

## **Connecting personal experience to the primary task: a model for consulting to organisations**

**David Campbell**

### **Introduction**

As an organisational consultant I always take time to introduce myself and my biases to the people I am working with, and I am going to do the same here. Although I was born, bred and trained in America, I have been working as a clinical psychologist in the British National Health Service for 24 years. As a systemic practitioner for most of that time, I began applying my systemic ideas to consultation in small units within the health service, social services or education such as multidisciplinary teams, area teams or school staff groups. I also work as a freelance consultant which has taken me further afield to do work with private sector organisations. This paper is based on work in various settings, but I have tried to reduce my experiences down to those ideas and techniques which have proven most effective over the years.

Professionally, I have been influenced by my training as a psychologist and psychotherapist to value people's emotional lives in whatever context I find them, including organisations. Exposure over the years to group relations events has left me humbled but also fascinated by the power of a group to create a life of its own, to maintain its beliefs and culture in the face of external pressures to change (see Bion, 1961; Miller, 1989; Menzies Lyth, 1988). The third major influence has been my commitment to systemic ideas and their application to organisational life (see Campbell et al., 1994, Campbell, 1995; McCaughan and Palmer, 1994; Selvini Palazzoli, 1986; Senge, 1990; and Wynne et al., 1986).

In my work I find I repeatedly fall back on core values which underpin my approach to organisations and influence the way I ask questions, tease out crucial dilemmas, and sometimes make interventions into the process of an organisation's development. In my work, I do not claim to be neutral. I want to give equal validity to all the views I can gather, but in doing consultation, I am clearly trying to create certain contexts for discussion and thinking which are shaped by my own values. Since values accrue during a lifetime it is difficult to trace specific sources, however these following works have more recently influenced my own values as a therapist and consultant: Anderson and Goolishian, 1986; Boscolo et al., 1987; McNamee and Gergen, 1992; Foucault, 1980; and White, 1995. My core values about change in organisations are conveyed in my consultation work in the following ways:

1. presenting the view that we are simultaneously at the mercy of the organisation, but also autonomous and able to initiate changes
2. allowing people to experience their connectedness in the organisation
3. providing the opportunity to step back and become an observer of oneself

4. creating a climate in which existing belief systems can be examined and challenged
5. supporting examples of change, risk-taking and new connections whenever they occur.

I try to take an organisation back and forth between the experience of reflecting on the meaning of the behaviour and creating new strategies and structures based on the understanding of meaning. First, it is important to understand beliefs which people want to hold onto, including for example my own ideas about systemic thinking, and then it is important to turn them upside down, examine the opposites, consider that which has not been said, and bring forth alternative accounts (see White, 1995).

I believe theorising is important as a means of creating a language to explain our experiences to other people. But I am also sceptical, because I think we all underestimate the degree to which our theoretical explanations merely justify our actions which confirm our values. Therefore I am not a theoretical purist, but I am interested to know what people in organisations find helpful; and this has more to do with watching and listening carefully than it does with conceptualising. I may use many different conceptualisations depending on whether they 'grab' people, and affect their possibilities for finding new ways to move forward together. I don't think one consultant is going to understand what is happening in a complex system like an organisation, but I find that identifying themes and making partial observations of the underlying meaning system, can act like beacons of light which allow individuals to go further and see aspects of their own experience differently; that has the possibility of creating ripples, through interaction amongst people who work together, which can lead to change in organisations.

So, what is an organisation? My model, very briefly, begins with a clustering of people in society who come together to produce something or provide a service for other people. They either serve to a certain standard in the public sector or they produce to make a profit in the private sector. Out of the necessity to fulfill a primary task (see Miller and Rice, 1967; and Miller, 1976), this group must work together; communicate a range of ideas; bring in supplies and technologies; and maintain its premises and its position in society. The complexity of coordinating these processes to carry out a task over time requires a structure, which I will now call an *organisation*.

Over time, patterns of working behaviour become established so that workers can observe, "this is the way we do things here" and the organisation is no longer an abstract set of structures, but, in people's minds becomes a living organism, which has a culture and which powerfully affects, and is affected by individuals' values, beliefs and behaviour. It is at this interface between the organisational structures and the individuals' beliefs and behaviour, that I choose to act as a consultant. In other words, I can be effective as a consultant if I can facilitate individuals to create and support the structures which allow the organisation to continue to carry out its primary task within its constantly changing environment.

### Getting to work

In this paper I will be describing my model of consultation to organisations. It goes without saying that the culture of each organisation is unique, however I have found over the years that some consultation processes seem to be helpful for most organisations I see. In order to bring them alive here, I have chosen a case study where many of these processes were used, but clearly some are emphasised more than others because of the nature and timing of the presenting problem. So I am asking the reader to keep in mind that I will be making general points about my approach to consultation as well as specific points about the particular case.

The most frequent request for help which I get is usually something like this: "We would like some help to resolve internal conflicts so we can get on and plan where we are going as an organisation". I would then begin to negotiate how I might work with the organisation, for example whether to meet an executive or steering group to plan the work. I have learned from bitter experience that starting off on the wrong foot can lead to ineffectual work, and that taking the time to understand and make hypotheses right from the initial phone call will reap dividends later on. I would negotiate between the organisation's view of what they want, how much time they have, and the money available, and my own views. Ultimately, I must feel I have the commitment from the staff to work with me in a manner which I feel allows us all to work productively together.

Once the contract has been agreed, I plan a loose structure for the consultation work; that is to say, I am aware of wanting to take an organisation through a process of discussion, understanding, and creating new structures, but I will never know how this process will develop until I begin to work and can understand some of the problems the organisation is facing. I am also constrained by the time available to do the work. There is a big difference in what can be accomplished during a one day staff away-day as opposed to six days of consultation over a six-month period. Nevertheless, I do try to take most organisations through a process which contains the following steps, in this approximate order:

1. Creating a climate for working together
2. Understanding the effect of group dynamics on the organisation
3. Seeing the organisation in the wider system
4. Clarifying internal resources
  - personal, professional
5. Developing the mission statement
6. Implementing the mission statement with a strategic plan
  - matching internal and external resources
7. Building structures to support the strategies in relation to:
  - communication
  - groupings and meetings
  - lines of accountability
  - feedback loops
8. Management and leadership
9. Stepping back to understanding the new group process.

*In this paper I will be illustrating my ideas by referring to ongoing consultation work I have been doing with Refuge, an agency of about 15 staff providing therapeutic and counselling services to political refugees and victims of torture, as well as consultation to other relevant workers. Several years ago the director asked me for an individual consultation (what I would call a role consultation), about his untenable position as leader of this agency. He felt he could not get the staff to support the changes which were necessary to move the agency forward; and the staff felt they could not cooperate with the management style he was using. They had clearly reached an impasse, and much of the consultation centered on whether he should try new ways of tackling this dilemma or whether he and the staff had gone as far as they could together, and he should therefore leave. At the end of the consultation an agreement was made to work with him and the staff group in several months' time. In the meantime, the director made his decision to leave, but the staff group wanted me to keep my agreement to work with them because they did not know whether the organisation would survive, and they wanted to understand more of what had happened between them and the departed leader.*

In this case study, it was appropriate to change the sequence of the steps in the consultation. While the 15 staff of Refuge all came to the two-day consultation this is not always the case. But my comments in this paper refer to small organisations, from four or five up to 50 or so, all of whom can fit in one room and take part in a collective consultation. I would always expect to spend some time working with the whole group, and some with sub-groups.

### **Creating a climate for working together**

I begin by asking myself and the group how we can create a climate for working together. In order to expose themselves to change, the group will need to feel safe with each other and safe with me. For example, I often invite them to discuss experiences they have had with other outside consultants, and their experiences of trying to change things in the organisation. Working together in a group with an outside consultant can feel like a great personal risk....and so it should be if any significant change is going to take place. However organisations can also create overly safe, protective environments for individuals, sometimes at the expense of sweeping difficulties under the carpet, or allowing rancour and bickering to conceal personal insecurities about the workplace.

My first task is to create a safe environment. In many organisations a lack of safety results from the feeling that there are dreaded issues lurking beneath the surface which will all be 'unleashed' by the consultation. I must address this. I try to convey that some of the dreaded issues will need to be discussed before progress can be made, but I will take responsibility for ensuring the issues are addressed without getting out of hand. I also make it clear that the consultation work I undertake is different from group relations work. Whereas the aim of traditional group relations work is to bring about understanding through interpretation of the group dynamics, this is usually only one part of what I would do during a consultation. The aim of the consultation is to create a better working environment and clarity about where the organisation is going in the

future. Many things need to be explored, and the relationships in the group will only be one of them. Exploring any dreaded issues is a means to the end not an end in itself.

My first question is usually: "What does it really feel like to work here?"

I usually ask people to discuss this with one or two others with whom they have fairly neutral relationships. Sometimes I let them discuss the question "What does it feel like to work here?" for a few minutes; then, to move the discussion along, I ask them to discuss, "what does it really feel like to work here?" Then I gather the responses and unpack them until I and the others have some understanding about what is actually happening that makes people feel the way they do, for example: "What specific things do you observe which lead you to feel so terrible?"

People give many reasons for feeling uncomfortable in the workplace, but my impression is that most of these experiences boil down to feelings of being treated unfairly. Gender differences, racial differences, professional differences, favouritism, pay and conditions, personal alliances, organisational influence — all of these have been presented to me at one time or another as the major obstacle to an organisation being able to work together. My experience leads me to the assumption that if any organisation is serious about working together, it must be fair, and be seen to be fair, to all employees.

Once I have identified a pattern of underlying problems, then I make another basic assumption which is that the organisation is like a human relations laboratory whose task is to mirror conflicts in the external or internal environment so they can be worked through and resolved. In other words, the organisation creates and maintains conflicts in order to have an opportunity to solve them. I prefer to use this formulation rather than a formulation which leads the organisation to think of themselves as harbouring pathology. I find that if people think of their organisations as active, problem solving laboratories, and even if the problems they are trying to solve are shown to be painful, anti-task ones, they feel more positive about the strengths and capacities for change within their organisation.

At this stage, I think that my task as a consultant is to enable the organisation to get to 'this place' where dilemmas can be felt by all those in the organisation. Over the years I have used a number of metaphors such as a 'precipice', a 'cutting edge', 'between the devil and the deep blue sea', or a 'twilight zone'; but it is an uncomfortable place where people feel a sharp recognition that if they remain inactive, they will continue to have problems, but neither can they move forward without experiencing loss and sacrifice.

Once we have all arrived at this place, my second task is to help the group stay with the dilemmas until there has been sufficient airing of contradictory feelings and opinions. I think it is important to convey to an organisation that solutions lie at the end of a process. If a brilliant idea emerges very quickly in the discussion, or if one person should appear to sum up the feelings of the entire staff group, I try to elicit other ideas, and unspoken feelings, to create a fuller picture of all the experiences in the organisation; and I make it clear that reaching a premature closure may relieve the tension, but is unlikely to underpin organisational change because the tensions

and differences amongst the staff have not been sufficiently woven into any final decision.

This is difficult work, and should sound familiar to those experienced in group relations work. I have personally been greatly influenced by my group relations experiences, although they were early in my career, as well as by the more recent writings of Gergen (1995), and White (1995) and the social constructionist movement (see Burr, 1995) on the subject of bringing a client's subjugated story to the surface.

### Understanding group process

In doing consultation work, the first question I ask myself is: why do organisations get stuck in the first place, and why should they ask for help? I agree with Bion that organisations get into trouble because group process gets in the way of carrying out the primary task, but prefer a simpler working definition which is that organisations are always straddling the double-edged task of being a group and being an organisation. One is for belonging whilst the other is for producing.

*When I arrived at Refuge for the consultation the leader had left and I was met by a senior member of the staff. The process of seeing the leader depart had been traumatic for everyone. There were splits between those who supported the leader, and those who did not, anger about the way the departure was handled, and hurt, guilty feelings that the staff had participated in a process which was hurtful to many people. It was as though a bitter, destructive process had developed which had then got out of control against their wishes.*

*I began by discussing a plan for the two days we had together. I was clear that we needed to address the feelings that people were holding inside themselves as well as the future of the organisation and the leadership vacuum, which suddenly seemed like a lot to do in two days. We had an open discussion with the entire staff group for several hours. The issue which emerged as most divisive and distressing was a recent change in salary levels such that the different disciplines, who previously had been paid at the same rate, were now, with the support of their unions going to be paid on differential scales. I was listening carefully for the themes which perpetuated the atmosphere of tension for all of them. For example, they were working with people who had been abused by society; they were confronting 'ultimate evil' as one of them put it. And this seemed to lead them to believe they had to create an experience of goodness to combat the evil. Everybody in the organisation should be equal. They demonstrated a loyalty to the ideal of fairness, a desire to create a good, safe, and enclosed world in the organisation, but some staff felt their different skills and levels of training were not recognised within the agency whilst they were in the outside world.*

*I dealt with this by acknowledging their personal feelings about the content of this issue, but also offering another idea, which was that this could also be seen as a group process. I suggested that if one task of the organisation was resolve conflicts between good and evil, it would be likely that this dynamic would be played out within staff relationships. Splits between good staff, those who wanted equal salaries, and bad staff, who wanted differentiation, would be one way for the organisation to confront and resolve the issue of good versus evil. I challenged the view that their distress was caused by personal battles, by*

*suggesting it was the result of the good versus evil struggle being played out, but not yet resolved, within the organisation.*

*Although this brief description is very condensed, I think this approach helped the staff step back from the process which gripped them. They could see their colleagues less as enemies, and more as actors in a group relations drama. It was a larger process than they could control; and it actually had some meaning in relation to what they were aiming to achieve with their refugee clients.*

*This was a difficult discussion for many of us, but at the end there was enough agreement amongst the staff that we should now move on, as we had planned to look at the future of the organisation. I was aware that some staff were still upset by the discussion of recent events, and I hoped their feelings would be addressed in other discussions during the consultation.*

### **Developing the mission statement**

The Italian psychiatrist and leading systemic thinker, Luigi Boscolo, once said his father told him that in life there were two kinds of jobs: those in which you keep your head down and those in which you keep your head up (Boscolo, personal communication). I have always enjoyed this metaphor because it captures an important organisational process. Organisations can easily keep their collective heads down in order to get on with the job. When this happens, everyone sees their work and their relationships in a narrower context. When changes then impinge, from inside or outside, the organisation lacks the breadth of vision to see things differently and find solutions.

Therefore I usually spend time with an organisation charting their position in the outside world. I draw large diagrams which place the organisation in the centre surrounded by all of the individuals or groups which have a strong, vested interest in the future of the organisation. The first step in this process is to identify these groups, which I prefer to call stakeholder groups based on the work of Guba and Lincoln (1989). The second step is to identify what these groups are looking for from the organisation, and the third step is to explore ways in which these multiple requests can be forged into plans and strategies for the future.

There are many terms in the literature to describe the process of clarifying the aims and strategies for an organisation's future. Until something better comes along, I use the term *mission statement*. I have found that it is the process of creating a mission statement, rather than the statement itself which unifies and focuses an organisation on its central task; and I have also found that the sequence one follows in this process makes a difference to how a staff group commit themselves to the mission statement.

### **Clarifying internal resources**

*With the staff group at Refuge I began by asking them to move into the subgroup where they felt they could most easily discuss their own professional development. And in this case, they initially broke into discipline groupings: psychotherapists, social workers, psychologists, physiotherapists, administration, and translators. Within those groups I*

asked them to talk in pairs about their own futures. How did they want their career to develop over the next few years? What specific activities or projects did they want to develop within Refuge? What would they need from, and what could they contribute to Refuge? I chose this way to begin because they all seemed discouraged by what had recently happened and I thought they needed first to be reconnected with their own sense of a future.

I made it clear that I wanted each of them to share only what they wanted to share with the whole staff group when we reconvened, and in doing so clear differences emerged. Some staff wanted to develop their counseling and therapy work, both psychotherapy and physiotherapy, with individual clients based in the agency; while others wanted to move more into the community working with extended families and consulting to other professionals working with refugees. After some discussion of their experience of these splits and possible meanings in terms of group dynamic process, I told the group I wanted them to keep these internal resources in mind as we now turned to look at the position of Refuge in the wider community.

### Seeing the organisation in the wider system

I first went to the flip chart to write the name Refuge in the centre of the paper. Then I asked them to tell me the names of other groups who were interested or who had a stake in the future of Refuge, that is the stakeholders in the organisation. I asked them to think of groups such as clients, referrers, other agencies or government departments who would have some vested interest in the decisions Refuge makes about the future direction of their service. When these groups were put on the page surrounding Refuge, the next step was to identify what each of them wanted from Refuge in the future. For example, the staff group identified that clients were asking for a service which did more work with their families in their own communities; other refugee organisations wanted a clearer profile of Refuge in relation to the other agencies, and they wanted more collaboration on joint courses and use of translators; the government departments expected Refuge to become less dependent on the government and to seek out alternative financial support.

I often use the following exercise to facilitate this process: I ask staff members to form themselves into role-play groups representing the most relevant stakeholder groups in their community. Then after 15 minutes they come back and each presents a stakeholder's views to the whole staff group.

Once the different interests or expectations of stakeholder groups are available for everyone to see, the next step is to discuss the competing expectations and then work towards a consensus about the priorities for the organisation, and the preferred strategy for addressing the expectations of the outside world.

I asked them to move into four small, mixed-discipline groups, whose task was to propose the elements which should be contained in the final mission statement, and which incorporated these different approaches. They came back as a whole group to give initial feedback, and I wrote their interim ideas on a flip chart for all to see. Then I asked them to go to their small groups, once again, to reduce these ideas to one final sentence which constituted a mission statement. This was to serve two purposes:



1. *The statement specified aims of the organisation which all the staff could sign onto and work toward for the next year.*
2. *The statement was a clear communication which would help the outside world understand what Refuge was trying to do.*

*Finally, as a large group, we amalgamated the four proposed mission statements into one, combining ideas and sharpening the language. The final combined mission statement read as follows:*

*“Refuge would aspire to be an interdisciplinary treatment and consultation centre for refugees, asylum-seekers, their families, and those who work with them”*

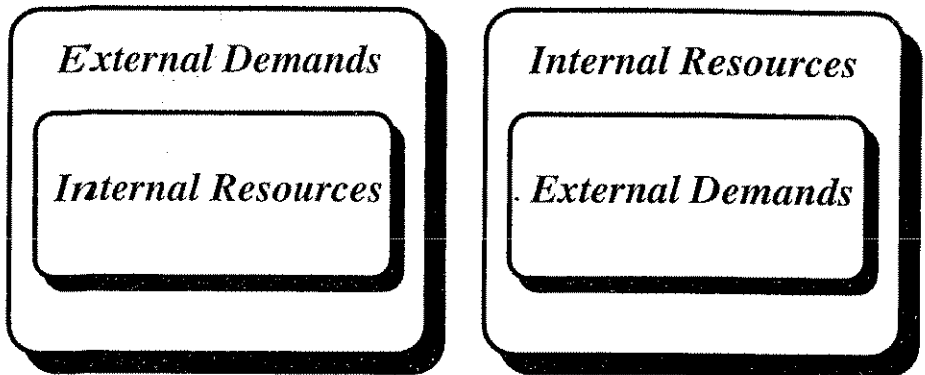
*Although the statement itself may seem anodyne, in the process of creating it, many differences were aired and new working practices were discussed. When we finished this work and were coming to a coffee break, I said I wanted all the staff to take the felt-tip marker and sign their name under the statement as a sign each was prepared to work toward those goals. When we returned from coffee to begin a new piece of work I noticed one person had not signed the statement. I made a light-hearted comment, and decided not to press the issue. It was only later that I realised the significance of this abstention.*

### **Implementing the mission statement with a strategic plan**

Once the aims or mission statement have been clarified, and the individual resources elicited, the next step is to devise a strategic plan which matches the internal resources with the external demands, and addresses the question: “How will we use our resources to achieve our aims?” I prefer to call this a matching strategy to remind everyone, including myself, that the aim is to link the external with the internal. This helps avoid the tendency to become unrealistic by emphasizing either the external demands at the expense of what the staff are truly willing or able to do, or being over enthusiastic about the staff’s personal goals, when there is simply insufficient demand for that particular activity. The process is one of moving back and forth between the internal and external; checking the viability of one in the context of the other; and repeatedly asking such questions as: “What client group will want to use or pay for that service?” “Which of you amongst the staff want to re-organise your work to respond to this external need?” “How will you get job satisfaction if you decide to shift to a new direction?” I have found it helpful to keep Hampden-Turner’s diagram in mind, adapted to this process (in Campbell, 1994).

*The Refuge group decided to implement their mission statement by supporting 4 strategic proposals. Each was identified, and a lead person was given responsibility for ensuring that the proposal was carried out. The proposals were:*

1. *Two social workers agreed to meet social welfare offices in the community to discuss ways Refuge could work with them.*
2. *A monthly meeting would be organised for translators. Relevant staff members would meet in small groups to plan the development of family and group work services within Refuge.*



**Figure 1** The diagram illustrates, on the left, that internal resources only take their shape, or gain their meaning, in the context of external demands; and on the right that external demands can only be defined in the context of internal resources. As in the earlier stage: 'creating a climate for working together' during which I work with dilemmas, my role here is to move back and forth between the internal and external to ensure one is defined by the other. I have to hold the tension between them and try to avoid premature decisions being made without sufficient discussion.

3. *One staff member took responsibility for raising the issue of interdisciplinary work at relevant meetings.*

### **Building structures to support the strategy**

Changes do not just happen in organisations, but they are initiated by individuals and then supported by formal policies, such as operating procedures, job descriptions, and contracts; and structures; such as lines of accountability, channels of communication, work groups and ad hoc meetings all depending on the task and size of the organisation.

Most of the organisations I meet will say they need to 'improve their communication'. The need is ever-present, and it is always laudable but consultants will get bogged down in the mire if they set out with the vague goal of improving communication. I usually respond to this request by saying, "for what purpose do people want to communicate — to whom and about what?" Communication, like other organisational processes, is best understood in terms of the primary task of the organisation. If the task is to work with clients by using one's own and colleagues' personal responses and feelings, then a more intimate, informal type of communication and an organisation which promotes trust will be most helpful. Other organisations with other tasks may need to communicate about academic ideas, about the interface between design and manufacturing or the relationship between sales staff and the customers. Therefore the structures of an organisation, in this case communication, must be designed in the context of the primary task, the mission statement, and the implementing strategies of the organisation. Structure must follow strategy, not the other way round.

### Management and leadership

*In the case of Refuge we could not go any further in our consultation until we answered the question of who was going to be responsible for implementing these changes. We had to deal with the leadership crisis. I chose to deal with this in three ways:*

- 1. I wanted to stimulate an agency-wide discussion about leadership. What did leadership mean to all of them?*
- 2. How did they all contribute to it?*
- 3. How could they support or undermine leadership?*

*My aim in doing this was to promote a sense of corporate ownership of the leadership process, so that it was not seen as an us versus them phenomenon. I knew that the staff had been hurt and demoralized by the departure of their leader and as a result they might be wary and stand-offish with a new leader; or they might expect the new person to be a saviour who would redress the problems of the past. But either way, it seemed to me the danger was they would be putting their hopes and worries into another person, instead of owning them for themselves, and under those circumstances it would make leading an impossible task. I wanted to look carefully at their strategic plans to discuss what a leader would need to do to develop the plan, and what qualities would be required of the leader and the staff. To develop this theme I discussed with the group the systemic relationship between leadership and 'followership'. I wanted to work with the staff on the issues about choosing their next leader.*

The American playwright, Arthur Miller, was recently asked why there did not seem to be so many great writers in the world today, and he replied, "Probably because there aren't so many great readers". I find it is helpful in organisations to discuss the ways leadership is influenced by followership, and vice versa. I hope, through this that staff members see their own, and collective, responsibility for the leadership in their own organisation. I also present a concept I have adapted from the writings of Peter Drucker (1990) which he calls 'information responsibility', which I have recast in systemic language as 'feedback responsibility'. This clarifies that feedback, which is truly the lifeblood of a systemic organisation, does not just happen, but individuals must take active responsibility to identify what is important feedback and to whom should it be passed. The failure of the organisation to understand the changing expectations and needs of the staff, is a responsibility shared by all.

*In designing an organisational consultation, one must periodically change the mode to keep the participants fresh and interested, and on this basis I ended this discussion with a brief exercise for all the staff. I asked them to write down, for themselves, statements under the following headings: 'What I will do personally to make leadership more attractive to someone' and 'If I were going to be a leader, this is what would need to be different for it to be attractive to me'. This second statement sprung from the possibility, discussed earlier, that the new leadership would emerge from within the current staff. Their comments were then passed to me, read out anonymously, and discussed.*

*The group felt the risks of having another leader appointed from outside far outweighed the risks that an internally appointed leader would create divisions and conflicts within the*

staff group. At least an internal person would need less time to adjust to the culture and personalities at Refuge, and this thought seemed to offer some security to the staff group, after what they had been through. We also discussed the advantages of one leader versus a leadership team of two or three, and the conclusion was that this group, which valued consensus decision-making where possible, would prefer a leadership team because all decisions would be discussed among the team, which would model the consensus process for the organisation as a whole.

It was clear that there would not be time during this consultation for the new leaders to step forward and assume responsibilities, so I wanted to be sure with the little time I had left, that there was sufficient agreement about the next step to be taken after my departure, and this led us to discuss the process by which new leaders would actually be selected. It was agreed that at a staff meeting in about one month's time, those interested would put their names forward as prospective leaders, and this would be discussed by the staff group. Then if there was sufficient support, this person, or persons, would present themselves to the Board who would make the final decision and agree all the official terms and conditions of employment. The staff group preferred this option, so they would not be led by someone, or a group, that they did not approve of, which prompted me to raise the dilemma that they would have to surrender some of their control and security if they were going to allow a leader, or a leadership group, to become a good, strong leader with his or her (or their) own ideas and authority. It was as though the organisation needed strong leadership at a time when the staff also wanted to control the process to prevent the organisation re-living some of the previous difficulties.

The two-day consultation finally came to an end and the Refuge staff were left to their own devices. At the subsequent staff meeting three staff members put themselves forward to become the leader group and the Board supported the principle of an internal team of three acting as leaders. After several months a rift developed between the leaders over the unresolved issue concerning one discipline's right to have different pay and conditions from other staff members doing similar work in Refuge. Although the principle was accepted, there were many angry feelings which did not abate and eventually the one leader representing this discipline decided to apply for another job and leave Refuge. The two remaining leaders stayed in their roles, and the pay and conditions issue has become more acceptable, presumably because it was no longer embodied in the daily activity of one of the leaders, and the staff at Refuge feel they have moved on to a less tumultuous and more productive period.

### **Stepping back to understand the new group process**

The final step in the consultation process is one of placing all the staff in an observer's position so they can reflect on what they have learned through the process (see Campbell, 1995). I assume that if the consultation has been effective, the participants are coming away with a new understanding of why the organisation feels the way it does; what they each contribute to this process; and what kind of structures they need in order to support development in the future. I try to consolidate this new thinking by giving

people the time to discuss, either as a large group or in small groups, their experiences. I emphasise that they have created these new understandings themselves, and the responsibility for the organisation's future belongs to all of them collectively.

If it seems necessary to clarify or consolidate points made during the consultation, I might remind people of some of the key issues which were raised, such as, in the case of Refuge, the necessity of identifying the badness and danger out there and the subsequent struggle to create a moral, non-abusive organisation which could treat everyone as equals, while at the same time recognising the differences between the professionals and their ties to the outside world.

### Conclusion

There are good reasons why there are so many dismissive jokes about consultants. "A consultant is someone who borrows your watch in order to tell you the time." I think many clients are disappointed in the results of consultation because of unrealistic expectations, but I want to caution any reader embarking on consultation work, not to collude with the hope that you will be able to perform miracles. My own experience leads me to the humble conclusion, that there is a limited amount a consultant can do to effect changes in organisations with long histories and momentum to carry them into the future. I think it is important to be clear about what consultation can do and that the real work must be done by the organisation after the consultant is gone. It behoves us all to encourage the establishment of organisational structures, such as meetings, to allow the consultation work to carry on after the consultant is gone. Follow-up visits are another important way one can monitor the change process begun during the consultation. In these ways I think it is also possible to help clients become observers of their own processes of change.

### REFERENCES

- Anderson, H., et al. (1986). Problem-determined systems: towards transformation in family therapy, *Journal of Strategic and Systemic Therapies*, 5: 1-13.
- Bion, W.R. (1961). *Experiences in Groups*, Tavistock Publications, London.
- Boscolo, L., et al. (1987). *Milan Systemic Family Therapy*, Basic Books, New York.
- Burr, V. (1995). *An Introduction to Social Constructionism*, Routledge, London.
- Campbell, D. et al. (1994). *Systemic Work with Organisations*, Karnac Books, London.
- Campbell, D. et al. (1990). *Systemic Approach to Consultation*, Karnac Books, London.
- Campbell, D. et al. (1995). *Learning Consultation*, Karnac Books, London.
- Drucker, P. (1990). *Managing the Non-Profit Organisation*, Butterworth/Heinemann, London.
- Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/Knowledge. Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977*, (ed.) Colin Gordon, Harvester Wheatsheaf, London.
- Gergen, K. & Gergen, M. (1986). Narrative form and the construction of psychological science. In T. Sarbin (ed.) *Narrative Psychology: The Storied Nature of Human Conduct*, Praeger, New York.
- Guba, E.G. & Lincoln, Y.S. (1989). *Fourth Generation Evaluation*, Sage, Newbury, CA.
- Hampden-Turner, C. (1990). *Charting the Corporate Mind*, Blackwell, Oxford.
- McCaughan, N. & Palmer, B. (1994). *Systems Thinking for Harrassed Managers*, Karnac Books, London.

- McNamee, S. & Gergen, K. (1992) *Therapy as Social Construction*, Sage, London.
- Menzies Lyth, I. (1988). *Containing Anxiety in Institutions*, Free Association Books, London.
- Miller, E.J. & Rice, A.K. (1967). *Systems of Organisation*, Tavistock Publications, London.
- Miller, E.J. (Ed.) (1976). *Task and Organisation*, Wiley, London/New York.
- Miller, E.J. (1989). *The Leicester Model: Experiential Study of Groups and Organisational Processes*, Tavistock Publications, London.
- Selvini Palazzoli, et al. (1986). *The Hidden Games of Organisations*, Pantheon, New York.
- Senge, Peter, M. (1990). *The Fifth Discipline*, Doubleday, New York.
- White, M. (1989). *Re-Authoring Lives: Interviews and Essays*, Dulwich Centre Publications, Adelaide.
- Wynne, L., McDaniel, S. & Weber, T. (eds.) (1986). *Systems Consultation*. Guilford Press, New York.

### Commentary

*Brian Wolfson in conversation with Alan Cooklin*

**BW:** I really liked the part where David Campbell very simply sets out what he wants to do in items 1-9. To me you could take that and use it in virtually any company or organisation; it would be an operating plan that is simple and to the point. And another point I liked is where he talks about "creating a climate for working together". Quite simplistically, one could call that the job of a manager — creating an atmosphere in which people will give of their best. As he is in the role of the consultant he has the luxury of being able to just that, sidestepping reality by saying that in an ideal world this is what we should and shouldn't do. Having said that he sets his stall out very well. But when he says "implementing the mission statement with a strategic plan", I have a discomfort with an outside consultant being the source of a strategic plan. Strategic plans should be designed by the people who are going to carry them out because they are the people who know most about it.

**AC:** Did you feel that he did that, or did you feel he was simply inviting them to do it?

**BW:** It wasn't clear to me; it certainly was a major headline for him and of course it is fundamental: "Where are we now, where do we want to get to and what do we have to do to get there?"

**AC:** So, what's your criticism, that he shouldn't have had to tell them that, or he told them in too much detail what to do?

**BW:** I think the latter, but again, perhaps I shouldn't be critical on this point because given the resources with which he was working maybe he had to adopt this posture to get this message across because the refuge needed certain things that they were not going to get from within. Overall I thought this paper was very matter of fact and down to earth.