Social imagination as reflexive imagination

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Organisational group analysis?

- "Group analysts will tend not to have the directness and practical orientation of the management consultant"
  - › Roberts (1983)
- "Group analysis is essentially a clinical theory and has no organisational equivalent"
  - › Nitsun (1998)
- "There is not yet any firm evidence to support a group analytic consulting paradigm"
  - › Curnow (2000)

Critique of group analytic literature

- Problems of scope
- Problems of coherence
- Problems of structure
- Problems of fit

Integrated communication framework

- 4 levels of abstraction:
  - › Communication theory
  - › Communicative matrix model
  - › Systemic reflexivity (participant observance about what matrix the communication makes)
  - › Communicative intervention

Framework: communication theory

- A basic Foulkesian hypothesis: human experience, consciousness and meaning are constructed through communicative interaction

2 unidentified discourses

- Transmission discourse:
  - "Communication … is everything sent out and received with response, whether consciously or unconsciously"
    - Foulkes & Anthony, 1957)

- Construction discourse:
  - "The mind that is usually called intra-psychic is a property of the group, and the processes that take place are due to this dynamic interaction in this communicational matrix"
    - (Foulkes & Anthony, 1957)

The organisation becomes...

- A matrix of conscious and unconscious communication exchanges, occurring within communication episodes, building narratives of identity, relationship and culture, which in turn shape communication episodes and exchanges

Organisational matrix

Cultural narratives

Relationship narratives

Identity narratives

Communication episode

Communication exchange

Communication act
(feeling, thinking, action)

Consultancy processes...

- become communication episodes themselves with an implicative effect on organisational narratives and patterns

Organisational analysts can

- Experience, observe, highlight, make sense of and intervene in conscious and unconscious processes of communication
- Encourage the development of new patterns more fitting to the organisational task(s), through communication episodes designed to enrich the communicational matrix

The monastery: a conflicted matrix

- Anglican community: meaningful communication broken down
- 2 camps: severe splitting, polarisation, projection, helplessness and hopelessness
- Fear and despair about conflict; fear of death

Typical vocabulary

- "it is hard to experience hope"
- "there is envy and competition but we don't talk about it"
- "there is a lack of charity in our talk about others"
- "we don't recognise each other"
- "we are shrinking daily"
- "has my life had meaning?"
- "we need to face the truth about ourselves as a community"

Matrix: narratives and patterns

› "To regard organisations as patterns of communication is to take a group analytic view of organisations"

• (Stacey, 2005)

Pattern forms

- Reactive
- Reflexive
- Paradoxical

...ctive pattern

Culture: poor meta-communication and reflexivity, unconscious defence

Relationship: oppositional; competitive

Identity: poor agency and discernment

Emotion: stress/fear/pain

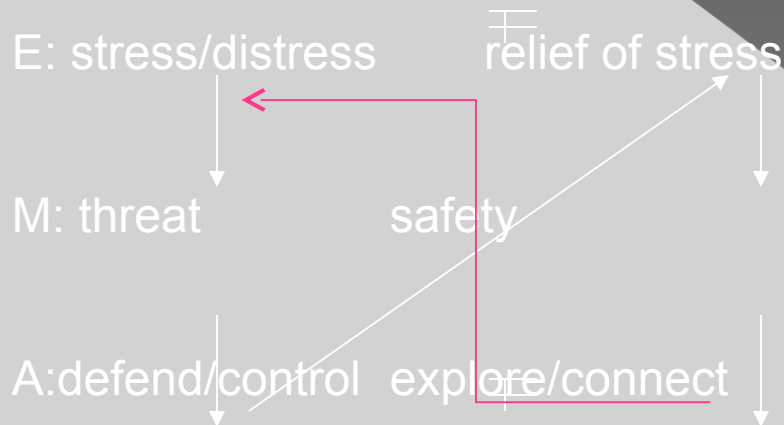Meaning: threat

Action: protect through defence

doxical pattern

Culture: unconscious splitting, poor meta-communication, fragmentation

Relationship: ambivalent, contradictory

Identity: confused

E: stress/distress   relief of stress

M: threat   safety

A:defend/control explore/connect

exive pattern

Culture: good meta-communication , respect for subjectivity of other

Relationship: self/other legitimation

Identity: good agency and discernment

Emotion: stress/fear/pain

Meaning: curiosity
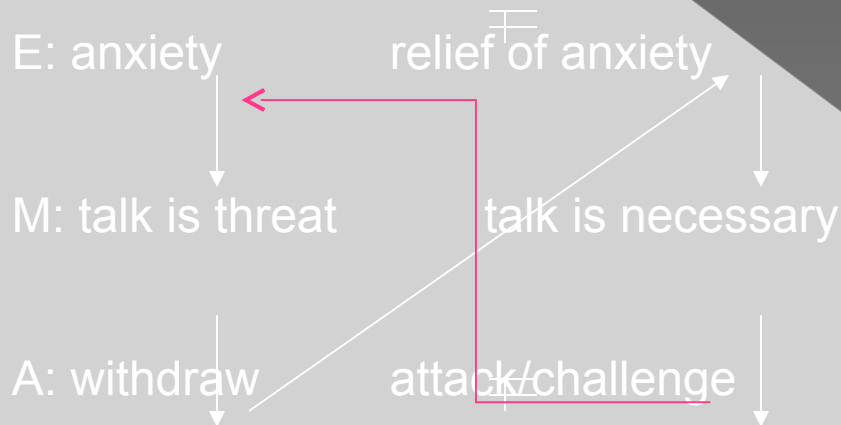
Action: protect through exploration

doxical pattern of figuration

Culture: splitting, poor meta-communication, fear of death

Relationship: self is ethical; other is unethical

Identity: failure and paralysis

E: anxiety   relief of anxiety

M: talk is threat   talk is necessary

A: withdraw   attack/challenge

Consultant reflexivity

- Consultant is not an 'objective visitor' but 'in the group' i.e. part of the consultancy matrix not outside it

- Taking up a listening position on the boundary of conscious and unconscious, facilitating, contextualising and re-contextualising expression of emotion, linking emotion to thinking and action

- Reflexivity is:
  - "an interactively critical practice that is constantly reflected back on itself and is always suspicious of the productions of its own knowledge"
    - (Frosh & Barraitser, 2008)

Systemic reflexivity

- Reflexivity based on observation and inquiry into the systems of emotion, meaning and action within which we participate
- Highlights **(in)coherence** in (part)narratives and patterns of communication
- Assumes a partial moral responsibility for the social realities created
- And encourages systemic reflexivity for and with others in our communication

Communicative intervention

- The most underdeveloped aspect of organisational group analysis
- Reliance on 'free floating discussion'
- Communication is the site for organisational creativity and destructiveness so a core focus should be its structure, process and content

Change in communication means change in organisation

- Structure: framing boundaries of place, time, membership, task, behaviour
- Process: reflexive, constructive (promoting forward movement); guided (based on hypothesis)
- Content: framing, reframing, locating, contextualising, interpreting
  - Adapted from Kennard et al (2000)

Implications for consultant

- Pay attention to:
  - › Managing contexts and their boundaries
  - › Positioning individuals reflexively, conscious about how they are contributing to cultural, relational and identity narratives and communication patterns
  - › Designing, structuring and facilitating communication to reflect on and reconstruct those narratives and patterns

Reconfiguring monks' matrix

- From paradoxical and reactive to reflexive pattern

- Purposeful, structured, boundaried conversation

- Enabling a new experience of speaking, listening, identity, relationship and culture

Reflexive exercise

- 1. Write a statement about how you feel you have contributed to misunderstanding, mistrust and conflict

- 2. Read each other's statements and take it in turns to explore, from a position of curiosity, the feelings, meanings and actions described

- 3. write a response in the form of a letter describing the impact of the conversation, your understanding of the other and what you wish for them now

- 4. share letters and respond

- 5.free floating discussion in community about the experience and its effect on identity, relationship and community

Some reflective comments

- "the exercise fitted with our valuing of confession and helped things to begin to come out into the light"

- "it is the first time I have been challenged to take responsibility for my contribution to the malaise. Previously I had tried to analyse what went wrong or tried to put it right"

- "focusing on one's own vulnerability makes one more attractive to the other and paradoxically helps to build strength"

Summary

- Careful communication analysis
- Reflexive reflection on consultant imagination and experience
- Specified exercises linking free floating discussion to task centred exercises enabling expression of emotion, development of meaning and challenging and reconfiguration of narratives and patterns