

The Governance of Quality: The Case of the Specialist Care Organisation

by Philip Boxer and Barry Palmer.

Abstract

This paper describes an intervention within an organisation providing residential care for men and women with mental health disabilities. The intervention was concerned with supporting changes in the way the quality of the work of the organisation affected the lives of its residents. Three issues emerged from this work which are explored in the paper: firstly, the question of how the consultant's practice meets the challenge of the case; secondly, the nature and complexity of the client system and its context, and the implications for the governance of the client system; and thirdly, the question of the ethic of the consultant's own relation to the intervention.

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Introduction

This paper describes a consultancy assignment with a British voluntary organisation, which we shall call the Specialist Care Organisation (SCO). SCO manages seventeen houses which provide accommodation and care for adult men and women who have severe learning disabilities, are chronically mentally ill, or who are elderly and mentally infirm. Philip Boxer was the principal consultant. The assignment arose out of prior consultations between Barry Palmer and the Chief Executive of SCO; and Barry also undertook supporting interventions with sub-systems of SCO during the assignment. The work was carried out between May 1994 and March 1996. The text in italics is written by the Chief Executive of SCO:

The entry of Philip Boxer into the consultancy relationship between Barry and myself marked a change in the way anxiety was to be understood and mobilised in the organisation. Historically, anxiety had been perceived as a personal response, in part reflecting concerns in the organisation that could be articulated and worked with via a process of interpretation.

Working on this basis, this consultancy would say something about me, about me in the role of CEO, and in the light of all that, about what may be going on in the organisation. The underlying assumption was that relief from this anxiety, gained through the consulting process, would make it easier for me to be a decisive and effective CEO. In general terms there was an unspoken contract within the organisation between employee and employer that this anxiety would be kept to a minimum.

The work with Philip and Barry was to raise a fundamental question about this – in fact to turn it on its head. Who had this way of managing and understanding anxiety been for? Was there a sense in which the organisational systems (e.g. line management, supervision, care planning) designed on the back of this assumption had been for the benefit of staff? Insofar as this proved to be the case, then interpretations about what was going on were likely to be used to reinforce the culture surrounding the implied employer-employee contract, rather than to ‘out’ it for critical evaluation.

The ethic of the intervention then, as it developed, was to provide an infrastructure and explanatory text which could support a different way of working with anxiety – an anxiety that was mobilised primarily to transform the experience of SCO’s clients rather than that of its staff.

Throughout the rest of this paper, I have interspersed some comments in italics which I hope will enable you, the reader, to retain a critical perspective which reflects something of my own experience.

*Chief Executive Officer
22nd April 1997*

Part I - Intervention

A letter to house staff

Rather than lead you circumspectly into this work, we shall parachute you into the heartlands. Here is part of a letter from Barry Palmer to the staff of one of the houses, in which he summarised what he had been told in a series of one-to-one conversations with five members of staff. He had been asked by the manager of the house to give the staff an opportunity to say what they wanted from their managers, in order to be able to meet the needs of the four male residents. These men had been resettled from a large institution, Greystone Manor, into a three-story terraced house in a lower middle-class neighborhood. In the current discourse of residential social work, they had varying degrees of learning disability and exhibited challenging behaviour. The names used here for the men and their former home are fictitious.

“You are aware that these four men - Ahmed, Robert, Tom and William - are more alive and less conflicted when they are doing what they want to do, exploring new places, doing new things, and meeting new people. And you have found that most of the opportunities for this are outside this house. This house is of course an important place for them: it provides safety, company, care and the necessities of life, in a more personal way than was possible in Greystone Manor. You are good at providing a home for these men which is not like Greystone Manor, but if they are confined to the house for too long, they become bored, irritable, depressed, passive, and dependent, as we do too under similar circumstances, and sometimes they become violent. (Their challenging behaviour may be a sign of life. They are still able to express their anger at the restrictions under which they have to live). So all of you talked about the importance of being able to go out with clients, on day-to-day errands, on trips and expeditions, and for longer holidays. This is good for various reasons, but most importantly because being confined in the house increases their disability: it "makes them worse". It also undermines your expectations of them, so that you come to think of their character and behaviour in the house as normal for them. One obvious restriction on your scope for going out with them is the number of staff available. So all of you also talked about being understaffed. If there are only, say, two people on duty at a particular time, there is limited scope for working with clients, inside or outside the house. It is only too easy for everyone to be fully occupied, dealing with the demands of the house and the sponsoring organisations, and escorting residents on routine trips to the day centre, the post office, the hospital and the shops. It seems to me that the restrictions of being short-staffed are real and require attention. But you are drawing attention to a more profound challenge. This cannot be met simply by appointing any number of additional staff. The challenge is:

- how to create conditions for these men, in which they are free to explore and discover what they want, what they like, what they can do, and what they have to give;
- and how to do this within the constraints of their own physical and mental limitations, and within the constraints of the world they live in.

As you are well aware, the world in which your clients are required to live - the house, the neighbourhood, the society, the economy - are in many ways unfriendly to them. This fact, as well as their disabilities, makes the challenge what it is. It is of course a challenge not only to the staff of the house, but to SCO, to the Health Trust, and to the society we all represent.”

This letter encapsulates several elements of the larger intervention we shall describe.

- i. The letter is an ‘interpretation’, in the sense in which the meaning that every listener makes of what he or she hears is an interpretation. And no staff member said all this - the interviews lasted a total of five hours or more. But everything that is said in the letter had been said by staff members. Thus the ‘interpretation’, although shaped by the way the consultant sought to understand what was ‘going on’ in Greystone Manor, and by his own desire as a consultant, is in essence a re-punctuating of their own words.

- ii. The letter implies a direction: towards giving the residents a voice in determining the future organisation and practice of the house. It is not actually written in the form of a statement by the residents, although it could have been. But it reformulates as a conscious proposition the awareness of some staff members: that Ahmed and the others are more lively and more content on expeditions outside the houses; that the men want conditions in which *they are free to explore and discover what they want, what they like, what they can do, and what they have to give*; and that the life of the house, on which the staff expend so much labour, cannot on its own provide this. In fact it *'makes them worse'*. No one said this 'out loud', but the consultant has had a go at articulating what cannot quite be said within the current discourse of the house.
- iii. In this particular instance it is not possible to say whether this intervention was effective in situating this implied direction for the task of the house staff within their ongoing conversations about their work. When the consultant met the house manager to discuss the report she made no reference to the above statement, and the consultant left without having drawn attention to it himself. Neither was apparently willing at that moment to admit the implied revaluation of the work of the house into their conversation. This direction was nevertheless congruent with the direction of change being addressed within SCO as a whole.

How, then, did this incident fit within the context of the larger intervention?

In thinking about Barry's choice of including the letter to the house manager at the beginning of the paper, it strikes me that it captures the whole challenge – to write what everyone thinks but which cannot be said.

The staff could not say that they had been told to keep secret from SCO managers that a client had a forensic history and another had been abused in the hospital where some of the staff had worked.

Barry could not talk with the house managers about the letter.

I could not talk to my managers about competence.

The clients were not in a position from which their talking could influence what was being done 'for' them by the house managers and staff.

The client system and the challenge of the intervention

SCO is an organisation which was, as its name implies, set up jointly by the local health authority and the local social services department, to manage the seventeen houses and provide professional oversight of staff who were initially still employed by these authorities. The CEO was appointed as Acting Chief Executive after less than a year with the association, after his predecessor was abruptly suspended and then dismissed. He had no previous management experience, having started life as a mental health nurse and subsequently worked as an internal consultant within a health authority, during which time he met and entered into a series of consultations with Barry Palmer, which continued into his time with SCO.

The CEO inherited a tangle of problems, which included the whole problematic of Community Care, its funding, and its relationship to the Local Authority and to the Health Authority. The demise of the previous Chief Executive was probably symptomatic of this tangle in some way, even though the suspension and dismissal came as a result of a lack of performance in the job.

In the first months of his appointment the CEO not only used the consultations with Barry to examine these problems, but also to articulate his concern for the clients of the service

for which he was responsible. He imagined one of them, on his deathbed, looking back over his life and asking 'What the f*** was that all about?' The question of the good of the client was thus explicit, in his leadership and in this assignment, from the beginning, and, as we shall hear, is still being addressed.

The CEO decided that he needed a strategy for the development of the organisation and services of SCO as a totality, and at Barry's suggestion engaged Philip as consultant. What follows is a selective track through a process which, for our purposes, started in May 1994, and ended formally in March 1996, although informal contact continued.

Key Events

The process of the intervention can be described in terms of a number of phases of work, punctuated by what appear in retrospect as key moments. We shall discuss the asterisked elements in more detail:

- The initial process of engagement (May to August 1994):
 - The Interviews: Meeting with 5 individuals, both from within and outside SCO, involved with different aspects of the charity's work.
 - The Workshops: meetings with the senior staff, formulating initial hypotheses around dilemmas* and development challenges confronting SCO, and exploring issues around cost structures, organisation* and constitution.
- Tackling the basics (September 1994 to March 1995). This period culminated in the CEO's confirmation as Director by the Trustees.
 - Systems: The role of IT and the development of a strategy for developing IT systems.
 - "QAGs"*: The setting of four levels of development agenda in terms of 'Quality Assurance Guarantees'. Negotiation of QAG I and QAG II.
 - House Managers: Enabling the managers of the houses to begin to develop their own voice and position in relation to senior managers. This laid the foundations for a different kind of working relationship with House Managers; and a recognition of their need to be able to hold problems which they had not got solutions to instead of pushing them up the hierarchy as a 'crisis'.
 - Activity Based Costing: an examination of how the way costs are analysed can be aligned with the 'logic' of the actual activities in the different kinds of house This is an approach to analysing costs which looks at overheads and indirect costs from the point of view of the activity, rather than vice versa. It is therefore consistent with what we will later call an 'edge-driven' approach, as distinct from the top-down approach of absorption costing (Johnson and Kaplan 1987).
 - Constitution: how can the constitution be modified to make it more congruent with a needs-driven culture?
- Beginning to develop a third level of Quality Assurance Guarantee (QAG III), culminating in a re-organisation. (May to October 1995):
 - Development of the 'red route' and 'green route' concepts of organisation* , and implementation of the 'green route' model.
 - Examination of authority issues in relatedness between the CEO, Barry and Philip: what is the ethic of our mutual engagement*?

- Conversations with the staff of one house, leading to the letter quoted at the beginning of Part I. and with the CEO about what kind of concept of ‘the clinic’ lay at the heart of SCO’s work.
- Emergence of new agendas, culminating in restrictions being placed by the Trustees on the use of external consultants (November 1995 to March 1996)
 - Establishing Service Management Meetings: Forensic Process emerging in the Houses. This was a process which was developed from Barry’s work and which was aimed at ‘outing’ the assumptions that drove the way SCO habitually responded to its service users.
 - Examining the ‘competitive environment’: who is SCO competing with, and on what basis can it remain viable?
 - The Trustees and the Management Team: what is the relation between direction and management? What are the joint development processes?

As of today, it appears that SCO is facing two major challenges:

- Facing up to the ‘crunch’ of how to secure long term viability, through a business planning process.
- Tackling the implications of the fourth level of Quality Assurance Guarantee (QAG IV), through obtaining charity funding for a project aimed at developing clients’ rights.

This gives an impression of the scope and span of the project. We shall now elaborate on three of these elements in the overall intervention in more detail, namely dilemmas, organisation and QAGs. The fourth question of engagement, bearing on the authorisation issues, we will leave for Part III. In between, in Part II, we describe the framework within which the QAGs were defined, and the implications this held for governance and therefore authorisation.

Dilemmas

In the initial workshops, Philip worked with the senior staff to articulate critical dilemmas that they encountered in managing SCO. The origins of this approach lay with the Milan method and the epistemology with which it worked (Cronen and Pearce 1985). The dilemma was a strange loop with the characteristics of a ‘moebius strip’, directly affecting strategic behavior (Hampden-Turner 1990). These dilemmas could be elaborated in terms of an impossibility around which they moved, formulated in terms of alternative themes/strategies which offered alternative resolutions.

Thus a management team could be said to be caught in a dilemma when they found they were committed to two propositions such that acting upon either one made them vulnerable to contravening the other. Sometimes one proposition was an explicit ideal or policy, while the other proposition was undeclared. The value of this type of analysis was that it provided a language in which members of a client system could discuss their acutest worries; and it opened up impossibilities or gaps in the current conception of the agency which were concealed when the emphasis was upon constructing coherent, holistic models like that of an open system.

The first workshop identified these dilemmas. We hope that you will gather something of the difficulties facing the staff team if we simply list them:

- ‘We are crisis managers of a process of transferring staff into the private sector’ (our history) *versus* ‘We are managers of an organisation delivering particular kinds of care into the community’ (our future).

- ‘We are running a room-centred service’ (health service culture) *versus* ‘We are running a person-centred service’ (local authority culture).
- ‘We manage through exercising control’ *versus* ‘We manage through creating collaboration’.
- ‘We are managing assets’ *versus* ‘We are managing care’.
- ‘We are driven by the demands of complying with regulations’ *versus* ‘We are driven by the real needs of residents’.
- ‘We will bring about gradual change’ *versus* ‘We will bring about step changes’.
- ‘We are aiming for independence and autonomy as an organisation’ *versus* ‘We are going for ‘cover’ within the local [community care] cartel’.

Forensic Process was a way of confronting these dilemmas by uncovering the position SCO took in relation to them, whether implicitly or explicitly. It laid the foundations for how the CEO and the senior staff were to develop new ways of working together.

The ‘red’ and ‘green’ routes

The second workshop closely examined the technologies of care, work group processes and formal organisation of SCO going forward, from the point of view of one of the houses. This analysis led to the formulation of two alternative concepts of the possible organisation of SCO, which were referred to colloquially as the ‘red route’ and the ‘green route’.

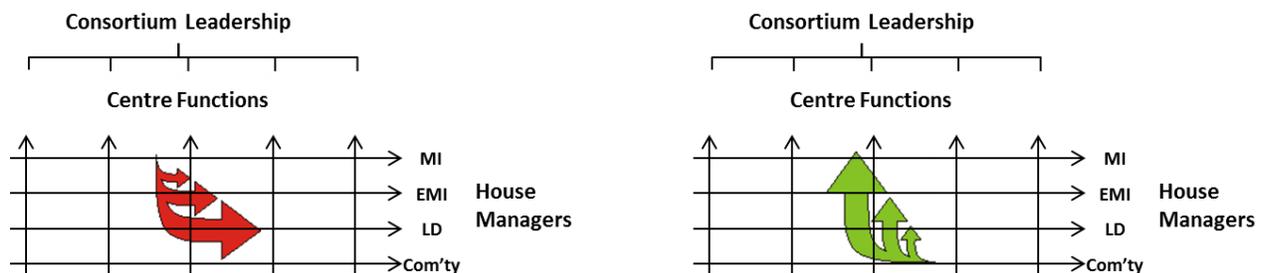


Figure 1: vertical (red) and horizontal (green) axes of accountability

- The vertical axis had the centre-based functions of: Advocacy; Intensive Care, Training and Development; Support Services; and Compliance.
- The horizontal axis comprised the House Managers, grouped according to the major types of service being provided by them to their clients: Mental Illness (MI); Elderly Mentally Ill (EMI); Learning Disability (LD); and Community Team (a team serving clients living independently).

The ‘red route’ reflected the present governance system and was dominated by the vertical axis, in which the house managers were subordinated to the centre-based functions. The ‘green route’ represented an alternative to this approach and was dominated by the horizontal axis, in which the House Managers had direct access to the Chief Executive, and the centre-based functions were there to provide services in support of the services provided by the House Managers to their clients. This work led to a commitment on the part of the senior staff to move towards a ‘green route’ approach to governance, which assumed a governance system in which the interests of the horizontal axis could be dominant.

Quality Assurance Guarantees

It was agreed that the essential purpose of SCO was to help the residents to migrate through the care regimes it provided, towards the greatest possible autonomy. One of the first issues to be tackled, therefore, if the change was to be sustainable, was that of the standards of performance which would be required of different parts of SCO, to support the residents in this migration. To give practical form to the process of developing quality, the concept of Quality Assurance Guarantees (QAGs) was evolved. A QAG is a promise or commitment by one part of the organisation to another, to deliver its services in a specified way and to standards (of speed, accuracy, etc) agreed with the recipient (Hart 1995). Four levels of QAG were identified by SCO, to be fleshed out and introduced in turn over a period of time. These were distinguished in terms of how behaviours were organized, and how those organized behaviours were aligned to the demands of clients:

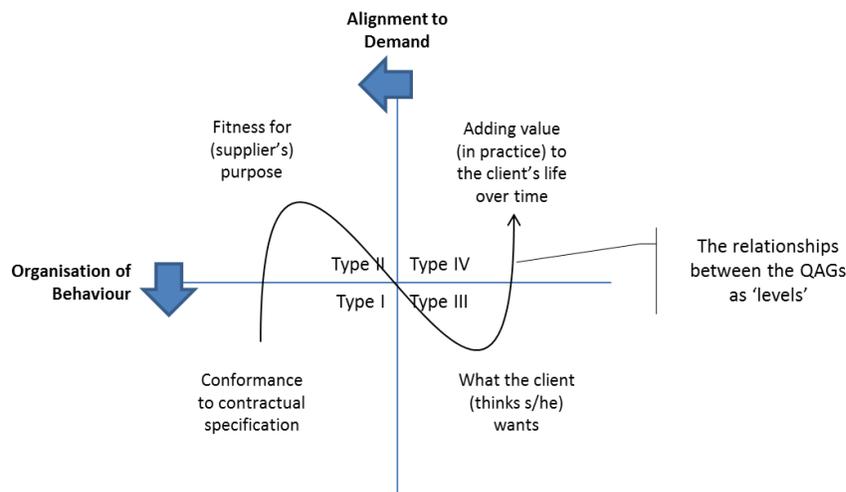


Figure 2: The Quality Assurance Guarantees and the relationships between them

Each QAG implied different assumptions about who was the recipient and who was the provider of a service, and what governed the way the service should be provided. These assumptions about the provider-recipient relationship moved progressively towards giving greater priority to the relationship between residents and their communities. They thus provided an indicator of how far SCO itself had migrated towards its intended quality of performance. The four levels were these:

1. **QAG I** (between SCO and Government): conforming to the standards of safety, hygiene, care etc laid down by law. It defined the minimum operational requirements.
2. **QAG II** (between the Centre and the houses): the Centre provides agreed standards of service to the House Managers and their staffs (e.g. the Personnel Manager specifies the period within which advertisements for new staff will be placed, and how the advertisement will be compiled). In arriving at these standards, the Centre have to balance the sometimes conflicting demands upon them from inside and outside the organisation, and make them work in the interest of the residents. QAG II defined the minimum levels of efficiency of the Centre.
3. **QAG III** (between SCO and residents, through the house staff): standards of care developed in the houses in response to residents' needs, as conveyed by care staff to House Managers

and thence to the Centre. QAG III includes an explicit concept of the role of each house in relation to the needs of its particular residents.

4. QAG IV (between residents and their communities): standards of work by all the staff of SCO, in facilitating the process by which the community anticipates and responds to the changing needs of each resident, as he or she articulates them. Strictly, each resident's 'community' is different, and not fixed: it includes his or her family and friends, and all the people and institutions in his or her life space. Ahmed's community included the local College of Further Education, in which he was enrolled on a cookery course.

The development of SCO's ability to sustain this progression of QAGs became a core management concern.

In the transfer of staff and gearing up for market change, the risk had been to lose sight of the purpose. To migrate people closer and closer to their communities or to live through the end of their lives in a way that respects who they have been. I think there was a struggle a few years ago when staff collectively attempted, albeit unconsciously, to keep their frames of reference intact. They had already had to move from the hospital to the community. A second move into SCO must have felt like a move too far.

Behind this human struggle there was another going on. Patients had moved into community based housing. But such was the preoccupation with staff anxiety that it was difficult to engage with the client's experience. Simply working with staff anxiety and thinking this would change client experience was a belief rather than an observable reality.

Both the context, explicit and implicit, and the way the organisation's systems were wired together, confirmed the primacy of staff and managers. It is another paper to explore what caused change, so that the idea of forensic process, when it all goes wrong, is at least now intellectually accepted.

But something of the flavour of this change is captured in the following:

- *Meeting Philip and saying that I was having a really difficult time getting the managers to agree to changes, and being told "that's interesting. What are you going to do about it?"*
- *Lucky for Philip that in my youth I had my bike taken by three others and when I told my father this (in tears) he took me to the park and said "hit the biggest one and the others will run!"*
- *In the end the people blocking change were 'forced' to leave. In a small organisation, such changes were personal and bloody. And people wonder why war metaphors abound.*

Part II – The Client System, its context and governance

Engaging with Complexity

When the CEO took over, the way SCO was organized was similar to that of many such organisations in the public and voluntary sectors in Britain. The assignment which the CEO gave Philip was to help the CEO consider changes in the governance of SCO, which would enable the senior staff to develop a new strategy and introduce new working practices in the way the organisation provided services to its residents. The challenge was to do this in a way that secured the continuing viability of the organisation in a changing funding environment. What types of complexity did this situation present?

The span of events described in the last section started from a consideration of how to describe the existing governance of SCO when the new Chief Executive took over (which was similar to many such organisations in the public and voluntary sectors), and of what ethical position it institutionalized. From there it considered what form of governance would be required for a human service organisation which aimed to be responsive to what the user wanted. Four points of view were considered:

- i. **Demand – what did the client want?** From the point of view of the users of the service themselves and their families, how were their needs to be understood and characterised? For any of the client groups, a statement of aim like, ‘To provide care and accommodation for men and women with learning disabilities’, skated across the surface of the problem. How was SCO to provide a way of understanding the human subject, such that it was possible to have an intelligent conversation about what, say, an elderly and demented man or woman wanted?
- ii. **Vertical Accountability.** From the point of view of the forms of formal accountability under which SCO operated, how was SCO to characterise the matrix of accountability in which SCO was situated, which included managerial relationships within SCO, employment relations with other authorities, professional accountabilities within a number of disciplines (e.g. nursing), and complex legal requirements? Staff working directly with residents were required to comply with a multiplicity of statutory and procedural requirements. It could conclude that these were functioning as defences against somebody's anxieties, in the sense which Isabel Menzies (1988) elucidated, but there was little scope for ‘working through’ these anxieties in this context. What was necessary was to extricate the staff from their deadening effect, without falling foul of them?
- iii. **Monitoring Performance – horizontal accountability:** What did managers and staff need to know in order to be able to monitor the performance of the parts of the organisation for which they were responsible, and how could they be provided with access to this information, in such a way that SCO can develop beyond functioning as seventeen semiautonomous cottage industries? For example, the CEO inherited a situation in which, in effect, all income was put into one pot, out of which all salaries and other expenses were paid. Early on in the intervention, and on the basis of available data, Philip demonstrated that the costs of providing the different categories of service were very different. Yet referring authorities were being charged the same amount for each of them.
- iv. **Dilemmas in balancing i, ii & iii.** Finally, from the point of view of the working experience of managers and staff, many of the moments in which rationality, or work group

functioning (Bion 1961), were most in jeopardy, were moments which could be characterised in terms of the dilemmas or paradoxes which they faced. The early work with the senior staff therefore involved describing the work of SCO in terms of the particular dilemmas that it faced. For example, the organisation defined the residents as tenants subject to legally binding tenancy agreements. Yet the very reason the residents were in the care of SCO was that they were unable to understand or voluntarily conform to agreements of this kind. So the staff encountered radical impossibilities at the heart of their work. SCO might be able to describe how this led them to adopt primitive and dysfunctional mechanisms of defence; but was it possible to characterise the demands of living with these dilemmas, in such a way that a culture could be developed which supported people in doing this?

Forensic Process

These four points of view reflected four different aspects of a ‘discursive practice’ built around the way SCO worked. “Discursive practice” is a term derived from Michel Foucault (Foucault 1972). By ‘discursive practice’ he meant the entire apparatus supporting the uses of and practices in language, and the effects of which could be described as a paradigm (Kuhn 1962). The corresponding term ‘non-discursive practice’ referred to the institutional arrangements and practices which, although not ‘in language’, nevertheless fell under the same axiomatics (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983; Palmer 2000). “Governance” was a way of referring to these axiomatics:

- what was problematic about the work of SCO (the dilemmas associated with the ultimate goals of the agency),
- what were the hypotheses about what SCO’s clients wanted (the demands made on the House Managers and Community Team),
- how would SCO know that it was ‘succeeding’ (horizontal accountability for the performance by the agency in meeting the demands of its clients),
- and
- how was SCO to respond to these demands in practice given the nature of its funding (the vertical accountabilities determining what it was viable for the agency to do for its clients)?

The aim was to explore how ‘answers’ to these questions were being built into the ‘grain’ of the governance of SCO, and to consider whether an alternative form of governance would be required for a human service organisation which aimed to be responsive to what its clients wanted.

In the process that produced Barry’s letter, these questions had been applied to what was going on across the particular boundary between the staff and residents. As we saw in the letter, the last question had a particular force in SCO, where residents were severely limited in their capacity to articulate demands. This questioning process became known within SCO as a “forensic process”.

The consultants’ account of what they were up to

What, then were the assumptions underlying this intervention? How, in these terms, was the direction of change formulated within SCO as a whole? The core ‘framework’ within which the intervention could be understood was based on the distinction between primary task and primary

risk. This schema provided a way of addressing the question of how we described the development of form of governance appropriate for a human service organisation.

Differentiating behaviours

At the very least, individuals may depend on an agency to provide them with a paid job. Beyond that, individuals may depend on an agency for a sense of who they are, as far as it becoming a means of having an influence in the world. If we consider the reverse side of this - of not having a job, not having their work valued, or not being able to 'act in the world' - then we would expect this reverse side to cause anxiety. Thus the organisation of an agency can be viewed as a defence against anxiety, not only for the individuals who work in them, but for all its other stakeholders and customers. This is a view that follows on from that established in the Tavistock tradition (Hirschhorn 1988; Menzies-Lyth 1988; Kets de Vries 1991). An elaboration within the Tavistock tradition of the nature of these issues in Human Service Organisations is to be found in Obholzer & Roberts (Obholzer and Roberts 1994). Here the emphasis is placed on the interactions between the defenses and the requirements of the primary task of the organisation, being that task essential to the organisation's continuing viability.

Working relations are supported by the alignment of behaviours in relation to demand that is spread both across time with respect to short-term and long-term time horizons, and across 'space' in terms of the way particular forms of work are aligned. Elliott Jaques (Jaques 1976; Jaques 1989) started elaborating this approach in the form of Stratified Systems Theory (SST). Gillian Stamp (Stamp 1978) continued to develop it with Career Path Appreciation (CPA). Initially giving priority to the vertical axis of accountability, Jaques subsequently modified his views (Jaques 1995). Rather than viewing hierarchy as a particular form of alignment concocted by individuals as a defense against anxiety, he argued instead the other way around. Social systems that were badly aligned to demand aroused psychotic anxieties and led to their disturbing acting out and expression in working relationships.

It was Lawrence and Lorsch (Lawrence and Lorsch 1969) who originated the framework of differentiation and integration for describing agencies. Their argument was that there had to be a congruence between the forms of differentiation of behaviour necessary for an agency's viability; and the forms of integration of those differentiated behaviours needed to maintain the agency's identity.

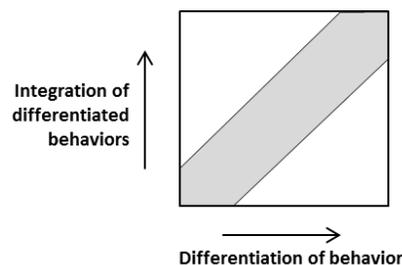


Figure 3: the integration of differentiated behaviours

Emery and Trist (Emery and Trist 1965) distinguished between four forms of 'causal texture' in the environment in relation to which the agency had to differentiate its behavior, three of which could be planned, but the fourth 'turbulent' one could not. The behaviour here had to be dynamically responsive to the environment – in the case of SCO, both to the corporate environment of SCO itself and to the multiple and changing environments of the houses and their

residents. The dynamic nature of this relationship to demand meant that it could no longer be subordinated to a hierarchy, but rather became an independent variable in its own right with respect to each relationship to demand. Referred to as primary risk (Hirschhorn 1997), it meant that the organisation had to hold a tension between vertical constraints imposed by hierarchy, limiting the ways in which the primary task for any given relationship could be defined; and horizontal linkages imposed by the nature of the client's situation determining the nature of the primary risk.

The domain of relevance within which this tension could be held was rooted in behaviours of which the agency was capable, producing the four quadrants shown below:

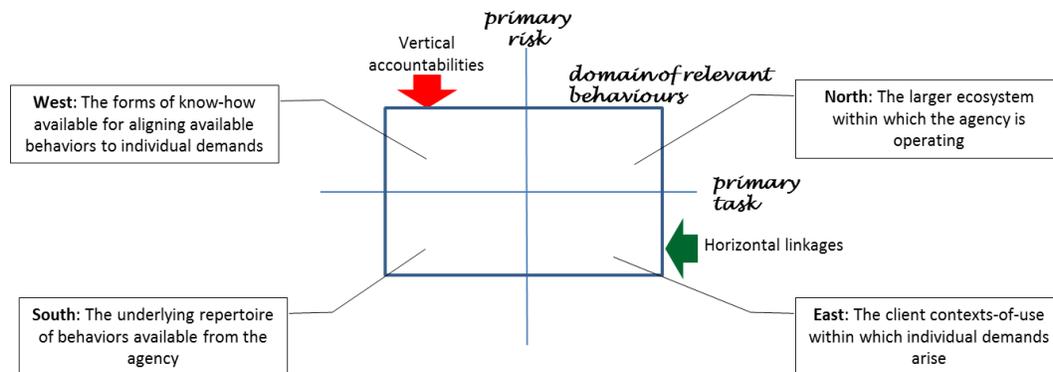


Figure 4: Primary Task and Primary Risk

The way the tension was held could be thought of in terms of the dynamic relationships between these four quadrants (referred to below using the four points of the compass):

- North: The larger system of individuals and organisations within which the agency is operating
- East: the client contexts within which individuals' demands arise.
- South: the underlying repertoire of behaviours of which the agency is capable
- West: the forms of know-how available for aligning available behaviours to individuals' demands.

Thus, to the North, the question of the needs of the residents became one of what they wanted from life ('What the f*** was that all about?'), not of what they needed from the house.

Viewed in this way, it was essential for the intervention to engage with the question of the governance of SCO to the extent that it affected how the dynamic balance between the four quadrants could be held; and it was in the extent of the authorization from the Trustees to pursue this balance that the CEO ultimately encountered the greatest challenges to the change process itself. Thus, if there were dynamic changes taking place in the structure of the environment in which the agency was competing, too restrictive assumptions would mean that the agency was unable to engage with the competitive challenges facing it. For example, when local authority cuts led to the closure of day centres in the borough, too restrictive assumptions made by house managers meant that it was difficult for them to imagine any other way of occupying many residents during the day.

Part III - The authorisation of the consultant

Who knows who knows best?

For SCO, the critical factor determining what it was possible to do was not its formal organisation or constitution, though these had limitations, nor the defences which the staff had developed to contain the anxieties of the work, though it would be possible to articulate them. The critical factor was the governance of SCO in the sense of the axiomatics of its discursive and non-discursive practices: the axiomatics underlying the way they conducted their conversations and evoked the 'realities' with which they had to deal. People had invested themselves in this governance in terms of task structures that acted as a support to their personal identities. Barry's letter was a glimpse of how, with great difficulty, we sought to bring new distinctions into this governance, working upon the way the house staff understood the mostly non-verbal communications of the residents. How, then, did the consultant actually intervene (Boxer and Palmer 1994)?

The following points concerning Philip's way of intervening were extracted by Marc Du Ry (Du Ry 1995) from his interviews with the CEO. They convey something of the approach taken:

CEO: "One of the things in looking for a consultant was that I felt I couldn't capture what felt like an enormous task, I didn't have the language to make sense of it, and one of the things I was immediately confronted with by Philip was his language". A key part of Philip's approach was a theory of speech and discourse and their role in organisations. CEO: "He stressed the importance of conversations, and the positions people would take in relation to them, especially ways of improving the quality of conversations and getting clarity about who needs to talk to whom about what." Furthermore, the CEO found that: "it supports this idea which I've always believed in, that there have to be lots and lots of stories about what is going on."

While the CEO struggled hard to take on board new terms, he found that everything sank in after a while, and as it did so, it enabled him to get a new handle on what had seemed an ordinary process. The time to understand coincided with the actual use of the concepts.

Speaking well involved not shying away from, as the CEO said, "uttering the unutterable, of what is not being said, which Philip could do, and then just standing there, of being there to live with it, dealing with the projections that arose, working them through, it was good to see him do that." It is an ethic in which interpretation aims at action, not just understanding. The CEO felt that as an ex-Tavistock person and consultant he was often only concerned with finding the right interpretation. The problem for the manager, however, remained performance, meeting the demands of reality.

Philip also made it a habit to send back to the CEO a record of what they had discussed plus any interpretations. Nothing was therefore imposed; on the contrary, the client had to accept and work through the actual complexities uncovered. All the more so "because there wasn't any premature closing down of the diagnosis of what was wrong, and there was an enormous challenge to my own assumptions" - CEO. In other words, the client was involved in elaborating his "symptom" as well as the most likely cure for it.

Controversially, but in line with an ethical position centred on a "relational" way of working, Philip would speak in such a direct way to people that their identifications to their role, their "positional" stance, might be shaken. Uncomfortable but necessary if one person is not to scupper the work of the whole. This meant that there was always an explicit or implicit invitation for people to take on the challenge of change, including changing their own roles, in order to find their optimum position in the structures they helped to define. CEO: "The way some of them are confronting and challenging where you'd least expect it, to me that's a test of the validity of the theory. People that have been hammered by their organisations, are now saying this is the kind of service I need in order to meet the client's need, and doing it in a way that is not full of hatred or rage. That is evidence... It allows us to provide a service that begins to unpack the bureaucratic, hierarchical experience everyone has had in the last 6

years, or in their own training, the last 20 or 40 years. So it is turning the organisation, if not on its head, at least on its side.”

And Barry: “The result has been to allow house managers to articulate their needs rather than the Centre imposing directives. But without the managers becoming barons dictating to the Centre. Rather, everybody is organizing around one issue: what residents and community at large might want. So it allows people to give service to each other rather than telling them what to do. Furthermore, there is now a clear notion of an end: when each house can articulate what it is doing for residents and why, can hold dilemmas and paradoxes.”

Lastly, Philip had taken on board the Plus-one position, developed by Lacan (Boxer and Palmer 1994), of one who is not part of a workgroup, but is both inside and outside it at the same time, called upon by each member to prevent it from getting bogged down in non-work problems. CEO: “...this is the ‘orthogonal’ position that he talks about. And that’s where I want him, to be quite honest, otherwise I’m not learning, I just get stuck in dependency, and that’s not why I’m doing this job”.

The process of intervention, starting from the identification of dilemmas facing staff practices, rested on an ability to problematize the axiomatics of SCO and the associated questioning of its existing governance system. The positioning of the consultant in this was based on a principle of “orthogonality”. This was a position in which relationships to members of the client system were never identified with the interests of the system as a whole (Boxer 1995).

In the following diagram, a distinction is made between the forward movement through time of speaking, and the retroactive movement inherent in listening to what-is-being-said. In effect, listening imposes a punctuation on the chain of speaking:

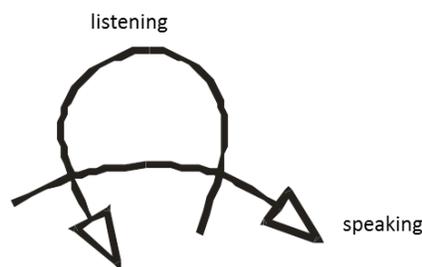


Figure 5: speaking-and-listening

Reduced to its barest minimum, this listening can be said to have the structure of a metaphoric act, in which the listener ‘superimposes’ meaning on what-is-being-said. In contrast, the speaking has the characteristics of a metonymic act relative to the listener, insofar as it is always taking the listener outside and beyond the meanings previously constructed. If the governance system is understood as the privileging of particular ways of listening, then the aim of the intervention is to metonymise speaking so that it calls these into question. And what drives this metonymising? As far as SCO is concerned, this metonymising is in relation to the articulation of the needs of SCO’s residents.

Insofar as a discursive practice privileges particular ways of listening, ‘metaphor’ will therefore reflect particular forms of organisation. In contrast, the differentiation of behaviours in relation to the environment becomes metonymic in its effects on particular ways of listening. For the consultant to intervene therefore in a way which privileges metaphor over metonymy is to work within a vertical governance system, while to privilege metonymy over metaphor is to work within a horizontal governance system. And to privilege metaphor is to risk losing orthogonality, taking over leadership of the agency, keeping the management of the agency “stuck in dependency”, as the CEO said above.

Questions of Authorisation

Why then should the principle of orthogonality be so important? Something of this can be understood from another incident during the intervention.

In October 1995, the CEO asked Barry to do another assignment in one of the houses. Barry was too busy to do it himself. His first reaction was to propose that another consultant should be introduced. But in discussions with the CEO and Philip he recognised what would be lost if SCO used someone who was unfamiliar with the thinking behind the intervention. It was instead agreed to challenge the CEO to internalise the forensic process which Barry had been modeling in his earlier assignments.

This incident led Barry to begin to articulate how he had found himself working. He wrote: “When I look back to the interviews with the house managers, and even more to the later conversations with house staff, I see/hear myself doing something which most other people would probably not do. This is hard to characterize, but is to do with listening not only to people’s articulate views and feelings, but also for how they listen to the clients. So I am constructing an account of what they (seem to) know about the clients and what they want, although they do not know that they know this.” Up to this point Barry had been considering himself to be in the position of an ‘outworker’ in doing the interviewing, acting within guidelines laid down by Philip. Yet he had been fulfilling a crucial role in carrying a forensic process to the houses, in advance of any explicit process having been formulated within SCO to do this.

This realization had been triggered partly by a study done by Marc Du Ry (Du Ry 1995) of Philip’s role in relation to the CEO. In this study Barry had remained all but invisible. This was in part a consequence of the one-to-one consultations between Barry and the CEO that antedated the intervention and were still continuing. Barry now saw himself as caught in a dilemma that he identified in this way:

“How do I talk to Philip about issues which the CEO and I discussed which I think are relevant to the consultancy to SCO without destroying the sessions between the CEO and me as a space in which the CEO feels free to articulate any aspect of his experience of acting as Chief Executive in SCO?

Or conversely, how can I provide the CEO with spaces in which he feels free to talk about any aspect of his experience of acting as Chief Executive in SCO without destroying the collaboration between Philip and me in providing consultancy to SCO and developing our own practice?”

Working these issues through with the CEO raised the question of the CEO’s own authorisation and mandate to lead change within the organisation, and the basis on which he was drawing on our support. The CEO had been treating his sessions with Barry as a kind of ‘safe haven’ from the challenges that his work in SCO were facing him with. At the same time, Barry was acknowledging the full extent of the importance of the orthogonality inherent in his ‘outworker’ role. By extending the principle of orthogonality to Barry’s personal role in relation to the CEO, the metaphoric basis of the ‘safe haven’ was called into question, and the basis of the CEO’s authorisation to act as Chief Executive became further problematized as a result.

This incident, and the questions which it gave rise to, marked the beginning of a process in which new agendas were beginning to emerge, particularly around establishing forensic processes in the Houses. By the following spring, a restriction had been put in place by the Trustees on the use of external consultants by the service, and major issues were emerging for the management and Trustees over the processes for determining the direction of SCO.

In my exchange of letters with Barry concerning my request for consultancy, I saw Barry running it past Philip. Philip’s response to both Barry and I was to make a

distinction between primary and secondary anxiety; and to suggest that the request could lead to working off a frame of reference that moved further from the 'truth' of the primary anxiety surrounding working with the client's experience. This was a key moment that went un-celebrated and un-brawled over.

I have to say that I was pretty fed up with this intervention. I was in trouble and it felt that what I got was a kick and a being told that I didn't understand. A low point. The effort of listening and learning the new stuff and translating this into a form that could be understood by the others (who I hated a lot of the time because they were using old and known frames of reference) was at times seemingly beyond endurance

Conclusion

What are the consequences of maintaining orthogonality for the consultant? How much personal risk is the consultant willing to take in order to maintain this position? To what extent can he or she support being called into question as a consultant *per se*? It is easier to use an interpretive framework as a defence than to become questioned in relation to your own desire as a consultant. These questions can be brought together in terms of the question of the consultant's authorisation, and of the ethic that is constitutive of the way he or she works (Boxer 1994).

Intervening under the principle of orthogonality is primarily a difference between strategies of intervention which aim to be edge-driven, and those that are centre-driven. The main points of difference between the two approaches can be summed up like this:

	Centre-driven	Edge-driven
Purpose	'Working through' anxiety	Engagement with 'gaps'
Object	Anxiety in taking up roles within the Client System	Demands at the edges of the Client System
Method	By Interpreting	By Problematizing
Focus	Relation to assumptions of vertical axis	Discursive practices framing demands

Thus, with the centre-driven approach, the aim frequently appears to be to release members of the client system to engage creatively with whatever is problematic about pursuing the primary task, by working interpretively, often in groups, to contain and work through the anxieties engendered by this task and by the threat of change.

It is often assumed that, if this is achieved, members of the client system will themselves have the knowledge and skill to address whatever the challenges are to the performance of the organisation. In effect, this form of intervention aims to dismantle the defences mobilised by probing taken-for-granted assumptions about the way the organisation works. But this is done on the basis of a particular set of organizing assumptions implicit in an existing governance system in which the vertical axis is dominant, and does not adequately address power issues.

For the edge-driven approach, the aim is to engage with the gaps implicit in people's relatedness to their work with their clients, through interventions that problematize the discursive and non-discursive practices within which the needs and demands of their clients are articulated. Here the aim is to metonymise along the horizontal linkages to people's experience both within and outside the organisation (Boxer 1999; Palmer 2002). The consultant's job is to enable the

interventions to work on the underlying assumptions. In order to make this possible, the consultant needs to maintain a position which is orthogonal.

Postscript

The catalyst for the end of the CEO's time in his role was a meeting in one of the services for elderly people with serious mental health problems. The meeting was with the Board and the CEO's Senior Management Team (SMT), and was to talk about plans to change the service's system of governance to improve the service. The Chairperson challenged the Director of Finance (DoF) in a manner that the CEO felt was unacceptable in a meeting with staff. He confronted her and proceeded to have a row in front of the SMT. The CEO took the position that speaking to the DoF in that way should not happen, that it was the CEO's SMT, and that he should be the one managing them. Other Board members became involved, but neither the Chairperson nor the CEO were prepared to back down. As a result, the CEO resigned.

The row occurred in the context of uncertainty about the future. The economics of the service were changing. There was less money and the SMT had been working on ideas to uncouple the building (of which SCO had many) from the services to its clients. The CEO had articulated a future but had not engaged the Board, who he experienced as resistant. The CEO's resignation derived from his lack of attention to the politics and the interests in the Board, and his failure to recognise the desire in the Board, in some of the SMT and even in himself to preserve what SCO had, while espousing a plan for a better service. To paraphrase the CEO:

The effort of listening and learning the new stuff and translating this into a form that could be understood by others (who I hated a lot of the time because they were using old and known frames of reference) was at times seemingly beyond endurance.

Glossary

forensic process - a process aimed at 'outing' the assumptions that drove the way SCO habitually responded to its service users.....	6
governance – a way of referring to the axiomatics under which an agency's discursive and non-discursive practices fell.	11
agency - although we are talking about a voluntary organization here, to avoid a confusion of terms, 'agency' has been used to refer to any Institution, Business, Organization, Company, or other incorporated entity.	12
discursive practice - the entire apparatus supporting the uses of and practices in language, and the effects of which could be described as a paradigm. The corresponding term 'non-discursive practice' referred to the arrangements and practices of an agency which, although not 'in language', nevertheless fell under the same axiomatics.	11
green route - an alternative approach dominated by the horizontal axis, in which the House Managers had direct access to the Chief Executive, and the centre-based functions were there to provide services in support of the services provided by the House Managers to their clients.	7
red route - the present governance system dominated by the vertical axis, in which the house managers were subordinated to the centre-based functions.	7
metaphor - the figure of speech in which a name or descriptive term is transferred to some object different from, but analogous to, that to which it is properly applicable.	15

metonymy - a figure of speech which consists in substituting for the name of a thing the name of an attribute of it or of something closely related..... 15

moebius strip - the topological property of having only one side, so that a line traced along the surface of the strip returns to the same place it started from. 6

QAG

- Quality Assurance Guarantee..... 5
- I** – conformance to contractual specification. 8
- II** – fitness for supplier’s purpose. 8
- III** – what the client thinks s/he wants. 8
- IV** – adding value in practice to the client’s life over time 9

SCO – Specialist Care Organisation..... 2

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