, which concerned conflict between two social work teams for which she was responsible, about the fostering of a handicapped Chinese child. When we eventually put forward our hypotheses and suggested some options for action, she backed off rapidly and said she 'had 'chosen the wrong example'. later she said she had not discussed the problem she was really concerned about. It is possible that this was a smoke-screen; but at the time it seemed more likely that the consultants had not picked up signals which would have told us that we had lost touch with what was really on her mind.

If on the other hand we simply listen and take the situation as it is presented, we may in effect buy in to a formulation of a problem which is itself the problem. Or we may fail to clarify in what way the problem described is itself the problem. Or we may fail to clarify in what way the problem described is the responsibility of the client, with the risk of spending a lot of time elucidating a situation in which the client is powerless to intervene.

In our workshops we notice that managers have difficulties with positioning themselves in relation to the situations presented by their fellow workshop members. They often listen well and ask sharp questions, but they too readily accept the picture they are offered as reality, and tacitly endorse the presenter's judgement about what is wrong. This is wholly understandable: they are colleagues in the workshop, often in the same kind of work, and they readily identify with the trials of the presenter. It is satisfying for consultants and clients as it were to sit side by side and analyse a malfunction which is safely 'over there'. Sometimes they come up with good ideas; but they also set limits to what they can achieve. For if the behaviour of the presenter is itself part of the pattern of interaction which perpetuates the dysfunction, they will be unable to see or say this.

Systems practice entails accepting the client's descriptions as information, while continuing to work at formulating hypotheses which include the behaviour of the client in the processes represented. This will be the subject of a later chapter.
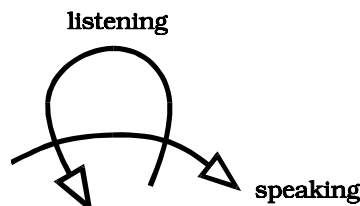
Part II - Speaking and Listening, Power and Knowledge, Dilemmas

These notes are intended as an *aide memoire* for the theoretical ideas which we introduce during the first weekend. They are not intended to be fully intelligible on their own.

Speaking and Listening

The small group sessions will take the form of a conversation between a speaker - the one presenting a case - and a group of listeners who seek to make sense of what is described t them. Speaking and listening may be seen as two complementary positions in a conversation. Here is a way of understanding what is going on:

> Everything said is said by someone to someone else - even when speaking to myself there is a listener. If 'stream of consciousness' is understood as an endless chain of speaking behaviours, then any listening to this chaining will involve punctuating the chain. This can be thought of as a backward movement which makes sense out of the forward movement of speaking. The listening is then a framing of the reality brought forth by the speaking through the punctuating of the speaking chain by the listening.

> The manager can make sense through doing two things: defining reality through the speaking 'I' position he takes, in relation to which reality is brought forth [2]; and framing through the choices he makes in the way he constructs the reality he 'sees' - through the ways he listens to his speaking.
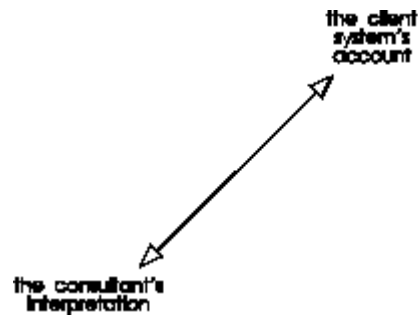
To get beyond a simplistic notion of consultancy, it is necessary to take into account two other 'positions' in the conversation between the presenter (speaker) and the consultant (listener). The questions associated with the position of critical process in the following note are the kinds of question which we expect to be raised by those taking the role of *Plus One* during the workshop, referred to as the position of the 'fool' above:

> In any conversation we can distinguish between two positions:
>
> - that of the manager or client who describes what is going on, and takes up the position of 'client system' in their accounting; and
> - that of the consultant, who listens to the account, and forms a view of not only of the what-is-going-on, but also of the client's view of the what-is-going-on. This view is expressed in an interpretation of the client's view.
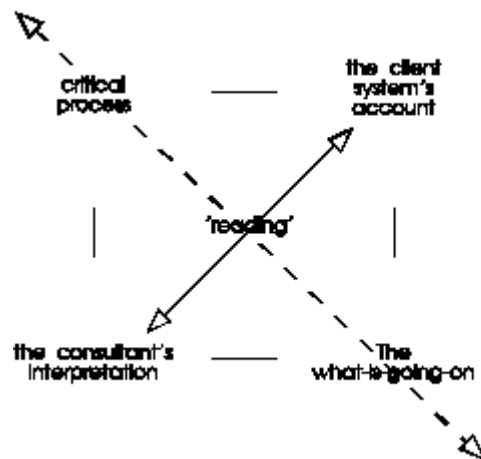
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[2]Taking this speaking 'I' position as the subject-position means referring to the set of speaking 'I' positions imagined to be a particular person.

Such a conversation implies two other positions, from which it is impossible to speak, though sometimes we speak *as if* we could:

- That of the 'what-is-going-on' - the organisation as it 'is'. This is the position attributed to the proverbial fly on the wall. The psychoanalytical distinction between reality and phantasy can imply the possibility of taking up of this position; but any account of this reality is always going to be mediated in practice by the speaker (and so becomes another aspect of the client system's account.)
- That of a 'critical process', which unfolds in relation to the conversation over time.

This 'critical process' position is pointed towards by the questions we have already discussed:

- Are we placing too much dependence on one account of what-is-going-on?
- Are we assuming that there is a right way to interpret the 'presented problem'?
- Are we able to pass beyond the presenting problem?

These questions are directed towards uncovering what-is-being-ignored, as a structural characteristic of the being-in-conversation of the positions of the consultant and client.

So everything that is said is said by someone to an-other: in this diagram by the client to the consultant. (We suggest) the challenge of the case is only addressed insofar as the conversation is oriented in relation to this other axis: thereby becoming a continuously seeking after discovering 'what-is-going-on' in the full knowledge that it can never be pinned down; and therefore a continuous asking of what the conversation as it is being conducted is causing to be ignored (forgotten: the word for truth in Greek is 'αληθεια' - 'unforgetting'.)

The reading is taking place between the consultant and the client system, and the challenge of the case arises insofar as the other axis arises which remains perpetually Other to the reading. This Other axis represents the question of what is being ignored, and therefore the challenge of the case. A way of formulating this is to say that the ethic of this direction constitutes a passion for ignorance.

Power and Ignorance

According to the picture built up in the previous note, it is possible to have a conversation in which the participants are aware that they can never have a total knowledge of what-is-going-on, nor can they come up with a hypothesis or interpretation which fully explains what-is-going-on. Philip has called this working within a 'conjectural' paradigm. When the participants behave as though they could have total knowledge and/or a total theory, they can be seen as working within three other paradigms, which are described in the next note.

Using these two concepts - (i) the reality brought forth by a particular form of speaking, and (ii) the 'frame' as a particular way of listening to this speaking - we can distinguish between these four paradigms:

1. Within the *instructional* paradigm, the primary concern is in the learning of particular ways of listening and speaking about problems - this paradigm best characterises traditional classroom teaching in which the knowledge needed is specified and transmitted to the manager in such a way that both the ways of speaking and listening are given.

2. The *revelatory* paradigm, presenting a given way of listening within which a number of things can be said about a particular problem, and in the context of which the manager is encouraged to develop his own particular ways of speaking, even though this freedom is limited by the nature of the frame. Skills-based teaching is characteristic of this paradigm. The given way of listening may be a particular behavioural skill, or even mathematical algorithm, which invokes a particular way of making sense of/listening to what is said.

3. The *emancipatory* paradigm, providing the manager with a particular reality which can be used within the context of all sorts of ways of listening. Case teaching is characteristic of this paradigm because it permits freedom in how the manager listens to/makes sense of what is going on in the case, but on the basis of the particular formulation of the 'reality' of the case.

4. The *conjectural* paradigm, which differs from the other paradigms in that it seeks to leave the manager free both to formulate the reality he brings forth through his speaking, and also in how he listens to his speaking. Project work and action learning both offer managers a way of working within this paradigm [3].

These differences can be summarised in the diagram shown below.

This view of the subject's relation to a paradigm is a way of describing his or her way of being on the speaking-and-listening axis in relation to the Other axis, and
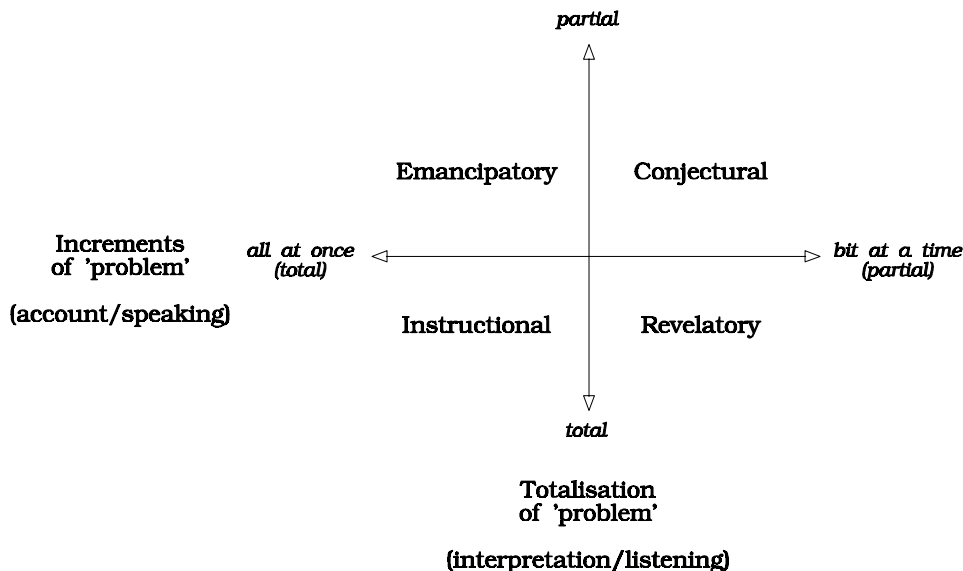
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[3]This paradigm is therefore a special case, in that it demands that the teacher <u>must</u> be conscious of his own part, otherwise he will necessarily collapse into one of the other paradigms. By 'conscious' I mean that he must have an awareness of his own way of speaking/listening as one out of many possible other ways... It is this awareness which is brought forth by the activity of reflective analysis through a process of self-referencing, which therefore surfaces the issue of the listening. It is a 'parenthesising'.

allows us to formulate this relation as a way of being *obedient* to particular ways of speaking-and-listening ('the way we do things around here') - to particular forms of knowledge. The *Power* of the paradigm over the subject is therefore the extent to which it commands this obedience.

                        partial

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        Emancipatory   **Conjectural**

Increments   *all at once* <———————————————> *bit at a time*
of 'problem' *(total)*   *(partial)*

(account/speaking)

            Instructional   **Revelatory**

                v

                        total

                Totalisation
                of 'problem'

            (interpretation/listening)

These four paradigms of power/knowledge enable us to distinguish four different ways in which managers can become stuck, and hence four kinds of stuckness we may find ourselves up against as consultants, in the workshop or elsewhere:

> Over the years I had developed a sense of there being three distinct ways in which managers became stuck: their stuckness manifested itself as alienation, impotence or fragmentation.
>
> - *alienation* took the form of the manager having lots of things to be done with good reason for doing every one of them, but with no feeling that any of them mattered at all;
> - *impotence* was the manager being unable to connect events as they were unfolding with his desires for the way in which he felt he would like them to be unfolding; and
> - *fragmentation* was a kind of all-consuming 'busyness' in which the manager seemed to have vast numbers of things to get done by yesterday, but with none of them appearing to lead him anywhere.

These ways of getting stuck were the corollaries of the paradigms described earlier [4]. Each of these forms of stuckness had severe implications for the business if the manager who was stuck also had some responsibility for developing the business. His alienation meant that he never really seemed able to develop anything at all, despite

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[4]So first of all we had four ways of speaking/listening, each of which had their own characteristic ways of being-in-the-world. By externalising these 'givens' onto the teacher-as-metaphor, these became three forms of 'stuckness' arising from an attachment to particular forms of relation to this Other-as-listener. It was only some time after I had written this that I was able to name the fourth form of stuckness: *insignificance*. It characterised the behaviour of not being able to accept 'givens' as they presented themselves - being slavish about not adopting the teacher's 'givens' or conjecturalism for the sake of it. This was being stuck with refusing conscious dependency through not being prepared to trust a teacher to be under-determining.

making himself enormously busy; impotence meant that despite all his power, he could never really find ways of using it which seemed to have any significant effect; and fragmentation led to incoherence in what he was doing, and an inability to sustain the initiatives he took. In each case the manager could say 'I have tried everything that I can think of, and still nothing works.' Under these circumstances, what would be more natural than to seek out an expert who could provide a solution?

free	Fragmentation	Insignificance
given	Alienation	Impotence
	given	*free*

Interpretation (vertical axis label)

Account (horizontal axis label)

Intervention then becomes a matter of calling these forms of stuckness into question.

Process Dilemmas

The stuckness of consultants and client systems can be conceptualised as process dilemmas, in ways that suggest procedures for unsticking them. Here is a definition and analysis of process dilemmas, which we shall work with in the workshop:

A dilemma is a problem situation in which there are inherent conflicts that are impossible to resolve. It is only possible to formulate a process dilemma in relation to a particular situation with which particular people are involved.

A process dilemma has a number of aspects:

- a **process** for dealing with the problem
- a **premise** about the nature of the problem for which the process is a solution
- an **outcome** of the process which is an observable effect of the process
- a **context** of people and vested interests which acts as a frame for the premise-process-outcome giving consistency/coherence to it.

The dilemma exists because the outcome has **two** possible kinds of **consequence**:

- on the one hand a consequence which is consistent with the current framing context and leads to it being reinforced;
- on the other a consequence which 'flips' the whole problem situation into another framing context with a different premise-process-outcome.

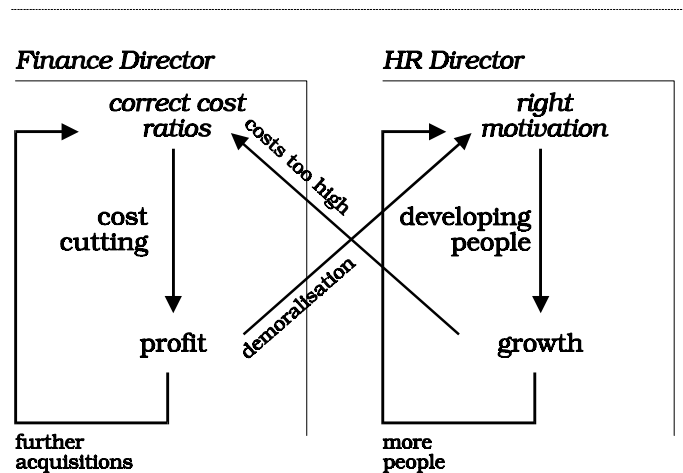An example of this might be the dilemma between valuing people and getting rid of people:

- The first **context** might be one associated with the FD, the **premise** being that there is a correct set of cost ratios for a business, the **process** being cost cutting to enforce these ratios, the **outcome** being the emergence of a 'correct' set of accounts.
  - One **consequence** from the first context might be greater profitability leading to further acquisitions leading to a further cycle of cost-cutting.

- An alternative **consequence** however might be increasing demoralisation of the remaining staff to the point where there <u>has</u> to be a 'flip' into the second context and a focus on people development.
- The second context might be one associated with the HR Director, the **premise** being that if the motivation of people is wrong, then the business won't perform, the **process** being people development, the **outcome** being creative engagement with the business.
  - One **consequence** from the second context is that there is successful growth leading to more people coming into the business leading to the need for more people development.
  - An alternative **consequence** however might be that the 'people' costs become too great and there <u>has</u> to be a 'flip' into the first context and a focus on cost cutting.

The procedures for unsticking these dilemmas revolve around understanding the dilemma as a whole, including the dynamics of movement between the two 'frames'. Understanding what it is around which this oscillation is taking place is to understand what it is that is *driving* the dilemma.

For a useful account of dilemmas and their unravelling, see Charles Hamden-Turner's <u>Charting the Corporate Mind: From Dilemma to Strategy</u>, Blackwell 1990.

Part III – Formulating dilemmas: Viability, Identity and where to draw the line?

Formulating dilemmas

In this second weekend we would like to shift the focus of attention. Last time we focused on the consultant and his or her relatedness to the client system. We concerned ourselves with different *orders* of process not only for the consultant but for the client system too. These orders depended on how many of the levels of $\dfrac{\dfrac{critical\_process}{interpretation/listening}}{\dfrac{account/speaking}{what-is-going-on}}$ were articulated in relation to each other, and corresponded to the different modes of consulting ('Background Theory' p2) - bird, guru, fool.

This time we shall be looking at how, as listeners to a description of what-is-going-on in an organisation, we can formulate hypotheses about the nature of the stuckness in the organisation that has led to the request for consultancy.

These forms of stuckness reflect an *obedience* to particular ways of speaking-and-listening in the client system <u>itself</u> ('Speaking and Listening' p4). In previous notes ('Speaking and Listening p5) we set out a scheme for elucidating this stuckness in the form of *process dilemmas* in relation to our own experience. Applied to the client system itself, it will constitute a key concept and analytical tool for the second weekend.

Bound up with the approach to speaking-and-listening was a notion of time: a *linear* time bound up with the forward march of speaking; and a *circular* time bound up with the *après coup* of listening. These notions of time divide us between experience as a repetition of something we take to be ourselves, and experience as irreversibility - we all have to die sometime.

In identifying forms of stuckness, we are alluding to symptoms which are repeated but which in some way the client system wishes not to be; and in speaking of change - meeting the challenge of the case - we are alluding to the possibility of 'moving on'. How are we to work with these notions in formulating hypotheses about client systems? How do these notions of time 'show' in relation to client systems?

To be able to formulate usable hypotheses we require (at least) two things:

- We need to be aware of the consequences of drawing the boundary of the organisation (system) we are concerned with in a particular place. If we are asked to consult to a team about their inter-personal difficulties, should we regard these difficulties as the team's 'symptom', and 'treat' the team, as 'really' being the problem of particular individuals, or as a symptom of a wider organisation (and what level of organisation: the department, the hospital, the health authority, the NHS?). In other words, where do we draw the line?

  In a Plus One position we may ask questions about the consequences of drawing the line where it has been drawn, and whose interests this has served.

- We require a serviceable model of, or metaphor for, organisations; and a sensitivity to the fact that it <u>is</u> a model or metaphor, with distinctive biases. Gareth Morgan's <u>Images of Organisation</u> (Sage, 1986) sets out some dominant metaphors in current use.

> As we listen to a description of a problem in an organisation, we frame our reading of the situation in terms of a model or metaphor (machine, open system, family...) which may be knowingly adopted or may be taken for granted. From a Plus One position (critical process), as we listen to the way people are listening to the description, we may ask what this metaphor excludes from the conversation, and whose position and power it privileges with obedience - whether within or beyond the client system.

We shall now expand on each of these issues in turn.

Where do we draw the line?

An alternative title for this section would be: 'whose symptom is it anyway?' If I have a headache, is it *intimate* to me, the property of my body? Or is it the headache of my over-stressed department, a symptom of some other body - '*extimate*' rather than intimate[5] - for which my body is a *foreign* body?

This is not a new idea. Foulkes distinguished between an 'autistic' concept of the symptom, and what we might call a more systemic concept:

> We might describe the route taken from the autistic nature of the symptom to the more articulate recognition and formulation of the problem underlying that symptom as an important landmark of the therapeutic process itself. In a sense this is the same as the making conscious of the unconscious; but the group-analytic situation, while dealing intensively with the unconscious in the Freudian sense, brings into operation and perspective a totally different area of which the individual is equally unaware. Moreover, the individual is as much compelled and modelled by these colossal forces as by his own *id* and defends himself as strongly against their recognition without being aware of it, but in quite different ways and modes. One might speak of a social or interpersonal unconscious.[6]

Paul Bates ('Believing is Believing', in press) has written about the problem of clergy breakdown in an Anglican diocese. He says that the breakdown of each priest could be 'interpreted in individual terms', that is, in terms of their personality, family history and so on; but he prefers a 'corporate interpretation':

> Further evidence that the whole had to be taken into account came from the fact that many of the clergy who constituted a 'problem', those who got into debt, or marital trouble, or depression. or a breakdown of relationships, were on the edge of the diocese, both literally and metaphorically. The 'junior' clergy seemed to have a struggle, junior in terms of the length of time they had spent in the profession, not in terms of their chronological age. There were similar issues around non-stipendiary clergy, those who earn their living in some secular occupation. They are a part of the

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[5]The extimate is that which is <u>both</u> intimate <u>and</u> exterior: it constitutes a *foreign body*.

[6]S.H. Foulkes 1964. Therapeutic Group Analysis. p52

body of the clergy but, by virtue of their jobs, were on the fringe. It was also apparent that the further people lived away from the centre of the diocese, or where the centre was perceived to be, the more they felt uncared for, and the more likely they were to be 'problems'. Some of this could, of course, be interpreted in individual terms, but the hypothesis that springs from the myth of coherence is that all these are symptoms of a failure of oversight. A corporate interpretation of what was going on would see the 'problems' as showing the feelings on the fringes of the diocese, where people were, as it were, 'falling over the edge'.

Although he does not say this, it is possible to imagine the diocesan authorities not knowing where to draw the line. They might lay on counselling for clergy in difficulty, and screen new applicants more thoroughly, and fail to consider the breakdowns as symptoms of the diocese.

Philip has written about 'shifting from an intimate to an extimate formulation of the symptom':

> The intimate reifies an inside//outside - an imaginary formation of the subject. The extimate subverts this imaginary formation. Taking the Institution as symptom means asking what notion of symptom we are attending to and what is the nature of the subject's investment in it. In doing this however, are we going to be moving 'beyond the couch'?

Foulkes too problematises this relation between the individual and the group. Certainly he is using the group like a model of the mental apparatus of ego, id and superego, in which its dynamics are personified and dramatised by the group. But he is not *only* saying this:
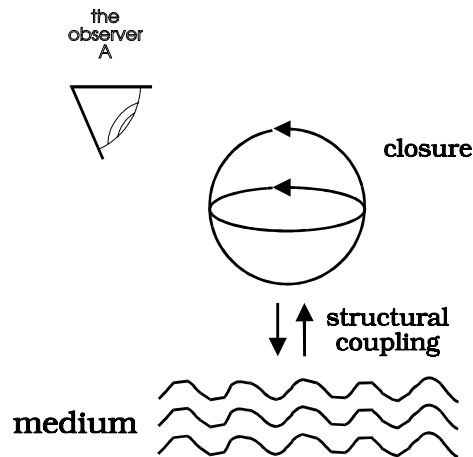
> "In the group-analytic group, the manifest content of communication, broadly speaking, relates to the latent meaning of this communication in a similar way as the manifest dream relates to the latent dream thoughts. This matter is so important and so bound up with our concept of a *group matrix* that I shall once more take occasion to stress the group matrix as the operational basis of all relationships and communications. Inside this network the individual is conceived as a nodal point. The individual in other words is not conceived as closed but as an open system. An analogy can be made with the neuron in anatomy and physiology, the neuron being the nodal point in the total network of the nervous system which always reacts and responds as a whole (Goldstein). As in the case of the neuron in the nervous system, so is the individual suspended in the group matrix."[7]

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[7]S.H. Foulkes 1964. Therapeutic Group Analysis. p118

Viability and Identity

The biologists Maturana and Varela[8] represent a biological organism[9] with a central nervous system like this:

This is an assertion that an organism survives as long as:

- It remains in a dynamic relation (structural coupling) with its environment or medium- eating, breathing, excreting. Maturana and Varela call this 'conservation of fit'.

- It maintains an operational closure in the organisation of this dynamic relation by which it continually re-creates itself from moment to moment and so maintains its viability (from the viewpoint of an observer). (It is said that we change all the molecules in our bodies in the course of seven years. If we were not continuously reassembling ourselves we would disintegrate.)

- In the case of organisms with a central nervous system which is itself in a dynamic relation with its medium, the organism also maintains a cognitive closure in the organisation of its nervous system, and so maintains its identity.[10] Maturana and Varela refer to the maintenance of both forms of closure as 'conservation of closure'.

We can use this as a model of any living system, including individuals, organisations and parts of organisations. This is how Barry has explained the 'open systems' and 'systemic' models of organisations:

> In the writings of Rice, Trist, Miller and their colleagues at the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations (eg 1967), the word 'system' is used to refer to a bounded entity, in an environment, which survives and sometimes fulfils the aims of its backers by taking in 'inputs' (materials, people, information), doing something with them, and returning

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[8]A good book here is The Tree of Knowledge: the biological roots of human understanding by Maturana and Varela Shambala 1987

[9]You will notice that we have already 'drawn a line' by speaking of a biological organism.

[10]Strictly speaking, both forms of closure define identity: the particular form of viability defines the phylogenetic (race) identity, and what is referred to here as "identity" is the ontogenetic (individual) identity.

them as 'outputs' to the environment. The 'system' in this model corresponds to what we call an organisation or institution in ordinary experience. Expositions of this model in the literature point up different aspects, according to the interests of the writer. From our point of view, there are two distinguishable themes.

The first is that of the openness of this 'system' to an environment (which earlier theories of organisations ignored), the exchanges with that environment through which it remains viable, the regulation of transactions across these boundaries (management), and the relation between these transactions and the proclaimed or inferred purposes of people 'in' the 'system' - managers, stakeholders, employees.

The second is that of the stability of the 'system' itself, and the way it conserves a distinctive form through all its exchanges with a changing environment (homeostasis). It concerns the way it resists changes to its essential organisation, and the processes through which this essential organisation may change through time, or perhaps be suddenly transformed.

There is another broad school of writers, like Gregory and Mary Catherine Bateson (eg 1972, 1987), and Selvini Palazzoli (eg 1986), sometimes called 'systemic' writers, for whom there is a different focus. This is upon the <u>patterns of interaction</u> between persons, groups and material things in their physical and social context. This is the domain of systemic family therapy, and of Bateson's speculations about mind as something which is not located within the surfaces of human bodies, or indeed located at all. It is a focus upon communication 'systems'. From this point of view, a 'system' is a pattern of interaction, between members of a family, groups in a conference or organisation, the employees of a company, or an organisation and others in its environment - which an observer selects out of the total hurly-burly and represents in words and diagrams.

In effect, we are faced by the problem of having <u>two bodies</u>: a natural body and a body politic. The challenge we face in this sense is in their relation each one to the other. Consider this approach to the two-body problem from Edmund Plowden's *Reports*, collected and written under Queen Elizabeth I:

For the King has in him two Bodies, *viz.* a Body natural, and a Body politic. His Body natural (if it be considered in itself) is a Body mortal, subject to all Infirmities that come by Nature or Accident, the Imbecility of Infancy or old Age, and to the like Defects that happen to the natural Bodies of other People. But his Body politic is a Body that cannot be seen or handled, consisting of Policy and Government, and constituted for the Direction of the People, and the Management of the public weal, and this Body is utterly void of Infancy, and old Age, and other natural Defects and Imbecilities, which the Body natural is subject to, and for this Cause, what the King does in his Body politic, cannot be invalidated or frustrated by any Disability in his natural Body.

One form of organisational dilemma which presents this two-body problem can be understood as an unresolved conflict between those concerned with viability (conservation of a particular form of fit with the environment), and those concerned about identity *per se* (conservation of closure). For example,

- in the dilemma mapped out in the previous notes, those identified with the beliefs and concerns of the Finance Director were concerned with putting viability first: 'if we don't maintain profitability, we shall die'; whereas those identified with the concerns of the Human Resources Director were concerned with putting identity

first: 'if we don't develop and motivate our staff we shall be unable to <u>be</u> the kind of organisation which can deliver this product'.

- In order to retain its position and funding (viability) within the criminal justice system, the probation service has in recent years felt that it must accept a more containing and punitive role in society. Probation officers committed to a social work ethos for probation have talked about the service 'losing its soul'. They have felt that they are losing their identity as probation officers. This is another version of the same dilemma.

Formulating Interventions

Managers and consultants get 'stuck' therefore when they identify with one or other speaking-and-listening position in a dilemma and are unable to see the dilemma as a (w)hole. "Identify with" is here taken as meaning being-obedient-to a particular form of speaking-and-listening. We are approaching a 'symptom' therefore as 'speaking' of that which is essentially problematic, and which can be formulated as a dilemma.

In our work together this weekend, we will therefore be concerned, firstly, with developing the presenter's listening to his or her own speaking. We shall take this speaking as presenting 'symptoms' which can be formulated as dilemmas.

Secondly, in seeking to resolve these dilemmas through formulating interventions, we can then consider four facets of the *problematique* presented:

- what is the dilemma that is being taken as being problematic?
- how would we know that this dilemma had been resolved?
- what is our hypothesis about why it is problematic?
- how are we to elaborate the hypothesis in terms of possibilities for action?

Finally, in our *critical process*, we will be listening to where the line is being drawn, and to the nature of the listening emerging from the small groups. In this our concern will be with the terms in which we are formulating the system itself which is exhibiting the symptoms:

	WHO/M	WHY	
symptoms external to the system *extimate*	supply/demand structure	demand organisation	*the 'cut'*
symptoms internal to the system *intimate*	WHAT system structure	HOW system organisation	
	viability	identity	

Part IV – Passing beyond the problem as presented: what do we do next?

The focus of this third weekend is upon what you have learned about your own consulting (in whatever role you take up a consultant position). This learning may be at the level of <u>recognising</u> what you do and where you become stuck; of <u>understanding</u> what you do and where you become stuck; or of <u>acting</u>, and finding that you have moved on, with the client system and in your own practice. You may also have developed theories and techniques along the way.

We propose that you explore what you have learned by presenting to a group what has happened in your project to date, including your hypotheses and your interventions, drawing out how you see yourself to have been working, and what questions the project has raised for you about your own practice. (What we are calling your project may be a piece of work you have not talked about previously.)

The purpose of this may be clearer if we put this third workshop in the context of the whole series:

- In the <u>first weekend</u>, the presenter spoke about a case, and group members listened and offered readings of what was going on. We suggested that the Plus One should ask, amongst other things: is there too much reliance on one account here? Are speakers and listeners 'buying in' to the presenter's account, as though he/she knew and could give a total description of what was going on? (We shall comment later on the difficulty you have had with this role.)

- In the <u>second weekend</u> the presenter again described a case, but now presenter and group were invited to listen to this account, and to read it in terms of dilemmas in the client system - dilemmas which were manifesting themselves in the stuckness the presenter was being asked to address. An appropriate Plus One question was: are we assuming there is a right way of reading this situation?

- In the <u>third weekend</u>, the presenter will again speak about a case, but now presenter and group are invited to <u>listen to the way the presenter is listening to her/his own account</u>. In other words the thrust for all of us is towards a Plus One position. Presenter and group are seeking to articulate, not simply 'what has been going on', nor interpretations of 'what has been going on', but readings of how the presenter is interpreting what has been going on, including her/his own part in it. A key Plus One question (for all of us) will be: has the presenter been able to pass 'beyond' the problem as presented, the problem which includes themselves?

This process may face us with questions about the desire that shapes our consulting, about the ethic of our consultancy, and about the challenge of this and other cases for us.

What am I learning about consulting?

The focii of the three weekends correspond to the 'orders' of $\frac{\frac{critical\_process}{\frac{interpretation/listening}{account/speaking}}}{what-is-going-on}$ we

spoke of in the first weekend. ***First order*** when $\frac{account/speaking}{what-is-going-on}$ are being articulated

in relation to each other and we might say we are *imaginarising* what is going on, ***second***

order when $\frac{\frac{interpretation/listening}{account/speaking}}{what-is-going-on}$ are being articulated in relation to each other and we

begin to share ways of *symbolising* what is going on, and ***third order*** when all four are
articulated in relation to each other, and we might say that we *realise* what is going on.
We also spoke of the weekends in terms of *recognition, understanding* and *realisation*:
the *instant of recognition*, the *time for understanding*, and the *moment of realisation*.
These 'orders' bear a resemblance to the Imaginary, Symbolic and Real registers
identified by Lacan in the sense of *imaginarising, symbolising* and *realising* being figure
to the ground of the RSI registers[11].

Psychoanalysis in Britain tends to work with two's: phantasy and reality, inner
world and outer world. Lacan makes a different three-way 'cut' through everything[12]. In
the rest of these notes we shall scan the three weekends twice more, first to characterise
each one more fully, and secondly to discuss the difficulties of taking the Plus One
position at each stage.

In what follows the questions are framed from the point of view of the presenter
during the weekend. You can read 'he' or 'she' for 'I' throughout. There are references to
the previous notes:

        VIWDL = Viability, Identity and Were do we Draw the Line?
        SLPKD = Speaking and Listening, Power and Knowledge, Dilemmas.
        SBWCD = Some Background Theory to What Consultants Do.

I - Speaking (about the case)

This is about imaginarising in the sense that we build <u>images</u> of the organisation,
individuals, the client system, ourselves, and respond to them as though they were real -
as having a *consistency* which *persists* through time. This imaginarising has its mythical
roots in the time when the young child sees an image in a mirror and thinks: 'That's me'.
So the child identifies with an image of a complete body, and substitutes this for the
chaotic self-awareness of the subject who says 'That's me'. In a similar way, when we

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[11]Two very different kinds of introduction to Lacan's work are: <u>Jacques Lacan</u> by Jonathan Scott Lee,
University of Massachusetts, 1990, and <u>Looking Awry: an introduction to Jacques Lacan through popular
culture.</u> by Slavoj Zizek MIT Press 1991.

[12]For the purposes of this series it is not necessary to master/mistress this terminology: if you want to
know more, see for example Anthony Wilden's Chapter 1 in <u>System and Structure</u>, Tavistock 1972, or his
translation of Lacan in <u>Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis</u>, Johns Hopkins University Press 1968.

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think of an organisation as though it was an organism with a boundary (as in VIWDL p4), we are imaginarising.

Bird consultancy (SBWCD p1) is conducted in this order: we know what the organisation is, and we know what a solution would look like. Never mind all this philosophical stuff, just fix it! If we get trapped in this mode, we have no way of engaging with problems which are rooted in the way this 'reality' is being constructed, and by whom. Some of the questions we have worked with are ways of problematising this 'reality':

- In constructing an image of the client system, am I placing too much emphasis on one account? (SLPKD p2)
- What is the 'body' (the client system) I am working with? Where have I drawn the line (or accepted a line drawn by other people) to create this body? (VIWDL p6)
- What are the implications of drawing the line here, and whose interests does it serve? What difference does it make if I regard the presenting problem, not as 'intimate' to this body, but extimate to it (which subverts the imaginarised definition of the body - the natural body) (cf VIWDL pp2f)

II - Listening (to my own or others' speaking about the case)

This is about symbolising. It is also about languaging in the sense of constructing interpretations and hypotheses in ways that are mediated by language.

> All language allows us to speak of is the 'reality' constituted by the system of the symbolic... Because 'there is no metalanguage', the Real perpetually eludes our discourse. (Lee, p136)

An organisation constructs itself in ways which are mediated by language. What we cheerfully take to be a consistent identity or culture turns out to be a tissue of incompletely reconcilable beliefs and assumptions (premises), perpetuated in conversations between various individuals and groups. Dilemmas arise as members of the organisation act upon incompatible premises (SLPKD, pp5f).

Guru consultancy is conducted in this domain. The consultant finds himself in the position of having a master interpretative scheme (as did Freud, Foulkes, Lacan, Bateson, Marx (Karl), Marx (Groucho).... all of whom experienced being in this position), from which s/he is taken as being able to discern what is really going on and to say what needs to be done.

We may avoid being trapped in this position, if we ask questions like:

- What am I accepting as given, as certainties, in this situation (either as facts 'out there', or as a theoretical or ethical position)? Am I assuming there is a right theory for interpreting the situation presented? (cf SLPKD p2)

- What dilemmas can I formulate to explain the stuckness which is the presenting problem? What incoherences therefore are there in the way the affairs of the organisation are understood?

III - Listening to my own listening (to my own or others' speaking about the case)

This is about realising (which is not the same as an encounter with the 'reality' constructed through imaginarisation and symbolisation). When we encounter a moment of realisation, we encounter something which only makes its presence felt in verbal descriptions as disturbances - in something like what the Neptune poem calls 'a bend in the known'.[13]

> The Real, then, stands 'behind' the reality constituted in and by our use of language, and only hints at its operative presence in the variety of failures or ruptures or inconsistencies that mark this symbolic reality. (Lee p136)

Since a consultancy project is an episode in the life of the consultant, as well as in the lives of others who make up the client system, becoming aware of the Real problem means becoming aware of a question about what <u>we</u> are up to, as well as what other people are up to - the question of our own desire in the matter.

> ....Knowledge imposes a pattern, and falsifies,
> For the pattern is new in every moment
> And every moment is a new and shocking
> Valuation of all we have been.
> (T.S. Eliot, 'East Coker')

For example, after Barry had found a way of describing the dilemma of the merging hospital social work teams (presented on the first evening of the second weekend), and what happened during the session he ran for them, he found himself asking: 'How could I have been so dumb?' At this point he was encountering a question about himself, and not just about a bunch of people 'over there'.

As we listen to our own interpretations, we become aware of how they are shaped by the desire of the one who formulates them, as well as by 'what is going on'. (We might call this being aware of the 'countertransference'. This may be a useful thing to say, if it helps to locate what we are talking about. But it is misleading, insofar as it gives the impression that this is an aberration rather than something inevitable.)

It is in relation to these moments of realisation that we find fool consultancy, which we are exploring in this series. This direction is represented by the impossible axis
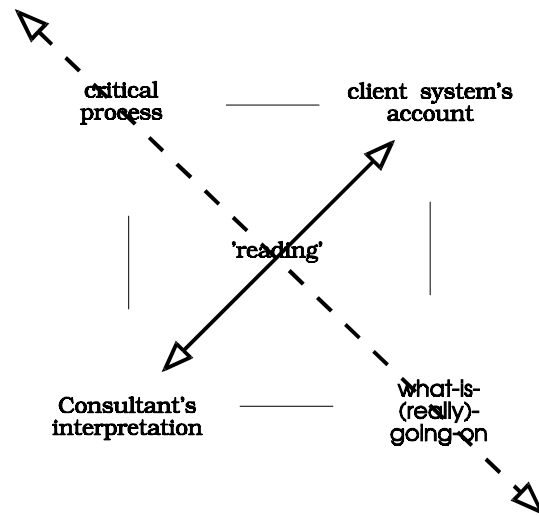
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[13]THE UNDISCOVERED PLANET by NORMAN NICHOLSON

> Out on the furthest tether let it run
> Its hundred-year-long orbit, cold
> As solid mercury, old and dead
> Before this world's fermenting bread
> Had got a crust to cover it; landscape of lead
> Whose purple voes and valleys are
> Lit faintly by a sun
> No nearer than a measurable star.
>
> No man has seen it; the lensed eye
> That pin-points week by week the same patch of sky
> Records not even a blur across its pupil; only
> The errantry of Saturn, the wry
> Retarding of Uranus, speak
> Of the pull beyond the pattern:
> The unknown is shown
> Only by a bend in the known.

in the diagram we introduced in the first workshop (SLPKD, p2). The questions we have suggested under II orient us to this impossible axis:

- Am I able to pass 'beyond' the problem as presented?

- What is the real problem? What is my real contract with the client system?

The point about these questions is that there is no *answer* - only moments of realisation when we encounter the challenge of the case, and are, in the Zen phrase, "fully involved and unconcerned". The test is whether the client system, and we ourselves, are released and able to move on.[14]

The impossibility of the Plus One

You have all had difficulty in taking up the Plus One role. Encountering this difficulty is not a failure: it is a first step to understanding the place of the consultant, as we are construing this role. This is the nub of the series.

So it may be useful to examine what the difficulties are - and why it has been difficult to acknowledge them. The difficulties can be related to the focus of each weekend:

(1)   First weekend: this work entailed coming to terms with the fact that what the presenter says is not, and can never be, the whole story. There is an irreducible partialness in the account (cf SLPKD pp3-5). We have sometimes ducked this by working with the presenter's account as if it were 'material' in a psychoanalytic sense, and therefore all we needed to work with.

The Plus Ones were in a position to draw attention to this; but they could only do so if they were themselves to live with the anxiety of not knowing, of always working

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[14]Compiling these notes, we were aware at this stage of a wish to introduce quotations from poets and religious writers. This could be a sign that we don't know what we are talking about, and want to hide this behind mysterious quotations. It could also reflect a recognition that we can't know what we are talking about, so that we reach for other discourses which allude in their content, and even more in their texture, to what cannot be said.

with a partial account. In Kleinian terms, we could describe this series in terms of the defences we have erected against this anxiety.

(2)   Second weekend: here we had to come to terms with the fact that the presenter's account and the group's interpretations are articulated through languaging. We think the radical implications of this have not been publicly acknowledged in this course, whatever individuals have made of it. We have sometimes side-stepped this by for example accepting individual or group analytic language as a *lingua franca* for the series.

If the Plus Ones were to question this, and ask whether we were assuming that there was a right way of interpreting the presenter's story, they had to tolerate the anxiety of accepting the partialness of language in general and of the course *lingua franca* in particular.

We think the recourse of Plus Ones to commenting on the process in the room was one version of this. Attending to the dealings between the presenter and the group was a relevant way of getting another fix on what was going on in the client system, and so addressing difficulty (1) above; but it also strongly invoked a group analytic frame of reference, and so protected us from the anxiety of (2).

(3)   Third weekend: This will present us with a further challenge in taking up a Plus One position - the challenge of coming to terms with the fool position itself. As we have said, this will entail shifting attention from the problem as presented, and the stuckness of the client system, to the stuckness of the consultant-client system, and to the real problem, in which the consultant is intimately (!) involved. This is the moment we were pointing to in the quotation from Robin Skynner in the pre-series flyer:

> The [consultant] automatically selects the ideal clientele in which to study himself or herself vicariously...., though the knowledge cannot benefit us... until we acknowledge the fact that our work, however useful, has also been an evasion about ourselves.

Postscript

PB: Is that it?

BP: Well yes. I think we have arrived somewhere..... It is somehow complete, although I do feel we have become crypto-Lacanian in the process.

PB: Except that Lacan refused to accept others' claims to know what he had said. And he ended up counting to 4 - not 3.

BP: Does that mean we need another weekend then....?

PB: Not if you count the spaces.... they came to the first weekend with something, to the second with dilemmas; and my guess is that, having assumed some kind of challenge at the end of the second, they will come to the third with a realisation.... after that comes the fourth...

BP: So what is this fourth then?

PB: The fourth is a bit like the other three, except without the innocence. In acting knowingly in relation to imaginarising, symbolising, and realising, the act itself somehow isn't the same any more. It becomes ethical. The quote from Lacan I like about this is:

"Scepticism does not mean the successive doubting, item by item, of all opinions or of all the pathways that accede to knowledge. It is holding the subjective position that *one can know nothing*.... Scepticism is something that we no longer know. Scepticism is an ethic. Scepticism is a mode of sustaining man in life, which implies a position so difficult...... that we no longer even imagine it...."

Lacan put it in terms of a fourth register which held the other three in relation to each other. There was something about working in relation to the other three which left you in pieces, so the fourth was a way of speaking about 'getting it together' again....   a kind of ethic which was about the nature of the *act* itself. Instead of being an *acting out*, it became a *passage à l'acte*.

BP: So the fourth is a kind of assumption of the impossibility of the other three in the form of an act?

PB: Sounds good to me....

BP: So what about this Indian meal on the last Sunday then. What is that about? Was that an *acting out* or a *passage à l'acte*?

PB: I don't know.