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Humanistic Management: an alternative way of organising

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Cover image: A Gaudi mosaic: photo by Christina Schwabenland

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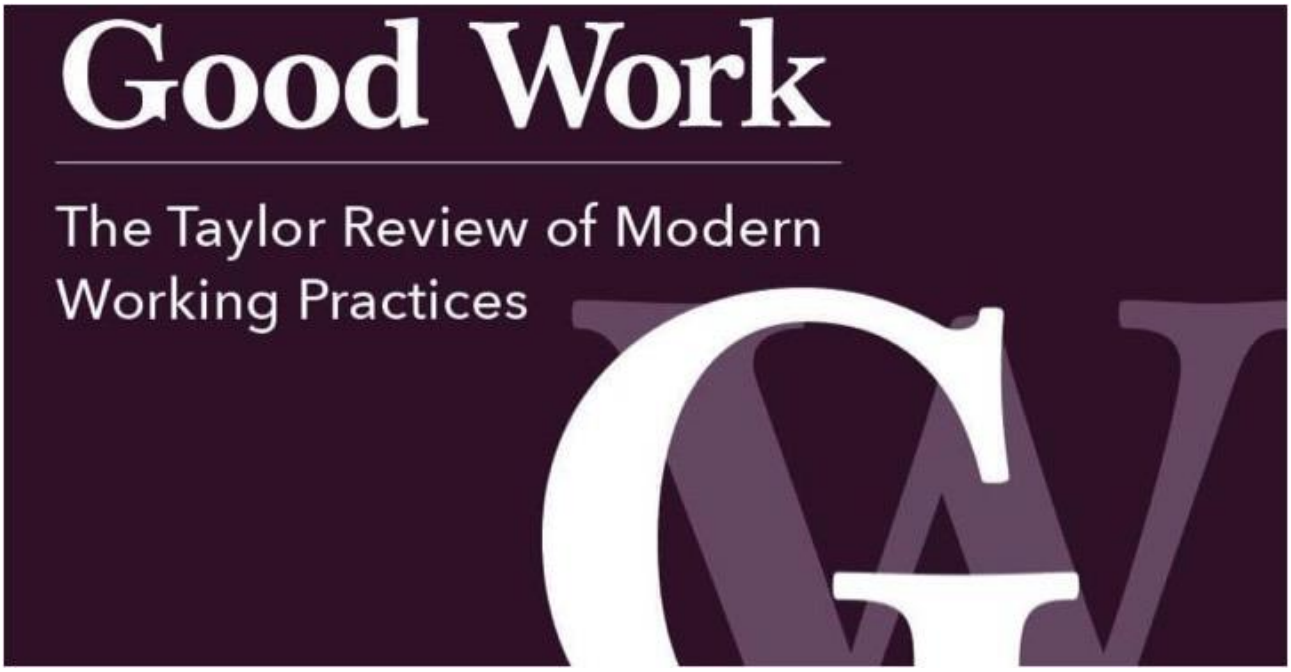
Humanistic management:
an alternative way of organising?

Christina Schwabenland and Paul Harrison

How this special edition came about

Last November (2017) Paul Harrison and I (Christina) launched the UK Chapter of the Humanistic Management Network (HMN) at the Young Foundation in London with a line-up of great speakers. We had Matthew Taylor from the RSA talking about his report for the government on Good Work, Loughlin Hickey from Blueprint, Mary Hodgson from The Young Foundation and Ernst von Kimakowitz, one of the founding members of the international network, and convener of the Swiss Humanistic Management (HM) Chapter.



Somewhat surprisingly, to us at any rate, the Humanistic Management Network had thirteen national Chapters, but none in the UK. We felt there was a need, not so much out of a deep engagement with the philosophy and underlying principles of humanism, but more out of a sense that organisations are becoming hard places to be for many people. Our evidence is largely anecdotal (and experiential), but here is just one, disturbing statistic: according to a Gallup poll in 2017, 87% of employees are 'not engaged' at work. If this is true, we find that shocking. All that potential, commitment, enjoyment, creativity that comes with a sense of fulfilment and purpose, and of being valued at work, lost. What unhappiness must lie behind that statistic? And for what? Are organisations more productive, more profitable, more effective, if their employees are miserable? It seems unlikely.

So, is there a need, perhaps, for a UK Chapter? But what might the new Chapter do, and what exactly did we mean by 'humanistic management'? The November 2017 launch could only begin to address these questions.

However, at that launch, we met Bob MacKenzie from the Association for Management Education and Development (AMED) and began to discuss overlapping areas of interest and concern. From these discussions, the opportunity arose to jointly create a special issue for AMED's journal e-Organisations and People (e-O&P). We saw this as an opportunity to continue the debate, to develop our ideas about the role and importance of humanistic management in the UK. We could also explore its relevance and boundaries with overlapping ideas and concepts, and begin to consider what a UK branch of the international humanistic management network might achieve.

Our collaborative commissioning, writing and editing process

Our partnership with AMED began with a joint workshop in April 2018 to bring together potential contributors and to give some initial shape to the special edition. From the start, this collaboration with AMED has been in itself a model of what might be viewed as humanistic management in practice – in particular, AMED's approach of 'critical friendship' (e.g. MacKenzie 2015) as an alternative to the more usual blind peer review that those of us working in academia are all too aware of. For e-O&P, critical friends work directly with authors on a one-to-one basis as the texts develop; sharing a joint commitment to excellent writing, scholarly practice and clarity of expression, offered through encouragement and suggestion. This model is not unique to AMED: the critical management studies group VIDA (a network which is open to any with an interest in critical management who identify other than cis-men) has also pioneered critical friendship as alternative to traditional peer review. We hope our contributors to this edition will agree that this process of critical friendship has been rigorous (some articles have gone through five iterations to reach the clarity that you will see here) but that it hasn't been of the kind that makes you hide the reviews away in a drawer for a few days after receiving them until you feel brave enough to go through the detail. (Are there any writers out there who have shared that awful experience?).

Some thoughts about our theme

The purpose of this miscellany is to explore the potential and viability of a UK Chapter of the Humanistic Management Network, to carry on the conversation, and to draw attention to the dialectic between the range of different understandings of the concept that we present here, and to its underlying coherence. We are still feeling our way, and we do not have a single, all-encompassing 'definition' of what humanistic management is. Rather, we see its meaning as contextual - as emergent and fluid. We do not claim to be 'experts'; we are people who work in management, study management, experience management and care deeply that it should be humane.

Questioning the alternative

Our theme contains the idea that humanistic management is not mainstream, that it is 'alternative'. Of course the principles of humanism are hardly new, and indeed in many ways are not radical at all. Humanistic thinking has a long history in the UK, and in management terms, can be traced as least as far back as the deeply influential human potential movement and Maslow's formulation of a hierarchy of needs (1943). Such influences led, among other things, to the work on action research developed through Surrey and Bath universities (e.g. Smith 2007), the growth in interest of self-directed learning, reflective practice and more. More recently, the growth of interest in Fredric Laloux's (2014) model of 'teal management' promotes the importance of peer relationships and systemic learning.

But our contention is that if humanistic management ideas really were mainstream, we would not have 87% of employees disengaged. We would not be hearing the stories that the #MeToo initiative is bringing to light. Bullying, harassment, and work intensification would be seen as intolerable - symptoms of something gone badly wrong.

Our suggestion is that even the notion of an 'alternative' has become challenging. We live and work in times where there is a striking disconnect between much of the management literature which supports the idea that humanistic principles make good business sense, that organisations should foster trust, creativity and the autonomy that workers can enjoy, when they know they are valued and appreciated. This runs alongside the increasing hegemony of neo-liberal forms of management, which promote the idea that there is only one way (David Zigmond's article in this issue exemplifies this well).

The dilemma posed by the 'business case', such as that made by Blueprint in association with the Health Foundation (2018), that humanistic principles are good for business as well as for people at large (although the Blueprint doesn't use the term 'humanistic' as such), concerns whether or not that argument should be its driving force. What happens when organisations which claim to adopt humanistic principles fail? Or when humanistic practices may incur additional expenditure? Do we need alternative rationales, appealing to ethical and/or moral values ('it's just the right thing to do')? And how radical should supporters of humanistic management be? Is humanistic management fundamentally reformist, sharing common ground with initiatives such as 'conscious capitalism' (e.g. Burden & Warwick 2013; 2014), or is it inherently more radical?

These are live questions, and we suspect there may never be complete agreement; Rather, we anticipate an on-going dialogue between principles and practice, and between pragmatism and challenge.

An overview of the articles

The seven articles in this issue each represent a contribution to these questions. Each makes explicit reference to humanistic management, but also presents the authors' theories-in-use about the different ways in which humanistic management is being conceptualised. The order in which they are presented is also significant. We have paired six of the seven articles together, so that each pair can be read as creating a dialogue. These articles are drawn from practice, they provide exemplars of what humanistic management is – and, in the articles by William Tate and David Zigmond, what it is not. The seventh article, by John Rosling, is more abstract, and serves to present a model to interlink these disparate ideas together.

The first two are each engaged in an exploration of the ways in which organisations can support women and reproductive health. When **Ilaria Boncori** became pregnant, she was able to draw on a rich – and unusual – resource. This consisted of the stories she had collected earlier from parents as part of a research project into parenting and work. Within these stories, she found inspiration for tackling issues around workload, returning to work after her daughter was born, and in the subtle, but necessary, work of identity negotiation as she sought to integrate her newer identity, that of mother, with her long-standing roles of researcher and teacher. Her organisation, which runs an on-site crèche, was also broadly supportive. This article provides an exemplar of a life-changing situation that was well managed and integrated, to the mutual benefit of all stakeholders.

Lara Owen's article similarly tells the story of her work to facilitate an organisation, Coexist, to negotiate a new policy on menstrual health. Lara writes:

> *'the progressive ethos of the organisation, committed to humanistic and broader ecological values, meant that there was a desire to encourage and support women to honour the menstrual cycle rather than to feel they had to suppress, deny, or minimise it'.*

Ilaria's and Lara's articles both explore ways in which employers and employees alike can find ways of being whole people at work, rather than compartmentalising different aspects of their being which then, almost inevitably, conflict. A humane organisation, by this reckoning, is one that can deal with the whole person, including the realities of their embodied selves, rather than labelling some aspects of self as irrelevant or even detrimental to its needs.

Ruth Slater and **Jayne Mizon** have co-authored an article about an initiative to identify an organisation's values 'bottom-up', rather than, as in so many organisations, being led by senior management. They describe the processes they developed, and show how certain values were seen as irrelevant by staff, who were also able to suggest values that the senior management had not considered. Ruth and Jayne write that:

> *'there is little merit in values which do not support the business. There is little merit, too, in values that do not reflect employees' experience of the company'.*

Here we see a different kind of integration, not of the different aspects of self, but of the different layers and functions within the organisation.

Ruth's and Jayne's article provides a nice counterpoint to **Rob Warwick**'s description of his experiences of teaching ethics to undergraduates in a business school. Both articles are exemplars of participatory approaches to values and ethics, and both describe action learning in process. Rob captures some of the sense of this in his use of the metaphor of 'foraging':

> *'for me'* he writes*, 'the image of "breadcrumbs" conjures up the image of a trail left for students, head down, bird-like, pecking the ground, taking one step after another with little thought to or active engagement with one's surroundings. "Foraging" is different: foragers are heads up, exploring in different directions, coming together to discuss, exchanging ideas and understanding. It is a constant sensing and negotiating of one's context'.*

These articles are rich in their observations about humanistic management in practice. What the 'foraging' metaphor suggests to us is the importance of teachers or managers being able to let go of control, to trust to processes of involvement and empowerment, and to have the courage necessary to allow the unexpected to emerge.

The next two articles present a very different picture; their articles each illustrate what humanistic management is not. These are the horror stories; immense suffering, careers and reputations damaged, if not destroyed, and the consequences of fighting institutional injustices. They share an interest in accountability which, in these stories, seems to be everywhere and nowhere. **William Tate**'s story, concerning the case of Dr Hadiza Bawa-Garba, a doctor in a paediatric unit who was on duty when a child died. The case illustrates the complexities of accountability within an organisation suffering numerous systemic failures. Where is individual responsibility under such circumstances? And how can we account for ourselves and be accountable to others in a way which does not separate the person from the systems within which they are located? Can systems be more or less humanistic? **David Zigmond** narrates a system that has become profoundly un-humanistic in its attempts to tackle these very issues. His Kafkaesque story is about the need to be accountable to regulatory bodies for the upholding of standards. It is one of systems dominating people, systems out of control. And yet, in his imaginary dialogue with the more human face of the regulators, he acknowledges the complexities of accountability in such complex organisations.

John Rosling's article takes a very different approach. While the other authors have all written about humanistic management (or its opposite) in practice, with all the messiness that such experiential accounts always involve, John's contribution is more abstract. Starting from the observation that the frequently proposed links between purpose and performance are more aspirational than demonstrated in evidence, he then develops a model to demonstrate how such links might actually be manifested in organisations. His proposition is that without ownership, trust and an understanding of context, a sense of purpose alone is not enough. Although his starting point is quite different from the other authors in this collection, his conclusions are very similar. Trust figures in all of the accounts, by its presence, in the first four articles, and by its absence in the two 'horror' stories. John writes:

> 'context-led rather than content-led management has been shown to be better adapted to fast-moving and ambiguous environments.'

This observation surely connects well to William's and David's stories of systemic failures.

So where are we now?

There is a richness to these contributions that cannot be conveyed sufficiently in a brief editorial – you have to read them all. But some themes do emerge quite clearly. These include the necessity of integration and ethical decision-making.

Integration

The first is the notion of integration between the different aspects of self at work, between different levels of management, between values/ethics/principles and experiences, between individuals and the contexts in which they work and live. This may not be a very radical proposition, but much of traditional management orthodoxy centres on separation – separation of function, role, work and home, mind and body, organisation and context/environment. But humans are all of these things, and humane management must entail a recognition and respect for the totality of the human being, and for the totality of the organisation.

Ethical decision-making

The Humanistic Management Network talks about 'ethical decision making' as being at the heart of humane management. When we talk about 'consequences' (and therefore about 'ethical decision making') do we think this is focused on consequences within an organisation for its people, or do we think this requires a much broader perspective? Do we think of consequences not just for humans within the organisation, but also for customers, suppliers, shareholders, and the wider society? If so, this then requires an organisation to understand its true purpose in society as a foundational requirement. Then, logically, this might encourage an organisation (as some do) to look for sources of established and emerging guidance as to what 'ethical' means in this wider sense, such as Sustainable Development Goals, Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The presence and future of humanistic management in the UK?

Making a start? Launching the UK Chapter of the Humanistic Management Network, November 2017
[Photo: Christina Schwabenland]

Finally, is there a need for a UK group to promote humanistic management? The horror stories suggest yes. The contributions in this edition form the beginning of a debate which the UK Humanistic Management Chapter is taking forward. Specifically, we plan to organise a post-publication workshop in early spring 2019. We will be looking to establish a steering group to drive the next phase of the UK Chapter's development and to identify a programme of events. Putting together this special edition has been tremendously exciting; the breadth of articles, the enthusiasm of the authors, and the enormous support we have received from AMED has given us a firm foundation from which to grow.

Please join in our efforts to continue this co-inquiry.

Acknowledgements

Our grateful thanks to many people whose help in putting this special edition together has been invaluable. First and foremost, those in **AMED**, especially the indefatigable and endlessly supportive **Bob MacKenzie**, without whose quiet but constant encouragement (not to mention taking on the 'critical friend' role for many of us) we would not have managed to pull this off. Also, to **David McAra**, who expertly worked unobtrusively behind the scenes to transform our penultimate Word drafts into engaging pdf documents, more readily accessible online, and to **Linda Williams** and **Ned Seabrook**, who enable distribution post-publication. Secondly, our thanks go to all our contributors who have written fascinating articles and revised them… and revised them again…. and again …. The UK Chapter of the Humanistic Management Network (HMN) is also profoundly indebted to the speakers at our November 2017 launch: **Matthew Taylor**, **Loughlin Hickey**, **Mary Hodgson** and, also, a special thanks to **Ernst von Kimakowitz**, who worked tirelessly with us to share his knowledge and experience as a founding member of the Humanistic Management Network.

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About the guest editors

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Paul Harrison is the volunteer co-ordinator of 'Humanists in Business' under the auspices of Humanists UK, the charity and campaign organisation (https://humanism.org.uk). Paul's interest in Humanistic Management originates from two sources: his interest in work psychology (he completed his MSc in Occupational Psychology in 2017) and a career in professional services. This included advising clients on ethical tax compliance and a range of senior management roles.

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A message of support for the Humanistic Management Network UK Chapter

Ernst von Kimakowitz - co-founder Humanistic Management Network

A context

The launch of the Humanistic Management Network UK Chapter marks an important step in the development of the Network, and this present publication is as timely as it is relevant. I am therefore very happy to write this message of support to the UK Chapter and share some thoughts to contextualise Humanistic Management and what it means to me and to our work at the Humanistic Management Network (HMN).

We are a global network that lives, works and acts through local Chapters and collaborations in many countries around the globe. As Christina Schwabenland and Paul Harrison have written in their editorial, it was about time to explore the viability of a UK Chapter. I am much looking forward to seeing it develop and thrive. While there is a variety of activities in different Chapters around the world, the shared purpose of the global Network is to encourage, promote and support economic activities and business conduct that demonstrate unconditional respect for the dignity of life. It gives me great pleasure to know that the leadership we have in the UK is genuinely committed to that purpose. For what is organising and managing good for, if it does not aspire to be supportive of a life in dignity for all?

Our rationale

When contextualising Humanistic Management, our point of departure is a clear acknowledgement of the tremendous progress that variations of market economies have brought about in many societies. By and large, we live longer, healthier, safer and more freely today than ever before. Our work in the Humanistic Management Network is hence not driven by gloomy scenarios but by the insight that the success story of market economies is creating negative side effects we can no longer ignore; by the insight that turning market economies into market societies will not provide us with solutions to the challenges we are facing.

Two main challenges: environmental and distributional

As a global community, we are confronted with two main challenges: environmental and distributional.

The environmental challenge

First, the environmental challenge, where climate change forms the most prominent - but not the only - issue we are confronted with. A whole set of environmental challenges including, for example, contaminated or uneven distribution of water supply and increasing air pollution, the exhaustion of some natural resources or rapidly declining biodiversity, are demanding that we urgently step up our efforts to maintain the conditions for life on earth.

The distributional challenge

Second, we are facing a distributional challenge which includes growing inequalities in the distribution of income, and also more generally of opportunities in life. From the global level all the way to that of individual communities, in rich societies just as much as in low income economies, the foundation of social peace and cohesion is eroding, when more and more people rightfully feel they no longer are getting a fair deal. The worrisome rise of populism we currently observe around the world may well be just a first glimpse at what is in store if we do not manage to make our economies work better for more people.

How business can help: a concerted humanistic management approach

Both of these challenges we cannot expect to address successfully without the active contribution of business in co-creating solutions with other societal actors such as policy makers, government agencies, civil society, international and non-profit organizations. Consequently, it would be equally wrong to expect business to singlehandedly fix it as it would be wrong to expect we can do it without the active contribution of business.

To enable business to play a more active role in addressing these challenges, a paradigmatic shift regarding the purpose of business is required. This requires a rebalancing away from a relentless focus on maximising financial returns and towards embracing legitimate interests of a wide swathe of stakeholders. Being profitable for a business is an integral part of being sustainable, but it is a means, and not an end in itself.

Humanistic management as a business paradigm shift?

Aiming to promote an active debate on this paradigm shift, I have developed the three-stepped approach to Humanistic Management, which is grounded in unconditional respect for the dignity of life. Its intention is to be both an anchor of reflection on business conduct as well as a summary of the main characteristics shared by organisations that demonstrate purpose-driven leadership beyond expediency, in ways that act to respect dignity. This approach was first published in the introduction to *Humanistic Management in Practice* (2011) the first book in our Humanism in Business book series at Palgrave Macmillan, in which a rich and varied body of knowledge has since emerged.

The three steps are

1. *Unconditional respect for the dignity of life* as the universal foundation and prerequisite for being an organization that is fit to gain public legitimacy.
2. *Integration of ethical reflection in management decisions* to depart from a corrective model where only public outcry following misdemeanor triggers corrective action.
3. *Active and ongoing engagement with stakeholders* to learn from and with each other and to mitigate risks from honest mistakes. Kimakowitz et al (Eds).2011]

These three anchor points can support organizations in developing strategies and practices aimed at the creation of sustainable human welfare with respect for the planet. They can help organizations reflect on their purpose in general and on their role in contributing to solutions to both of the aforementioned challenges we face as a global community. A desire to generate value for society at large is part of the DNA of organizations that embrace a Humanistic Management paradigm and it is also what we aim for at the Humanistic Management Network.

So please join me in congratulating the editorial team and authors of this publication and please engage with our growing Network in the UK and beyond - together we make impact towards a more sustainable and more equitable planet.

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Negotiating motherhood and career options through sharing narratives

Ilaria Boncori

I have been living and working in the UK for over a decade, after years spent in Italy (my country of origin) and China. I am a Senior Lecturer in Management, Marketing and Entrepreneurship at the University of Essex, where I also serve as a faculty Dean deputised for Education with responsibility for all teaching and learning delivered at undergraduate and postgraduate level in seven departments. My current research mostly focuses on inclusion in organization, with a specific focus on embodied practices, gender, identity, sexual orientation and ethnicity.

Having engaged on research about the experience of becoming a parent in the context of UK academia, I later found the narratives I had collected from parents within my professional context an invaluable source of learning and comfort as a new mother. I turned to those stories especially during pregnancy and later on when making work-life balance and career choices. This essay advocates the use of sharing of personal narratives in work-life organizational learning.

Keywords

Motherhood, academia, time management, organizational learning, narratives, humanistic management.

Some contextual background

I have been lucky enough to experience very little direct discrimination in my work life, but terms like “gender pay gap” and “glass ceiling” are systemic failures that have become all too familiar to most workers in contemporary organizations. My experience in academia, and even before in the marketing and communications industry, is unfortunately constellated with examples of gender discrimination in the workplace. Gender is mobilised, enacted and constructed in social ways that influence or dictate the way we understand organizations. The way people are managed is influenced by different types of bias, and the treatment of people of different genders is rather unbalanced, even within the supposedly enlightened context of Higher Education (see for instance Knights and Richards, 2003; van den Brink and Benschop, 2012a, 2012b; van den Brink, Benshop and Jansen, 2010; Winslow, 2010). Although the academic profession is based on intellectual abilities and we find many women in lower ranking academic posts, the path to top level leadership and professorship is still paved with inequality and exclusion as women are both paid and promoted less whilst facing “more difficult compromises than their male counterparts.” (Barry et al. 2006, p.275).

Some time ago, I conducted a piece of research on what it means to become a parent within the context of UK academia. At that time, I had no experience of taking care of children and no particular plans of having one of my own (which changed a few years later, after I met my husband). This meant that I approached the topic in a more 'objective' way than I would today, but also with a fair amount of ignorance, which allowed me to ask naïve and taken-for-granted questions that generated very insightful answers. I conducted 31 semi-structured in-depth qualitative interviews with 8 fathers and 23 mothers employed at a University in the UK regarding their experience of becoming a parent within this professional context. Their insights not only contributed to my research, but also to the subsequent management of my personal career choices, of motherhood and identity negotiations.

A humanistic management approach to work

Echoing contributions made in this journal's issue "Working with humans: beings not resources" (McAra, D. ed, Summer 2015), my research as an academic and my practice as a manager have always been led by a humanistic perspective. Humanistic management highlights the value of relationships, people and networks within the workplace and with external stakeholders, rather than focussing only on productivity, profit and outputs. This approach emphasises respect for people's dignity as human beings rather than just in their roles or with reference to what benefits they can bring to businesses and institutions. One of the ways to work according to this principle is to take a holistic approach to people in organizations that accounts for their lives, desires and challenges as people (not just employees) who work and live as part of an interconnected system that crosses the boundaries of personal and professional spheres.

With this in mind, I would like to note the importance for both public institutions and private ventures of avoiding the temptation of only recognising immediate profit or contingent revenues in the measurement of their staff's performance. Instead, people should be managed through a broader strategic plan that recognise the needs of individuals, especially at crucial times in their lives. Becoming a parent, and especially experiencing this for the first time, is an event that for many signifies a significant change in priorities and practices. Wise organizations would be able to retain capable staff by supporting and embracing their needs rather than ignoring these changes. Also, in dealing with people, their needs, wants and rights, decisions taken through the lens of critically engaged ethical behaviour facilitate a humanistic approach to management that moves beyond the legal towards ethical and moral decision-making processes. Although management theory has greatly developed from the early days of the 20th century, dominated by the 'scientific management' approach that highlighted productivity and cost reduction, many businesses today still fail to understand the social, emotional and embodied side of organizations. This misconception is still present even though any manager with some experience will recognise that employees who co-produce solutions, who feel valued by the organization, who are motivated and satisfied with their job and have room to grow are employees who tend to perform better and become more loyal workers. Within this perspective, the sharing of experiences, the creation of networks and the fostering of an informal peer learning culture are all measures that can support, value and develop our human resources.

The importance of narratives

Narratives and storytelling are incredibly powerful tools to gain nuanced understandings into a phenomenon (Gabriel, 2000; Boje, 2008). By telling stories and sharing narratives we can explore the silenced side of organizations, shed light on the margins where the corporate world overlaps with human experience and uncover ways to support our staff and managers on an organizational level, as well as each other as colleagues and individuals. Being people who operate in organizations we are inevitably – whether consciously or unconsciously, in actions or thought – bound to contaminate one of our realms of existence with the other. We tell stories with words, text, photos, images and sounds. However, the balance between our private and professional lives is often lost, and especially in some professions whereby the intellectual and emotional labour involved with one's professional role casts a shadow on personal interactions, or other professions like academia and creative industries where some of the work happens when inspiration strikes, even after office hours (see for instance Eby et al., 2005; Gatta and Roos, 2002; Hammer et al., 1997). Whilst spillage of work across the personal sphere of life is often a source of stress or more generally not a positive factor, traditional organizations have often seen 'presenteeism' and a culture of long working hours as a symbol of commitment to the job and the company. On the other hand, the contamination of professional settings with family matters is seen as a distraction or as an example of unprofessional behaviour (e.g. having to leave the office early or resume work in the house due to childcare issues; having to take time off to take care of sick infants etc.).

Parenthood: a game changer

As the popular saying goes, babies do not come with manuals, so becoming a parent tends to be a journey of discovery for most people who then often need to re-think their way of living and working, implement new structures and schedules, redesign their objectives and reframe their aspirations. For instance, most of my participants in the abovementioned study (with the exception of 2 men) reported significant shifts in their personal and professional trajectories. Some women decided to put their careers 'on hold' for a few years to take care of their children; others decided to look at roles more strategically in order to engage in activities that would complement parenthood or be more 'child-friendly'. A number of people (both male and female colleagues) were instead prompted to become more ambitious by the birth of a child – either to put themselves forward for promotion or increase their productivity and/or visibility. This was undoubtedly sparked by financial needs, but some women and one man commented on the fact that having a working mother in the family unit would be considered as a role model and a source of inspiration for their children.

When I became pregnant after a miscarriage (Boncori, 2018), I spent months obsessing about my baby's well-being and my own health as the 'nurturer' of a new life. At that time, I was part of an institution that, in my experience, has a very humanistic approach to management at the broader organizational level. This was evident to me in the human resources guidelines provided in a number of processes, in the organizational values that we follow and in the in the centrality of inclusion and the value of diversity. However, some of the colleagues whom I had been working with for some years, in my immediate surroundings, had very different management styles that seemed to coincide with our institutional values in theory, but sadly not in practice.

This had caused me significant levels of stress, which I now realise I kept hidden from most people I knew in the workplace to just 'get on with my work' and 'act in a professional manner'. However, the moment I realised that I was going to be a mother, or at least be given the opportunity to try again to do so, I decided to look after myself and my unborn child in a more protective way. I became very mindful of the stories I had been gifted with by my interviewees and learned from their experience in the management of this new phase of my personal and professional life. My participants' personal narratives had a strong influence on three aspects of my experience: coping with the workload to achieve a better work-life balance, becoming more strategic in my career choices, and dealing with shifting identity roles.

Lessons learned from others

The workload balancing act

The parents' narratives of coping with workloads, stress and career development were all invaluable in the choices I made during my pregnancy. For instance, I consciously tried to step away from my 'people pleaser' nature and learned to 'say no' to some of the tasks that were not relevant to me or my role, whilst I would have previously agreed to engage in those anyway to support colleagues. I also realised that I had been the enabler that had led to their being a little complacent with their job. This is because I was available to carry out things they did not want to do or did not want to learn to do themselves, even though it was part of their role. I also learned to manage my time in an increasingly effective manner and not only by managing my calendar more strictly to carve out time for emails and task/meeting preparation but also by prioritising in a more conscious way, which made me more efficient. In fact, the last year (which I spent half on maternity leave and half at work) has been the most productive of my life in terms of professional achievements, personal wellbeing and research outputs. This is also partly because interviewees made me very aware of the need to discriminate more strategically between roles and commitments. This led to an analysis of what was already on my plate and what could have been in the pipeline: I gave my all to the commitments that are necessary and important for myself as well as the organization. I then focussed on the tasks that I found interesting and motivating for myself even though not significant for my institution, or vice versa those of significance for the organization but not interesting for me or useful in terms of my career progression. Things that were not useful (did I really need three jobs as an external examiner?), not particularly relevant (did I need to embark on a lengthy translation of a book to make a colleague's life easier?) or not impactful enough (did I have to volunteer for that small scale but very time consuming working group at this stage in my career?) at the organizational and even at the individual level were all eventually declined.

Returning to work

Having lived in the UK for well over a decade I feel rather at home here, far more than in my country of origin or other places I have lived in around the world, but whilst expecting my baby I became aware of the lack of support I would have suffered from upon baby's arrival, due to lack of family members in the vicinity. My family and financial needs would have meant only being able to take six months of maternity leave. And, like

one of my interviewees said regarding her experience, my return to work was going to be a case of 'ready or not, here I come', as parental leave choices are frequently dictated by practical and financial reasons rather than one's level of readiness or physical recovery. Male colleagues all commented on their very short parental leave entitlement (ranging from no leave in the past to two weeks in more recent times), and the fact that they had decided not to take advantage of shared parental leave with their partners to allow mothers more time to recover, or due to financial constraints.

Surprisingly, I was actually quite glad to be back to work as I did start to get a bit bored on an intellectual level after five months of leave. I remembered other academics saying the same thing, so I felt less guilty and less of a 'bad mother' in comparison to my non-academic friends who were all taking at least one year of maternity leave and dreaded the time they would have had to return to work. I actually loved being back at work, talking to adults about intellectually stimulating points, having time to read and engage in research. Being able to take advantage of a nursery on campus which my daughter loves to attend, definitely helped managing that delicate transition between maternity leave and return to work full time without that feeling of guilt often experienced by mothers in the tension between being a good parent and a good employee (Brewis and Warren, 2001). Having heard the stories of people working in the same context proved to be more useful than, for instance, only relating my experience to that of my sisters and friends. This is because commonalities in terms of motherhood can not fully encapsulate the psychological, emotional and professional dynamics that come into play within a certain work environment at the personal/professional boundary-spinning intersection one experiences during the last stages of parental leave, the 'keep in touch' days and the initial stages of one's return to work.

Identity negotiations

Colleagues' narratives also helped me deal with another type of transition that I had not expected, which is often called 'identity work' (Watson, 2008) and entails the psychological and emotional work people do when "engaged in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening or revising the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness" (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003, p.1165).

As Irigaray notes (1985), in many cases it's almost as if women cease to be women and are only seen as mothers in their seemingly main role of procreators. This is culturally mainstreamed, for instance, in some places, like my husband's country of origin, where one's first name is no longer used upon giving birth but it is replaced by "Mama" plus the name of the first child (i.e. in my case I would be called "Mama Livia" rather than "Ilaria"). In what probably seemed like an unnecessary form of feminist fussiness to my in-laws, I refused to be called by my newly established identity tag and to be annihilated as an individual in what felt like a mere reduction to the embodiment of the over-pervasive role of mother. I am a mother, but I am also a woman, a daughter, a wife, an academic, a teacher, a researcher and many other things that have defined who I am, through countless experiences for almost four decades, and well before parenthood. Through the wonderful experience of motherhood, I want to maintain and enrich rather than negate my existing identity and roles. My profession and my career are intrinsic parts of who I am, so I decided that I definitely did not want to put that away or to the side my professional experience and aspirations while raising children.

Career decisions – Yes we can!

Some of my interviewees had decided to avoid work altogether during maternity leave to fully enjoy that phase of their lives, whilst others had kept busy with research (but nobody worked on any teaching or administrative duties when on leave). In many cases that had been a personal or family-oriented choice, but others had made a conscious career plan as they felt that the impact of slowing down on research outputs would have been too negative on their future prospects. As academics engaged in scholarship or research, we often take part in conferences or events that involve travelling. This had reportedly been a source of frustration and failure for many of my female interviewees who felt they could not have left their young children at home (especially if breastfeeding) as the provision of childcare and child-friendly arrangements is still rather limited at most conferences, unless the other parent or a carer accompanies the mother (which may however mean prohibitive costs). This was partially reflected in my own experience, as I happened to give birth about two months before an overseas conference I had been organizing for the previous three years. My colleagues were a great example of a humanistic approach to work, and made me feel valued as a person, both within and outside of my organization. I had felt pressure for some time from some male colleagues and other attendees to go to the conference as they belittled the impact that travel could have had on my recovering body, on my baby or my family arrangements ("just bring the baby along, I read on Google that they can fly fairly soon after birth"). Having completed all my required actions as a conference organizer, I stood my ground for what I thought would be the best choice for me and my family and eventually remained home with my baby (albeit with some regret as going to that conference always feels to me like returning to my intellectual home). I was saddened by the thought of my peers not being able to empathise with my situation and considering me unprofessional and "uncommitted", but instead I received a wonderful gift signed by a great number of conference participants wishing us well as a new family unit. Being professional does not mean having to be inhuman.

Another professional challenge I faced during the early stages of motherhood was in terms of career development. A few weeks before the start of my maternity leave it became clear that a Dean position was going to become available in my Faculty in the following months – a role that I had been aspiring to for some time. I fought with myself as I listened to concerns expressed by relatives and friends highlighting that usually people go back to work part-time or seek easier jobs, so why did I want to engage in something intense and more challenging? Why was I still thinking as my previous working self and not as a mother?

At that point I turned to the professional experiences I had come to explore through my interviewees' narratives. A number of people had been promoted during pregnancy, and some had become head of departments, professors or directors of important projects soon after becoming a parent. At the end of my interviews I asked all participants what piece of advice they would give to someone who was about to embark on the wonderful journey of becoming a parent in academia. Many people shared practical tips, a few people told me that one would not need to give up one's self, who we are, our aspirations and career plans.

This gave me hope and led me to think that whilst I would probably need to make some compromises, I could indeed still try to find some work satisfaction and quality of life as a young mother; I could, in fact, dare to 'have it all'. And so I applied for the Dean role. I was offered the job while on maternity leave and I was asked when I would have liked to start the new post, with no pressure or limitations on my personal life choices. Good organizations can adopt a humanistic style of management and do not need to be draconian keepers of antiquated images of masculine ideals of professionalism.

Conclusions

As a new parent living in a foreign country with no relatives around to support me in the practical aspects of parenthood, I know that the experience of becoming a mother could have been very challenging. I don't think I would have been able to effectively manage this crucial transition had it not been for the personal and professional stories I had collected years before from people in the same professional setting. Their narratives were based on a solid foundation made of taken-for-granted knowledge of what it means to be an academic, the challenges involved in this particular professional context, the specific institutional environment and what developing an academic career as a parent might entail. Through the generous sharing of their work-life experiences, my interviewees shed light on organizational behaviour as participants in my research, but also, as colleagues, they contributed to the management of my own experience of motherhood in the workplace. Organizations that not only implement, but also foster a culture of humanistic management could promote the sharing of stories, experiences and personal narratives through the establishment of formal and informal networks, social groups and mentoring schemes. The implementation of humanistic management approaches in organizations through the use of personal narratives can offer embodied, emotional and personal accounts of what it means to be a human being in today's increasingly de-humanised workplace.

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About Ilaria

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Menstruation and humanistic management at work: *the development and implementation of a menstrual workplace policy*

Lara Owen

This article explores menstruation in the workplace in the context of a humanistic management approach which highlights the values of respect, dignity, and wellbeing at work. Increased public conversation on menstruation in recent years, supported by research showing the detrimental effects of menstrual stigma on women's physical and mental health, point to a shift in consideration for women's menstrual wellbeing.

This paper is based on my research on the development and implementation of a 'period policy' at Coexist, a social enterprise in Bristol, UK, which I undertook between October 2016 and December 2017.

The policy was co-designed by management and staff, and uses flexible working arrangements and contingency planning to allow women greater support when menstruating. I discuss the effects of the policy and suggest avenues for future research.

Keywords

menstruation; menstrual leave; period policy; flexible working; contingency planning; Coexist

Introduction

This paper explores menstruation in the workplace in the context of a humanistic management approach which highlights the values of *respect*, *dignity* and *wellbeing* at work. In recent years there has been an increased level of interest in menstruation as a marginalised yet important aspect of women's lives. Research has shown the detrimental effects of menstrual stigma on women's physical and mental health (e.g. O'Flynn, 2006; Johnston-Robledo & Chrisler, 2013b) and the impact of menstrual prejudice on attitudes to women in the workplace (Roberts, 2002). Social media conversations, media articles, the new 'menstrual activism' (Bobel, 2010) and calls for 'menstrual equity' (Weiss-Wolf, 2017) point to a shift in consideration for women's menstrual wellbeing. Correspondingly, as a management and organisation studies scholar with a special interest in women's rights and wellbeing at work, I undertook an ethnographically-informed research study on the development and implementation of a 'period policy' at Coexist, a social enterprise in Bristol, UK, between October 2016 and December 2017. This paper describes the process of developing a new kind of humanistic management policy from scratch.

Background

In March 2016, Coexist, a social enterprise running a large community building and associated initiatives in Bristol, announced it was bringing in a 'Period Policy' for its menstruating employees. This public announcement was met with a remarkable amount of media attention, and for a while the organisation was overwhelmed with requests for print interviews and media appearances. The story went viral and attracted international interest. I was living in Australia at the time, and was contacted by a national newspaper for my perspective on what this meant for Australian organisations. I have a long-term interest in menstruation, and particularly in menstruation at work, so I followed these developments closely. I was also about to start a PhD in a Department of Management, and wondered if this policy might be a suitable subject for my research. As I was on the other side of the world, I wasn't sure this would be the best way forward for Coexist or for me, so I watched and waited to see how matters developed, but everything seemed to go quiet. So I contacted a colleague who put me in touch with Rebecca (Bex) Baxter, the Coexist People Development Director and initiator of the policy idea. I was going to the UK the following week to visit my family, and Bex and I arranged to meet at a café on the Gloucester Road in Bristol.

Bex Baxter with staff in the Coexist offices, March 2016. Taken from the Daily Mail 2/3/2016

https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-3471011/Company-reveals-plans-offer-period-leave-women-month-create-happier-work-environment.html

Why the need? An ethic of care

By this time, three months after the public launch of the idea, the media attention had begun to die down, and the organisation was faced with the nitty-gritty task of actually writing the policy. A lot of words had been spoken and there was a great deal of goodwill and excitement, but deciding how to actually go about it was daunting. Bex told me that since the public consultation and media frenzy she had felt rather stuck, and just did not know where to begin. So we started to talk. She said that as a basic premise, her organisation wanted to challenge the norm of women feeling like they had to work when they were in menstrual pain; that the initiating moment of the policy had occurred when she saw a staff member white in the face and bent double with period pain while working on the information desk in the front lobby, and who said (with the learned stoicism of menstruating women everywhere), "Oh, I'm fine, it's just my period".

There was widespread recognition within Coexist that expecting women to 'grin and bear it' as per cultural norms, and thus to work while in pain or having other menstrual symptoms, went against the organisation's primary ethic of care. For example, as with pretty much every workplace, along with those women who experienced 'normal' menstrual pain, at Coexist there were women with endometriosis (an estimated 10% of the menstruating population have this condition) which made menstruation extremely painful, and profoundly affected their experience of the workplace and at times, of their ability to work an eight (or more) hour day on every working day of the month (Seear, 2009). In addition, the progressive ethos of the organisation, committed to humanistic and broader ecological values, meant that there was a desire to encourage and support women to honour the menstrual cycle rather than to feel they had to suppress, deny, or minimise it.

Issues in enacting a menstrual policy

But how should the organisation enact this period policy? Should they have mandatory menstrual leave? Or one or two days paid leave a month for every woman if she wanted it? How would that sit with non-menstruating employees? How would it impact the smooth-running of the organisation? It sounded like such a great idea, to factor women's cyclicity into the structure of working life, to legitimise women's right to wellbeing at work, and to respect the fertile female body and its needs – but what would that look like in the contemporary world? Bex and her colleagues were well aware that they were engaging with this possibility in a wider context long predicated on the male body as the norm in the workplace (Acker, 1990; Tretheway, 1999), and still infected by longstanding menstrual stigma (Johnston-Robledo & Chrisler, 2013a & 2013b; Roberts, 2002; Young, 2005).

I had previously done research into menstrual leave internationally, which indicated that blanket leave (such as every menstruating woman getting two days off when bleeding, paid or unpaid depending on the situation), was only workable in specific situations where there was a cultural history of resting on the first two days of menses, (such as in parts of Asia), and where women were not competing with men for jobs. In practice this meant menstrual leave was a culturally related, traditional 'bonus' for women in very low-paid jobs with no career path. In Taiwan, the Gender Equal Employment Act (2002) gave women the right to

apply for menstrual leave, yet this benefit has not been taken up because of the inconvenience of having to get medical certificates, and because women fear losing status and jobs and being seen as less useful than men (Chang et al, 2011).

In developed countries, whenever the subject of menstrual leave has thus far arisen in the media, it has attracted a furore of contesting responses, exposing women to sexist and demeaning commentary (Sayers & Jones, 2015). Bex had recently experienced this phenomenon as the organisation's primary spokesperson for the policy, so she was well aware of the complexity of doing something apparently helpful for women at work, and how it could backfire. I knew of a few small businesses and non-profits in the Global North which acknowledged that menstruating women might need to adjust their work patterns to their cycles, but these menstrual 'policies' were mostly unwritten agreements that women could go home or take a bit of time off if they needed to, rather than anything formalised. Bex and her Board felt it was important to formalise the policy to legitimise and think through women's needs at work, and perhaps also to act as a model and inspiration for other organisations to do the same.

Making a start

In this first conversation, I offered to give my help pro bono, aware that this would simplify matters ethically if I went on to do research on the initiative. (I discussed my potential research with Bex at the time as a future possibility, pending my supervisors' acceptance of my research plans and approval from my institution's ethics committee.) In my consultant role, I suggested letting go of the term 'menstrual leave' as it was so contentious, and instead considering 'menstrual flexibility'. With this reframe of the concept, we worked through several iterations of the policy, and after several months settled on the most conservative version as a starting place. This allowed women paid time off when menstruating, in consultation with their line management, but this was time that would be 'paid back' at other times of the month. We knew this was potentially problematic, but that at least it was a start and a place from which to elicit feedback. It is much harder to get busy people to contribute to a blank slate than to something already partly formed, and we were aware that, given the potential difficulties and the lack of previous successful models, it was most likely we would end up with a policy that worked if the people using the policy were able to shape it. So we were not worried about putting something out there that was probably going to need a lot more change. From the start, I had recommended and modelled a process-oriented view of the policy, seeing it as something malleable and in flux at this stage. Bex was in agreement. This was also her personal philosophy, and with a shared perspective we worked together in considerable harmony. If this was to be a useful policy, with patient attention it would settle into something that worked, at which point I hoped it would become part of the background furniture of the organisation's life rather than a flashy thing to get excited about. If that could happen, then acknowledgment of women's needs surrounding menstruating at work would be on the way to being normalised, which I felt would be a positive development.

Reconciling my consultancy and research roles

Three months after I began consulting on the policy, I started formal research on it for my PhD, now with university ethics and supervisory approval. The existing role I had as a pro bono consultant thus became entangled with doing qualitative research into the development and implementation of the policy. Having foreseen this situation, from the start I had dealt with the potential tensions in this dual role by adopting a participant observer position informed by a feminist ethnographic ethos, which included factoring self-awareness into my analysis, understanding process, and reciprocating knowledge (Skeggs, 2001). As much as I could, I asked questions rather than leaping in to give solutions. I focused on attentive listening, waiting, eliciting, and then offering advice or suggestions when requested. When I was asked direct questions based on my knowledge of the field, I did not adopt either an authoritative role or deny my expertise by hiding behind a need for researcher 'objectivity'. Instead I used a friendship style in which I collaborated on solutions.

The evolution of the policy

It took six months to develop the pilot policy through an iterative process, during which time there were Skype calls and emails back and forth between Bex, myself and the new staff member taking over Bex's operational role, and occasional consultations with other staff. I took as light an approach as I could, primarily acting as a sounding board and not as an initiator. When they felt it was ready, the policy was presented to the Board, where it was ratified and implemented as formal organisational policy, with the recognition that this was a preliminary version open to feedback. It then took another six months for everyone to see how it operated in practice, and to turn the policy into something that worked. While by some standards this rate of progress was slow, once staff had a policy to work from, experimentation elicited clarity. We all met up again in person six months after the initial written policy had been ratified, at which point staff came back with their varying experiences and ideas about what they needed.

First, it became clear that the notion of everyone paying back time was too complicated and burdensome for people who already felt overly busy, with many staff members combining multiple life roles as workers, parents and partners, and often also volunteers and activists. As we reworked the policy based on this feedback, flexible working involving paying back time was taken out as a requisite for using the policy. However staff asked for and were given the option to work more hours at other times if they wanted to, in the acknowledgement that at times this might be a preference for some women.

Second, there was the issue of how much time people might need to take off from work. This varied from person to person, but it was agreed that the majority of women wanted the option of taking a day off and being paid for it. So the policy developed to allow all menstruating women one paid day off if needed; if they required more than one day off related to menstruation, this time would come out of their sick leave.

Third, women in some positions felt they really needed time away from the workplace, whereas for others it was less important. It became clear that the burden of working while menstruating was most keenly felt by women in front-facing roles who needed to be ever-present and ever-engaged. Some employees expressed a desire to rest and retreat when menstruating, especially if bleeding heavily. In front-facing roles, this inward pull conflicted with the emotional labour involved in being helpful to the public all day long. On the other hand, women in less extroverted roles, (such as in the back office), felt less need to take time out, also in the knowledge that they could often adjust their workload to their energy level without upsetting workplace needs and expectations. Working from home was included in the policy as an option to be discussed with line management.

Contingency planning

Importantly, it became apparent from the six-month feedback that women were much less likely to use the policy unless there was someone to temporarily take over their role. Accordingly, contingency planning was introduced for front-facing staff, with a list of people who could take over when needed, either by previous planning, a phone call the night before, or during the working day. If anyone felt physically uncomfortable at work, but not as if they needed to go home for the rest of the day, they could also make use of the contingency plan for an hour or two, and go and lie down in a wellbeing room.

The current policy

The policy that developed through this process appears to have enough flexibility to be effective for most employees. There remains one area of the workplace where two women work and where it has so far been impossible to provide a solution, due to the specificity and demands of the jobs involved and difficulties providing contingency support in their specialised area of work. However, these women have expressed that they find benefit in being able to be open about the situation, even when it is not yet ideal. Additional supportive elements of the policy include induction materials, regular check-ins, and support for management in listening to the needs of menstruating staff and destigmatising menstruation at work. The policy stresses good communication as key to the smooth working of the initiative, along with planning and awareness of the cycle. Women in front-facing roles share information about their cycles with each other through a menstrual app, to aid in planning.

The wider effect of the policy on the organisation

In terms of the wider organisation, men expressed no resentment, and instead said they liked the fact that menstruation was addressed openly, and felt it gave them permission to also adjust their working day to their bodies when needed. The notion of ‘permission’ came up repeatedly, and extended to a radical change in the customary opening roundtable of organisational meetings, at which women began to volunteer their cyclical status as a factor in their current state of mind and bodily wellbeing. Rather than being essentialist, or shaming in any way, and/or reifying the menstruating body in some compensatory fashion, this development appeared to simply normalise a previously stigmatised part of embodiment, which has profound implications for women’s sense of embodied ‘rightness’ in the workplace. Over time, men also spoke more in

such public settings about how they were feeling. I have sat in and participated in many organisational meetings in my working life, but rarely in ones which felt as relaxed, friendly, accepting and free, even when people were in disagreement about other matters.

The positive influence of progressive organisational values

It is no accident that this early example of a formal menstrual policy was instigated at an organisation based on progressive values. Coexist articulates its commitment to a trust policy tied into a commitment to wellbeing: no one is tracking hours or demanding people work no matter what. The staff are passionate about wellbeing and social justice, and work for relatively low pay. Thus, the possibility of staff exploiting the policy was minimised by the organisational culture and the people attracted to it. In addition, a majority of the staff are menstruating-age women. So there were specific elements that allowed the policy to be developed and implemented without discord.

Photograph taken by Lara Owen 20/6/2017 of the front desk area at Hamilton House, the community hub in Stokes Croft, Bristol that Coexist has run since 2008.

Conclusion

Social trends indicate that menstruation is in the process of losing its historic stigmatised status, and that menstrual equity and cyclical awareness are significant growing matters of attention (Weiss-Wolf, 2017). So we can expect to see continued interest in menstrual workplace policies of various kinds. (There is also growing interest in implementation of best practice recommendations for menopause at work.) The

experience at Coexist indicates that organisations need to listen to women employees when creating a menstrual policy, otherwise accommodations to menstruation at work could become lip service PR strategies. Clearly there is no point introducing such policies just to look good: they have to be practicable within the organisational context, and serve the real needs of menstruating workers. We learned that simply offering say, a day off a month, without contingency planning and acknowledgment of different needs in different roles, will not result in a policy that works for all roles or that women will feel they can take up without causing disruption, potentially endangering their jobs and promotion prospects in the long-term.

Future research on this topic is needed in a variety of organisations, and also longitudinally to find out how such policies are perceived to influence menstruating workers and organisational cultures over time and in specific circumstances. For example, research has shown that women with endometriosis tend to have shorter or interrupted careers, falling into unemployment or 'choosing' to be self-employed, whether or not they have the temperament and support necessary for entrepreneurship (e.g. Gilmour, 2008). While we might reasonably surmise that sympathetic policies could keep women with endometriosis in the jobs for which they have trained, are suited, and where they may have significant value to the organisation, we need research to confirm and understand the extent of this employment trend.

The pioneering policy at Coexist is an early example of a humane initiative to recognise and accommodate to the varying needs of menstruating women, and to relieve the unnecessary suffering endured by some women working within traditional organisational norms. The policy offers some new possibilities for reimagining workplace conventions surrounding women's biology. It will be interesting to see if and how these findings can be translated into organisations with different kinds of workplace cultures.

As for myself, it was an enormous privilege to be able to study a new kind of policy so close up, and I learned a great deal. Terminology is still a work-in-progress, with 'menstrual leave' clearly an inflammatory and insufficient term. At the moment I am using phrases like: 'best practice menstrual workplace policies', 'menstrual cycle recognition at work' or 'menstrual accommodation in the workplace.' So far the media (and my inbox) indicates there is growing interest in companies exploring supportive measures for menstruating and menopausal employees, certainly in the UK and Australia. In today's rapid global communication landscape, and considering the increased focus on menstrual and menopausal health and wellbeing more broadly, we can anticipate an openness to these topics in workplaces internationally.

In terms of humanistic management, the development of Coexist's 'period policy' offers several takeaways. First, that it is vital to involve the eventual users of a new and ground-breaking policy in its creation, to ensure successful uptake. Second, that humanistic policies can have (unanticipated) knock-on benefits to other workers. Third, that the workplace can be the locus for reconceptualising historically stigmatised matters whose marginalisation causes unnecessary suffering. In such ways we can integrate the values of *respect, dignity* and *wellbeing* into the lived experience of everyday working environments, and have a positive influence on the broader culture.

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Further resources

Bex Baxter's TED talk on the Coexist menstrual policy: *Ending a Workplace Taboo. Period.* https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0wWUAx_1JDw

Coexist's page on the period policy: https://www.hamiltonhouse.org/coexist-pioneering-period-policy/

Recent examples of articles on menstrual leave in the media:

(1) http://www.bbc.com/capital/story/20170908-can-period-leave-ever-work

(2) https://edition.cnn.com/2018/10/03/health/period-leave-australia-explainer-intl/index.html

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In search of organisational values:
a collaborative action research study to find values to underpin the organisational vision and mission

Ruth Slater and Jayne Mizon

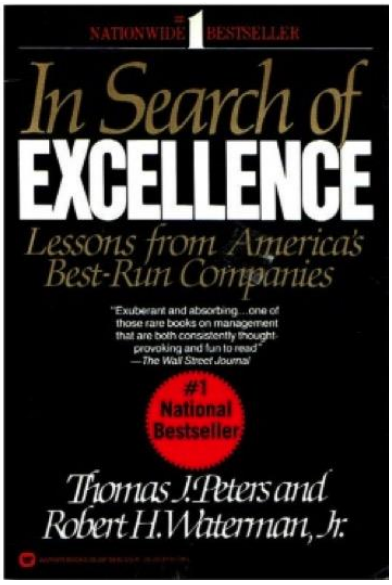
This is an example of practitioner-led research using humanistic management practices in a manufacturer of microwaveable snack foods. The aim was to uncover the extent to which employees found the company's vision and mission meaningful and to find values which would support the mission and vision. Four values appeared (Family, Ambition, Responsibility, Excellence), to which employees had contributed, and the organisation accepted the new practices which valued employee contributions and extended them to other parts of the group.

Keywords

vision, mission, values, collaboration, humanistic practices, practitioner-led research

Introduction

Readers may recognise the slightly sarcastic turn to the title of the widely read and much-vaunted book by Peters and Waterman of the 1980s, In Search of Excellence.



Influential in its day, and still cited by students, the text suggests, by example, a prescription to create excellent (profitable) organisations. The way was through culture and values. However, we ask, how often does the rhetoric of organisational values seem wide of the mark when it comes to the experienced reality of employees? So, in this paper, we report on the process and outcomes of an action research project whose overall aim was to discover organisational values which would support a company's vision and mission and create cohesion and impetus behind them before the company imposed them, using an approach which we call humanistic. Furthermore, we acknowledge the place of values in organisational cultures but question the widely acknowledged, but un-interrogated, link between vision and mission statements and value statements (Deal and Kennedy 1982; Barney 1986).

We believe that the project is significant because it is a rare example of a practitioner, in this case, a human resources (HR) practitioner, using collaborative action research (AR) to identify values from among employees. This humanistic approach to finding organisational values contrasts with the more conventional approach often taken, which is typically the practice of devising and imposing values, often designed by the leadership or third-party proxies. We hold, therefore, that this paper and the story, which unfolds, will be of interest to organisational leaders, HR, or HRD/OD practitioners who are dissatisfied with the outcomes of conventional approaches to articulating values, and who could see the potential for AR within their own organisation.

The research sought first to find two phenomena. First, the extent to which employees, within their day-to-day experience, understood the organisation's agreed vision and mission statements; second, with that knowledge, to find out which values employees thought would support those statements. Additionally, following the Human Resource Development (HRD) tradition of individual employee betterment (see McGuire 2011), other benefits accrued through these collaborative processes, which gave the employees a platform to communicate and collaborate in the search for meaningful company values. In this way, employees became stakeholders in the values formation process (Reason and Bradbury 2006:2, Mills and Spencer 2005:26), and so became active participants in their own and the company's development.

The context for the study

Jayne, the HR practitioner, conducted this research in her organisation, Rustlers, - a manufacturing site of a family-owned Irish food group, Kepak Convenience Foods (https://www.kepak.com/about/). The factory makes Rustlers (https://rustlersonline.com/about-us/), a microwaveable snack. The company began in the early 1980s and grew from being a sole trader to a group owning nine sites across three separate divisions, supplying food products to the UK, Ireland and Europe. This research site is in the UK and had 450 employees when Jayne conducted the research. Three-quarters of employees were working in manual non-skilled jobs, and a majority were Eastern Europeans. The remaining employees were British nationals in skilled or professional roles.

Family members of the original founder are still active in roles across the group, but a new leader commissioned a third-party to produce vision and mission statements for the company with the intention of producing a statement of values to underpin them. At this point, Jayne intervened and proposed that she should undertake an internal project to communicate these and facilitate the creation of value statements congruent with them.

Mobilising employees through values

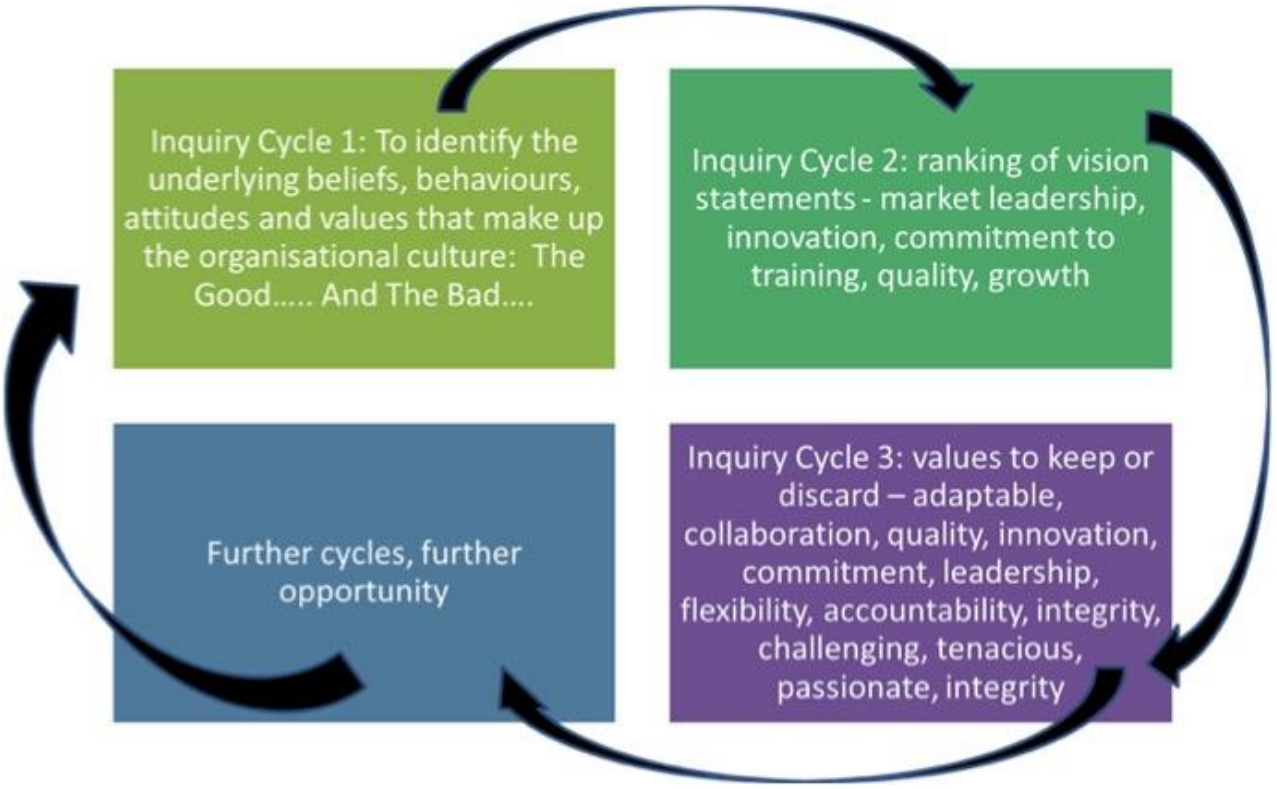
Although there is strong support in the literature for articulating organisational values, their association with vision, mission and culture, and the benefits they accrue collectively (Deal and Kennedy 1982, 2000; Barney 1986; Schein 2010), this is uninterrogated. The desired benefits rarely happen. Employers expect employees to demonstrate values in daily routines, it is the embodiment of values in behaviours and outcomes which makes employees the human resource valuable and unique, and a contribution to the attainment of organisational goals, and longer-term success (Denison 1990: 2; Gordon and Di Tomaso 1992: 2).

Writing in 1992, when humanistic approaches to management were appearing, Aktouf (1992: 411: 2) welcomed the shift of focus from the employee as "passive cog" to "active and willing accomplice" but warned of two opposite outcomes. These were what he called "the height of liberation" or "the pit of alienation and exploitation". Critical management scholars (Ray 1986; Wilmott 1993; Sambrook 2004) see this trend as tending toward the latter position, with practices which are performative, lacking in emancipation, and devoid of development. Githens (2015: 191) has also seen that humanistic perspectives have side-lined discussions of power or other socio-structural issues. Githens conceded, however, that critical action research was appropriate to uncover these issues, but we think it takes a knowing practitioner to champion the process. Jayne was that knowing practitioner, and the effect of her intervention was to turn earlier practice on its head, facilitate discussions of organisational power and so prevent the articulation and communication of values by imposition.

Collaborative Action Research – making connections

In an organisational context, AR is a way of finding things out from among a group of organisational members to address problems (Simpson and Bourner 2007: 178). In this case, the problem at hand was to uncover meaningful organisational values without their imposition from above. A key tenet of AR is the "participatory worldview" (Reason and Bradbury 2001: 6), acknowledging that participants co-create knowledge through inquiry in situated contexts. So, the underpinning condition for this research was that it would be "research with people "and not "research on people" (Heron and Reason 2006:1).

Fig 1: Cycles of Collaborative Research



Scholars identify four key components of AR: plan, act, observe and reflect (e.g. Lewin 1946; Reason and Bradbury 2006:14) with inquiry cycles moving between reflection and action. The first task was to determine how employees received the vision and mission, and the second, to find how these matched their experience of organisational life. The aim of the third task was to reveal values that were already part of the culture that could be relevant to the new vision and mission statements (Powell and Single 1996:499, Erikkson and Kovalainen 2008:174 – 175).

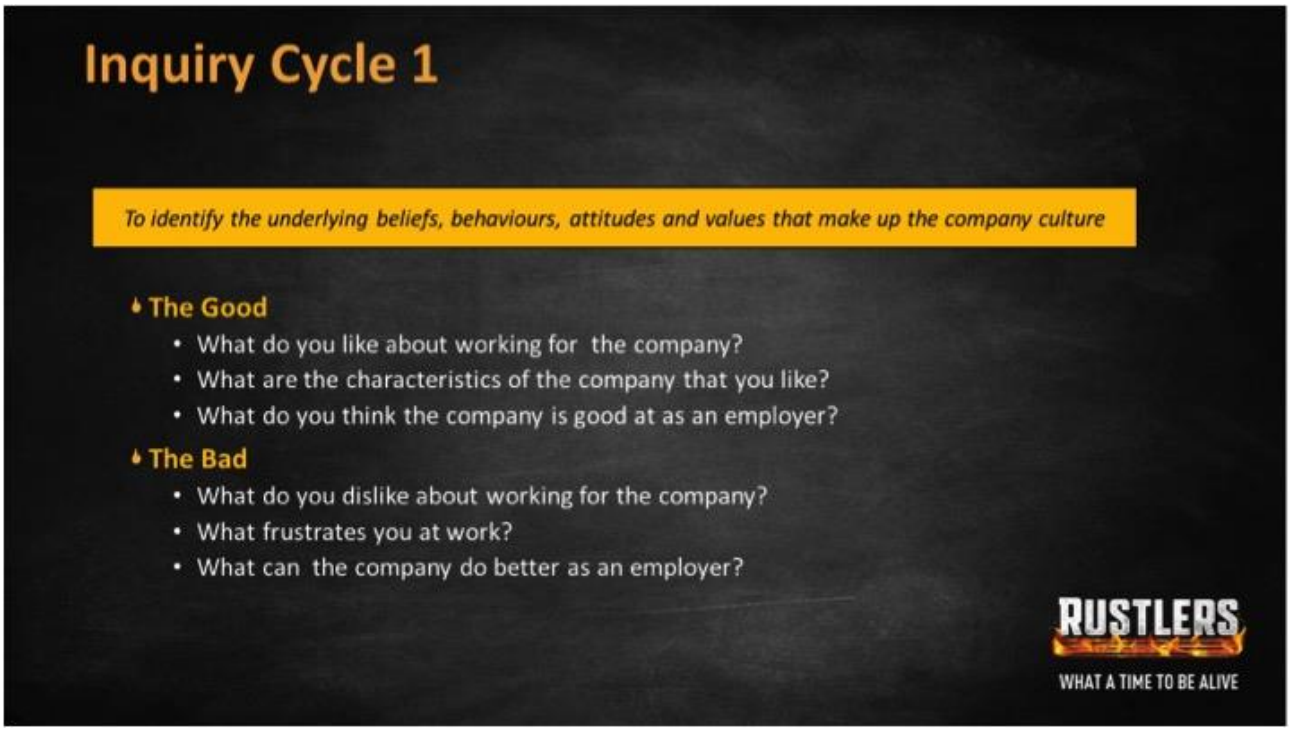
There were three inquiry cycles, with three tasks for employees to carry out. The first task was to determine how employees received the vision and mission, and the second, to find how these matched their experience of organisational life. The aim of the third task was to reveal values that were already part of the culture that could be relevant to the new vision and mission statements (Powell and Single 1996:499, Erikkson and Kovalainen 2008:174 – 175). The research, therefore, moved from a broad discussion of experience in inquiry cycle one to a narrower focus in inquiry cycle three, and processes enabled embedded and shared experiences to emerge and facilitate consensus about the perceptions employees had about working for the company, about what they valued and about what needed to be improved.

Jayne chose focus groups as the mechanism to deliver the inquiry cycles and she invited both factory and office staff to take part. There were in total five focus groups from each operational area and from headquarters, each with between six and nine employees, representing ten per cent of the company. Jayne made a personal approach to employees, saying that this was an opportunity (Coghlan 2001: 53) to share views and contribute towards the creation of the company's values to support the future direction and success of the organisation. Recognising that everyone had a considerable stake in the endeavour, Jayne assured them of their rights to confidentiality, anonymity and respect, and she did not publicise any information about the research before, during or afterwards. She also considered that the employees were novices in the process, without explicit knowledge or understanding of the terms "culture" and "values" (Denison 1990:2). Therefore, she used plain language, so that all employees could understand the process and take part.

Conversation and interaction between participants are fundamental to focus group effectiveness (Reason and Bradbury 2006) and because many of the employees were Eastern Europeans, with English as a second language, Jayne formed facilitated groups according to the main language in use in each group, so that employees enjoyed a common experience within a familiar social setting.

Inquiry Cycle One

Jayne designed this cycle to unlock the basic assumptions, values and attitudes that already existed within the organisation (Schein 2010: 2). In this cycle, Jayne invited employees to share their feelings of what was good and bad about working for the company, frustrations and difficulties and aspects which the company could improve.



The themes appearing from this inquiry cycle were phrases such as ***strong teamwork*** and that employees felt ***part of a family***, which contrasted with simply being an employee of the organisation. One such quotation is emblematic of this sentiment:

> *"…it's like a big family, we are in it together".*

Employees also highlighted ***investment*** and ***innovation*** (in the factory), ***support*** and ***pay and benefits*** as other positive aspects of the organisation.

As expected, there were some differences between the employees from the factory and those based in the offices. Factory employees, many of whom were of non-UK origin, tended to highlight ***stability*** as a positive aspect of the company. In contrast, employees working in the offices, highlighted ***autonomy***, ***trust***, and ***openness*** as positive characteristics of the company, expressing sentiments showing the potential for and appreciation of role-level decision-making.

Initial emerging themes

Several common themes did appear, which concerned a need for development or improvement. All groups agreed that ***communication*** needed improvement, as did the ***feedback*** given by line managers to employees. Furthermore, all groups felt that there was a ***lack of training and development opportunities***. This was not a surprise to Jayne, but it was a disappointing outcome for the company; senior managers would argue that they had already implemented several programmes for improving training and communication.

Comments to illustrate this included:

> *"…we need more business updates […] positive news is communicated but never the negative."*

> *"…the communication is terrible…it's a 'need to know' basis".*

Factory employees highlighted their issues with the quality of product components:

> *"…quality is not as good as it was last year… why are you using cheaper materials for our product?"*

Office employees highlighted a ***lack of customer focus*** for a branded product and a ***lack of collaboration across different departments*** as something needing improvement. These employees felt that the innovation taking place concerned improving the manufacturing operation, and not the brand and product.

Finally, throughout inquiry cycle one, all employees felt that there was an ***inconsistency of practice*** across all departments, with line managers making different decisions on the same or similar issues and in company routines. This turned out to be an important theme for the other research cycles to determine the values at the end of the research.

Inquiry Cycle Two

This cycle focused more narrowly on the business vision and how clear this was to employees. Employees within each group formed two sub-groups to reflect on and discuss the espoused company vision statements.

Jayne invited employees to place the vision statements in order of how clear each vision statement was within the company at the time of the research. Employees justified the order they had applied to the vision statements. In this way, knowledge appeared about the extent to which employees found and practised the company's espoused vision and mission. If the vision statements were clear in daily company routines, then they could represent a foundation for the values. If, however, employees felt that the espoused vision was

not clear, then this showed a gap in understanding and practice, with limited scope to achieve the purpose of supporting company goals.

Office employees' views

Office employees were consistent in their feelings indicating that the most important vision statements were: profitably expanding the business position in the UK and Europe and having an unwavering focus on the continuous delivery of quality and market leadership in the microwaveable snackfoods category. These vision statements were associated with consistency in communication, which employees had already found as being poor in other respects.

Office employees felt that investment in training and development and innovating to meet the needs of customers and consumers as the least clear in the business. This reinforced the findings from inquiry cycle one, where training and development and the lack of focus on customers were both already highlighted as areas for development. Comments included:

> *"…we have to innovate to meet the needs of our customers more frequently or we will lose them"*

> *"…it can't be training and development as none of that is going on"*

Factory employees' views

Factory employees, however, were ambivalent about the evidence for the vision, which illustrates the difficulty of imposing values from above and expecting understanding and compliance; there are competing interests. They appeared unaware of the purpose of the brand and the business ambition for the future. These findings suggest that despite the vision and mission, factory employees did not recognise the link between what they did and the vision and mission.

Inquiry Cycle Three

This last cycle was one of both action and reflection (Heron and Reason 2006:6), and asked employees to consider, reflect on and evaluate a range of values, and whether they applied to the organisation. These were values known to Senior Management Team, but which they had not shared throughout the company or used before.

Jayne invited two subgroups from each focus group to choose two values from the list which they felt most accurately described the company at that time and to justify their choice. The two groups then selected two values from the list that they felt were least like the organisation. Again, Jayne asked the employees to explain the reasons for their choice.

One value had a meaning among all employees, as it arose in every focus group. This value was ***teamwork***, as indicated by these examples of employee voices:

> *"…we are all one team, everyone feels this"*
>
> *"…we couldn't grow without teamwork, we need to keep this".*

This was consistent with earlier inquiry cycles and went forward as a value.

Factory employees agreed that ***quality*** held little meaning to them, as messages about ***quality*** had seemed contradictory at times. They accepted that product quality was important in achieving company goals and expected company routines to reinforce product quality. In earlier cycles, these employees had indicated that they were not satisfied with the attention given to product quality. This is illustrative of the facility of the AR process to enable hitherto unheard voices. One observation reflected this:

> "…this is a consistent message…without a quality product, quality brand and quality people we would not have a business".

Employees wanted a heightened attention to ***quality***, as it underpinned both the brand and the business strategy.

Employees in all factory focus groups cited ***passion*** and ***enthusiasm*** as the least evident values. Comments reflecting this include:

> *"…how can we get excited about packing a burger?"*
>
> *"…the only thing we are enthusiastic for is Friday".*

The value selected by the all focus groups as being least evident was collaboration, and the most evident was teamwork. At first, this may not seem to be consistent with earlier suggestions that teamwork was evident in the culture when considered in the context of earlier views. However, it did appear that employees felt that although individual teams worked well together, such teamwork did not translate when the organisation expected teams to work cross-functionally. These views explained findings from inquiry cycle one that a lack of communication and consistency were frustrated employees.

Values emerging

At the end of these three inquiry cycles, four core values emerged, which Jayne then proposed to senior management. These were: ***Family***, ***Ambition***, ***Responsibility*** and ***Excellence***. There is little merit in values which do not support the business. There is little merit in values that do not reflect employees' experience of the company. To have either sort would be an opportunity missed for promoting cohesion, change, and development and unifying values, beliefs and routines across all areas of the business to support the mission and vision (Deal and Kennedy 2000: 138, Schein 2010: 270).

Employees appeared to value support, teamwork and a sense of belonging, and so ***Family*** was a value that appeared both meaningful to employees and key in supporting the mission and vision; it also reflected the family-owned heritage of the company.

The vision and mission statements were explicit about the ambitious plans for the brand, growth and development of people, but employees felt that the company did not live up to those intentions (Kopaneva and Sias 2015: 359). However, employees supported ***Ambition*** to achieve the innovation, growth and brand dominance desired from the vision and mission.

Employees talked about ***Quality*** throughout the research and appeared to suggest that it was primarily associated with product quality. For the value to apply to the whole organisation, and not just in manufacturing, Jayne proposed the value ***Excellence***, which could carry multiple meanings and enable consistency between values and practice (Graber and Kilpatrick 2008). ***Excellence*** also encompassed positive themes such as the stability that employees valued, and processes such as reward mechanisms and performance management.

The final value was more difficult to determine. If the company were to engage employees consistently across the business, then at least one value had to promote change. Jayne proposed ***Responsibility*** as a value implying underlying behaviours to bring about the change which employees thought were important. ***Responsibility*** was a value to empower and unite the whole company in taking responsibility for achieving the vision and mission and to eliminate existing undesirable characteristics.

Conclusions

Here we highlight significant aspects of the research and explain what happened next. Jayne was able to propose values which were relevant to the vision and mission and was also able to use the findings from the inquiry cycles to suggest areas for company-wide development, to strengthen the modelling of the values by the leadership and senior team, improved communication and continuing participation.

The senior management agreed to extend the AR processes to other group sites and the new practices have created excitement and a desire to see their extension and development. This illustrates the potential to move beyond quick-fix interventions in organisational development which can be common (Greenwood and Levin 1998: 18). Therefore, this humanistic management approach has changed this company's practice and given voice to a greater number of employees than previously. It has lent weight to the argument for more interventions which value the human, facilitate individual growth and a sense of belongingness in which the individual will mobilise generously their skill and effort (Aktouf 1992: 411).

Readers of a critical persuasion may still see the perpetuation of the coercive nature of values (Willmott 1993: 526) in the building of organisations (Ray 1986), and the exploitation of the employees' goodwill and effort in practices shown here. Neither did the process address issues of power in contemporary organisations as Githens (2015: 191) had said. But, a "guerrilla" aim of the research had been to promote more emancipation through humanistic management approaches to practice, and management practices purporting to be humanistic should be interrogated more critically and we agree that a "modicum of realism is far better, and ethically superior, for both sides" (McGuire et al 2005: 135). However, the best place to interrogate such practices is in the modern organisation that is inevitably bound by economic priorities, by practitioners who care about employees for what they are and what they could be.

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The ethics and practice of teaching the practice of ethics

Rob Warwick

I argue that business ethics is an important feature of humanistic management. It is a practice that needs to be developed in relation to each person's own values, wider societal norms and expectations, as well as to the various frameworks that enable decision making.

For business studies undergraduates, I contend that this reflexive practice can be socially facilitated by a series of guided group conversations, student-directed research, and supported by careful selection of theory.

This approach, which I liken to foraging rather than following a pre-set teaching path, enables deeper reflexive learning, and requires students and tutors alike to be open to surprise, challenge and vulnerability.

Key Words

ethics, reflexivity, corporate social responsibility, humanistic management, business studies.

Introduction

Business ethics is a practice. Like many others, it is a heuristic process that needs to be developed. Drawing upon my work with business studies undergraduates on an innovative ethics and corporate responsibility module, I provide an example of how this might be carried out. I draw attention to the reflexive tension and learning between the development of each person's own values (including those of the tutors), wider societal norms and expectations, as well as to the various frameworks that enable decision making. To achieve this, I emphasise the important prerequisite that we are *all* learning together, engaging in a process where showing deep curiosity and vulnerability are important in the reflexive learning process. I introduce the metaphor that we are foraging together, rather than following a more traditional show-and-tell approach, whereby students are encouraged to follow a set teaching path, which I liken to following a trail of breadcrumbs that some knowing person has laid to lure them to a pre-determined goal.

In adopting this foraging approach, everyone involved is more likely to engage more meaningfully with ethical issues that arise in the course of their working lives, and thus enabled to embody principles of humanistic management.

Context and orientation

Domènec Melé (2003) has traced the development of humanistic management from the mid twentieth century, with a focus on people's motivations, expanding in the 1980s to include organisational culture. Only later, he claims, has greater emphasis been placed upon regarding the business enterprise as a 'community

of persons' (Melé, 2012). Here he pays attention to the challenges and opportunities inherent in attempting to integrate a higher moral quality of management, the development of human virtue, and organisational efficiency.

The Humanistic Management Network (Humanistic Management Network, 2018) provide a conceptual framework around unconditional respect, an ethical approach to decision making and an emphasis to an active and ongoing engagement with stakeholders. Acknowledging this, my approach to this has been rather more intuitive, taking more into account how I *feel* how it is to be humanistic and how this might be reflected in my actions, in a way that would perhaps strike a chord with Melé's views, but without the structuring principles of the Humanistic Management Network.

Here, I explore these tensions from two perspectives: firstly, how do we pay attention to this 'struggle' in the here-and-now of everyday events? Here I use 'struggle' to mean the iterative sense by which we come to understand something from hazy and incomplete parts. Secondly, how can we (university business tutors) enable people who may have little experience in the world of work to develop such ethical acumen?

As a teacher and researcher in a university business school, my personal interest in ethics and organisational life relates to how we deal with and make sense of the present. Dealing with the ambiguities and uncertainties of the here-and-now is often experienced in stark contrast to the *post hoc* relative apparent clarity that is often perceived once the dust has settled (Warwick & Board, 2013) or to any policy that declares future intent. Previously this interest has led me to co-edit (Burden & Warwick, 2014; Warwick & Burden, 2013) two editions of AMED's journal *e-Organisations and People* on conscious business, which placed an emphasis on people writing about their practice of and struggles to create a better world of work.

The seeds of my current thinking

In 2017, twenty-one undergraduate Business Studies students opted for a course on Business Ethics and Social Responsibilities, a fifteen credit Level 6 final year module. This was their last module before completing their studies. As Business School faculty in a small university, we pride ourselves in working closely with our students, so classes of this size are the norm, not the exception. We would meet ten times over the semester, each session lasting 2.5 hours, with a mid-point break.

Students had two tasks as part of their assignment. Firstly, they were asked to prepare for and engage in a ten-minute conversation, akin to a job interview, where they would explain and justify their perspectives on business ethics. Secondly, they were to assemble and present a portfolio of evidence of the ideas and theories that had captured their imagination, including organisational case studies, and accounts of their own experiences and thoughts. Central to all this was the way that the portfolio items were curated, with an explanatory editorial, to tell the meta-story of their own developing ethical stance.

On taking over this module from a colleague, an ethical challenge struck me: despite my deep interest in the subject spanning several years, who was I to tell students about ethics? I could of course explain various philosophical ideas going back to Jeremy Bentham and beyond, and refer to the frameworks and structures

that had been designed to improve Corporate Social Responsibility. But this alone would have failed to create an important bridge between these theories and models and students' own developing views, experiences and practices beyond the classroom. In these deliberations, Wittgenstein was my guide:

> *'Not only rules, but also examples are needed for establishing a practice. Our rules leave loop-holes open, and the practice has to speak for itself.'*
>
> (Wittgenstein, 1969, Para 139).

Arising from this portfolio project, every student had something to talk about, reflect upon, develop and articulate. Most had experience of work (some of which was shocking) and/or a small number had an international/BAME (Black, Asian and minority ethnic) background. I, too, had relevant experiences to discuss and share, which inevitably affected the way I worked with the students, given the variety of experiences and the importance of the unique way each person was developing their voice. I strove not to present as the lofty academic on a dais. However, at the same time I felt I had an obligation to provide some content and insight, if with a light touch, to enable the students in groups to take up and work with those ideas in practical ways.

Issues of reflexivity, noticing and challenging their own development of thought, had rarely been explicitly explored before with the students. For me, imagination and creativity were to be important reflexive enablers. This was reflected in the how students worked together and in what each had to produce as part of their written assignment, with some choosing to write posters, blogs, newspapers or magazines.

The thinking underpinning my design of this teaching initiative

The analogy that I use with the students to reflect the change of pedagogical approach is that we are moving away from following a pre-determined trail of breadcrumbs – an approach that they might be used to - and instead towards an act of foraging for oneself, see figure 1 (below).

This visual metaphor reflects my aim to encourage students to take personal responsibility for developing and articulating their own ethical standpoints by using: 1) frameworks, models and philosophies, and 2) reflexive group coaching along action learning lines (Revans, 1998). For me, the image of 'breadcrumbs' conjures up the image of a trail left for students, head down, bird-like pecking the ground, taking one step after another with little thought to or active engagement with one's surroundings. 'Foraging' is different: foragers are heads up, exploring in different directions, coming together to discuss, exchanging ideas and understanding. It is a constant sensing and negotiating of one's context.

Foraging

The key features of the foraging approach are:

- Exploring as a cohort – what does it mean to be a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991).
- Mixing the students into groups, encouraging them to come up with a group name and to work out how they might work together.

- Each group leads a 30-minute session on an organisation they felt was interesting and relevant – good, bad or just struggling along. It was not just a presentation, they facilitated discussion involving the whole cohort, often in group work.
- Guests, including the local MP and an entrepreneur who had set up a fairtrade scheme for gold.
- Some input from me, such as on utilitarianism, exploring the attractive ideas by Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart-Mill concerning the greatest good for the greatest number. And then to explore their negative implications, such as the impact these ideas might have for minorities. The ethical contributions of John Rawles, Hannah Arendt and Ayn Rand also featured in our discussions. Also, frameworks and schema such as Fairtrade and the UN Global Compact, and.
- Time to explore. By this I mean taking my cue from the students to discuss subjects that emerge as important to them, and connecting these back to theories and ideas we have been discussing.

Figure 1: A slide introducing my approach – from breadcrumbs to foraging

Rationale: phronesis over episteme

Academics engaged in research, and practitioners and managers engaged in business, face similar ethical challenges. In her paper exploring the teaching of research ethics in higher education to post-graduate students, Jan Smith (Smith, 2016) explains:

> *'By its very nature, the topic of research ethics is difficult to teach as it does not deal with stable knowledge and, indeed, is characterised by dilemmas with no simple answers'.*

Smith goes on to explain the highly contextual nature of research ethics, with increasingly fewer shared points of reference to rely on in her teaching. There is a connection here to management education: how do we make accessible the tensions and discrepancies that exist between plans and strategies on the one hand, and what happens in day to day practice on the other? Issues can be sensitive. Examples include those relating to national and cultural heritages explored through discussing neo-colonialism in a mixed race group, or the terrors of the concentration camps highlighted by Hannah Arendt and the implications for human behaviour – 'the banality of evil' (Arendt, 1963). That said, these unsettling liminal spaces offer rich learning opportunities.

Thus, instead of shying away from such dilemmas, their contextual nature and how these rub up against ethical schema, I wanted to put these at the centre of our inquiries. To do this I felt that it was important that students contextualised these matters in relation to their own experience and interest.

Pedagogically, this represented a shift in exploring knowledge from the Greek classical notion of *episteme* (universal, scientific knowledge that is context independent) to that of Aristotelian approach of *phronesis* (a pragmatic, context-dependent reflection on values). In pointing to a richer and more reflexive understanding Bent Flyvbjerg (Flyvbjerg, Landsman, & Schram, 2012) points out:

> *'Whereas episteme concerns theoretical know why … phronesis emphasizes practical knowledge and practical ethics. Phronesis is often translated as "prudence" or "practical common sense" '.*

This was a very different way of talking about knowledge for many of the students. However, as this was their last module before most entered the world of work, I felt that exploring this practical way of knowing was important.

It also enabled conversations on issues such as power, politics, cunning and even knack in ways that were practical. When it came to such issues, it enabled me to share my interest in critical management studies in ways that seemed 'natural' when applied to student's experiences. Reflexivity (e.g. Cunliffe 2004; 2009) was a concept new to many of the students, an idea that we discussed briefly at an early session and returned to weekly in different forms. Also, an exploration of any movement of their thought in relation to their portfolio was explicitly assessed.

I was influenced in this way of working with students by studies on developing a learning community (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and by adopting a Mode 2 way of exploring knowledge (MacLean, MacIntosh, & Grant, 2002). Mode 2 is an approach that pays attention to the expertise and knowledge of the whole group, rather than

residing solely in the mind of the tutor. This enabled me to draw particular attention to the social reflexive processes of the group of learners, the importance of the diversity and difference of views within the group, and to the conversations we had as to what we meant by quality and utility of knowledge.

Impact upon students of foraging

Right from the start there was surprise: 'Of course I would employ a pretty young woman – they are cheaper and attract the customers' said one slightly older student who ran a pub. A lively argument developed, with students holding and shifting their ground and with me giving a gentle nudge or two on the conversational tiller.

The example of Nestlé drew the attention of one student who learned that the company used to employ nurses to recommend that mothers in developing countries use formula milk. This led us onto a conversation on post-colonialism. How much have things changed: asymmetry of information, power, social capital, gender, all topics for today when we think about ethics.

A student who was quiet at the start, found her voice and confidence with #metoo. (The course was running at the time that the Harvey Weinstein case was in the news). And the Japanese student who became intrigued by the work of Hegel, started drawing cultural connections with the values with which she had been brought up and articulating how they had shaped her ethical views. In tutorial sessions she became intrigued by process philosophy and the connections this had with Eastern thought.

And of course there were some who saw the module more instrumentally, studying to get a 2:1 degree, to rig their sails to move as effortlessly as possible through the choppy business waters. For some of these students the balance between effort and progress was hard for them to fathom, with several asking me 'tell me what to do'.

That said, the module created the opportunity for the majority to develop, test and articulate their own views. The person who became interested in Nestlé had never heard of post-colonialism. For the student enraged by Weinstein, the issue of power became very vivid for her. These subjects emerged seemingly from nowhere – and here theories were used to understand, communicate and make sense. Having the space for free-flowing conversation was important.

Getting people to reflect, be curious and to find their voice came easily to some, more slowly for others, and for a minority not at all. Each had an individual take and approach.

On theory

Reflection did not begin (or end) when I finished marking assignments. Nor did my interest in the subject start only when I took the module over last year and began the bureaucratic rigmarole of making changes. The issue of ethics, reflection and theory had started to become important to me long before, in my practice as an NHS manager curious about the interaction of healthcare policy and people's daily lives, particularly noticing how complex and fraught this can be. This was an interest that led to my later academic career that began in earnest with my doctorate (Warwick, 2010) in taking complexity analogies as ways to understand organisational life. This immersion forms the reflexive backdrop for this article.

Those students with adult experience of organisational life could relate to issues of ethics and politics in ordinary everyday life, and often had the ability to explore these experiences reflexively. In this sense reflexivity is a practice, drawing on phronetic ways of knowing (Flyvbjerg, 2001), rather than being introduced as an abstract concept. It reminds me of the genesis of David Knights and Hugh Willmott's book 'Management Lives' (Knights & Willmott, 1999), where they used fiction as a way of exploring these issues. I am intrigued to expand on this further, perhaps using film as well. Right at the start of the Module, I asked students to spend 20 minutes on 'free writing' (Lawrence, 2013) about their experience and understanding of ethics. In future, in a spirit of explication of experience (Franklin, 2007), I intend to return to their previous work and require a little more writing to enable the students to plot their movement of thought more clearly.

What did work well were the conversations between students on sharing experiences of work, ethics and power in groups of about five. We concluded with a plenary conversation on the themes and nature of the conversation, rather than on the specific content. To enable this, I briefed them on coaching principles and on some aspects of action learning (Pedler, 2011; Revans, 1998).

Issues of power

I mentioned earlier my interest in Mode 2 learning. Although this is a useful idea to describe to students some of the ways we would be working together that might be different from what they were used to, it also had certain limitations. At its most fundamental, this came down to power again, particularly regarding my own power as a lecturer in relation to legitimating knowledge and the impact I had on how we worked together, as well as, of course, over their final mark. Next time round, I will make conversations on power and ethics more overt, particularly in relation to how we relate to each other in the process of our working together. Inevitably, this will draw attention to our own group dynamics and to the ethical choices we are making in our work.

Finally, it's worth pointing out that this module is about ethics and business responsibility; it is not about the philosophical nature of knowledge, phronesis, episteme, techne etc as such (Baumard, 1999). However, as yet I am still uncertain about the extent to which an explanation of this in relation to practice is needed. Perhaps it may be less to do with *if* and more to do with *when*; coming more naturally at a point when students can talk more confidently and relevantly about theory from a position of practical experience.

Implications for teaching humanistic ethical practice: following the trail of breadcrumbs, or foraging?

Based upon my andragogical experiments so far, it seems to me that any university teacher attempting this approach must be prepared for surprises and for the different directions in which learning conversations might go. This means being confident over a wider landscape of knowledge than might otherwise be the case, and being able to recognise and value students' innate and experiential knowledge. This means being prepared to take some risks, to throw oneself into the mix – showing curiosity, vulnerability and sense-making when exploring students' ideas and concerns (which may be different from those of the teacher). In this, some theory is important as an enabler to exploring experience and views.

Some people like speaking in class, others prefer speaking in small groups, and some in one-to-one conversations. Getting to know students is important, as is remembering and keeping the conversation alive between sessions: 'Katie, have you had any more thoughts on Nestlé, and our conversation on post-colonialism?'. Thus the conversation develops, and new avenues of ethical exploration open up.

The virtual learning environment (VLE) was important too (MOODLE), and in some ways reflected our conversations. It became an eclectic array of materials, not unlike an artist's studio: podcasts, student presentations, papers, videos, each reflected fragments of our time together.

Another surprise may be that some deeper and personal issues come to light. One person spoke movingly of being of mixed race and the impact this had on how she saw the world and made ethical choices. Another, an overseas student, spoke of cultural dissonance on arriving in the UK and getting used to student culture. Questions of diversity emerged from individual experiences and ways of seeing the world. So sticking with this and exploring on individual terms was important – and very moving.

For some students this way of working was unwelcome, as there is nowhere to hide. Next time, I will make the way we work clearer to them from the start. For most students it did cause anxiety when it came to the written assignment. This for me was the saddest part. Given a blank sheet of paper to express themselves, the reaction was often 'will I get it wrong?' To me this raised wider questions about learning and higher education. Next year I will pay more attention to courage, creativity and imagination, to break down some of that anxiety and to develop a sense of reflexive play.

For some, a trail of breadcrumbs was what they wanted, head down, being led by the nose. But I do not think this prepares our (business) students for a world where truth seems to be increasingly mutable, and where working with others to understand and be critically reflexive might just hold an answer.

I'm aware that the way I've described this teaching process has limitations – as does the process itself. To some, the thought of working with 20-25 students 2.5 hours a week over a semester might seem unfeasible and far-fetched. Perhaps how we engage with students, how much time we spend with them, and how we enable them to shape the agenda are ethical questions in themselves that should be taken up by those responsible for the funding of higher education and pedagogy more generally.

Conclusion

The title of this article 'The ethics and practice of teaching the practice of ethics', might seem clunky, but to me it conveys an important educational point in teaching ethics, and humanistic management more generally. Who are we, or any of us, to put ourselves on a pedestal as paragons of virtue? The practice of ethics is emergent and a shared endeavour, exploring the interactions between the here-and-now dilemmas and contexts with values we share as a society; and being alive to how they – and we - shape each other. I have shared my experience of this approach in the hope that it will be useful to others as we consider the relationship between business ethics and humanistic management.

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A humanistic challenge to systemic organisation failure

William Tate

I think of today's organisations as complex social systems, with the best adopting a humanistic approach to management. This perspective affects how systems are analysed, managed and improved. A modern understanding of organisations in the post-scientific management (post-Newtonian) paradigm is a belief that living human systems behave organically rather than mechanistically. The new mindset challenges the traditional bureaucratic model that imagines the organisation's operation running like clockwork, with every part's movements and relationships predetermined. Old linear cause-effect assumptions are supplanted by complex, non-linear relationships. Less uniformity and greater resource variety are better able to respond to a less predictable and faster-changing world. Leadership and management processes are more systemically aware and operate less hierarchically.

In this article I question how well relevant authorities and business leaders understand this shift in thinking, particularly the implications for holding officials to account in the context of operational shortcomings and collapses. This shift of viewpoint questions the popular but mistaken practice that conflates organisation performance issues with personal mistakes and individuals' assumed deficiencies. Most crucially, a move away from a blame culture is needed, as my case study illustrates.

Keywords:

leaders, leadership, systemic, system, complexity, fishtank, blame, accountability

Context

There is no shortage of organisation failures, many of them scandalous: Grenfell Tower, Gosport War Memorial Hospital, Birmingham Prison, Costa Concordia cruise ship, Manchester Arena, HBOS, Carillion, Windrush, Roman Catholic priesthood, and Baby P/Sharon Shoesmith are a few examples. There are also untold in-company disciplinary cases requiring investigation and justice.

The examples mentioned are inherently socially complex and are talked about as 'systemic failures'. The work in such systems, and also in any subsequent investigation, is successful only when there is sufficient curiosity about the system's relationships, inter-connectedness and consequences. Where there has been a serious failure, it can be resolved honestly and morally only by viewing the case through a systems lens rather than looking for who to blame.

While system features may be spoken of during investigations, they rarely take centre stage. Moreover, the inquiry process itself will contain its own systemic aspects, biases, shortcomings and implications, affecting direction and outcomes. The inquiring parties' ability to grasp the full significance of this is often in doubt. Just think about the need to re-run inquiries such as Hillsborough and Northern Ireland's Bloody Sunday.

I examine the tragic death of six-year-old Jack Adcock in the Children's Assessment Unit, Leicestershire Royal Infirmary. This case brings to the fore both systems and humanistic sciences. Predictably, we saw headlines like 'We need to learn the lessons of the tragedy of Jack Adcock' (Cunningham, 2018). But did we believe the rhetoric? Will those lessons be learned? And what are the lessons (we rarely hear), and who needs to learn them? If the system of governance is our guard against the most egregious instances of organisation failure, who guards the guardians when investigations themselves so often act unfairly and fail to get to grips with the full scale of human issues?

Children's Assessment Unit, Leicestershire Royal Infirmary

Photo from Digital Health

Backstory

First, a summary of the case. On Friday 18th February 2011 Jack Adcock died in the Children's Assessment Unit in Leicester Royal Infirmary. He had acquired group A streptococcal sepsis, a notorious killer, that led to a cardiac arrest. Jack was already a seriously ill boy with Down's Syndrome. He had a known heart condition, was vomiting, had diarrhoea, and had difficulty breathing.

A long-running legal case followed Jack's death, pursued more intensely since 2014, with many twists and turns and many players, only being resolved by the Court of Appeal in August 2018. We don't need to know all the legal technicalities, nor the full detail of medical interventions, but we present here a synopsis before turning to the systemic aspects of the operational failure, where a bungled attempt to allocate blame was contested and humanity fell short.

In December 2014 junior registrar Dr Hadiza Bawa-Garba (left below) and two nurses were charged with manslaughter by gross negligence. The doctor and one of the nurses were convicted. They were denied leave to appeal against their convictions. But, rather surprisingly, in August 2018 Dr Bawa-Garba was effectively exonerated in her professional practice by the Court of Appeal (though her conviction, which was not the subject of her appeal, was not reviewed) and she was then allowed to resume her medical training and employment.

Dr Hadiza Bawa-Garba and Jack Adcock [Photo from ITV News - Twitter feed]

But before we come to the process's denouement, the tortuous facts are these. In June 2017 the case was considered by the Medical Practitioners Tribunal, the adjudication service of the General Medical Council (GMC). The tribunal decided that Dr Bawa-Garba should be suspended for 12 months after which she would be able to continue her training and could practise again in the same hospital trust. (There were precedents for criminal convictions not to lead automatically to loss of employment or licence to practise). Then the GMC's own chief executive (the doctors' regulatory body) surprisingly and controversially appealed its own tribunal's 'lenient outcome' to the High Court.

In January 2018 the High Court agreed with the GMC's appeal, though it expressed the view that a criminal court was not well placed to consider the systemic factors introduced by the accused doctor (Dr Bawa-Garba)

in her defence. Having secured its desired outcome, the GMC then struck her off the register, arguing that her conviction meant that she could not be fit to practise. However, in March 2018 the doctor was given leave to appeal to challenge her erasure from the register.

With much professional support, and following a crowd-funding campaign, the appeal was heard, and in August 2018 the Court of Appeal overturned the High Court's judgment that had supported the GMC and its chief executive. As a result, Dr Bawa-Garba's registration was reinstated, allowing her to practise once more. That led to the Doctors Association UK and the Hospital Consultants & Specialists Association to call for the GMC chief executive to resign.

Some implications and unanswered questions

The Court of Appeal was principally concerned with the question of whether or not it was reasonable for the Medical Practitioners Tribunal to conclude that the doctor was safe to practise. That legal focus left a number of organisational issues of a systemic nature dangling unresolved. This raises a key issue: to what extent is it reasonable to blame and deregister a doctor, given the exceptional systemic hospital working conditions and the particular circumstances at the time, as well as the role played by the doctor's colleagues. Together, such systemic considerations impact on the performance of individuals (Dr Bawa-Garba in this case), taking into account that the system – experienced as real or perceived – affects people's choices, decisions, priorities and their allocation of time and resources.

Important issues that we lack space to critique here include the unsatisfactory and protracted disciplinary and legal system and the medical treatment interventions that Dr Bawa-Garba made. If you choose to read the medical detail and are on the lookout for system shortcomings you will find them popping up from the start of the very day that Jack was admitted and died. Many such failings would be thought of as normal – stuff happens, such as delays in receiving blood tests and X-rays, even though they may have contributed to Jack's weakening condition during the progress of the day.

The account published in the medical Pulse website, ['Bawa-Garba: timeline of a case that has rocked medicine' (2018)] doesn't point out all these failings as system failures, nor lay them at Dr Bawa-Garba's door. It chiefly reports facts and describes the doctor's working conditions and short-staffing. But there is a related system that is our main concern – this is the disciplinary and legal process conducted over a number of years from 2011 to 2018, where there was a potential significant miscarriage of justice that holds implications for the wider medical profession as whole. It is here that we find a system blindspot in the actions of those concerned with assessing Dr Bawa-Garba's actions and with determining her guilt and failings.

System conditions and circumstances in question

So what was happening in Hadiza Bawa-Garba's workplace in February 2011? She was a junior doctor specialising in paediatrics in year six of her postgraduate training, with an 'impeccable' record. The day Jack was admitted to hospital, she was the most senior doctor in the unit.

She had just returned from 14 months of maternity leave. This was her first shift in an acute setting. It was claimed that she had not received the necessary induction that the hospital trust would normally provide in such situations, and she said she had not worked with the supervising consultant before.

On the day that Jack Adcock died, the unit was short-staffed. The consultant who was on call that day was off site for much of the time. Her junior colleagues were new to paediatrics and required close supervision. Dr Bawa-Garba was effectively doing the job of two registrars. She was covering six wards across four floors and was responsible for over 75 critically unwell children. On top of this, the hospital's electronic computer system went down for four hours.

Note that there are several systems at work in cases like this. Some are obvious and major. Some are matters of intention and design, however flawed they may be in practice. Others are darker, shadow systems. For example, in the previously mentioned Windrush scandal politicians deliberately set out to create a hostile environment, which was a major contributing factor in that immigration system's design and its consequential failure.

A deliberate decision to cut hospital staffing levels would be a conscious system design issue. But many system conditions are unplanned and consist of the daily messy reality of organisation bureaucracy and resource issues such as a staff member being sick or taking annual leave. Issues at this less formal level also shape how an organisation and its individuals work and perform on a given day.

Note, too, that there are social systems (how people are relating to others in their work – colleagues, bosses, patients, etc.), and there are non-social systems (how people are relating to structural factors in their work – rules, incentives, objectives, targets, computers, etc.). Both types of system are addressed in this article. Crucially, as we search for the truth as we see it, these structural systems can affect our level of sympathy with the employee who is accused of failing.

"The Dr Bawa-Garba case has shaken the medical profession." Anas Sarwar on Twitter

The authorities' response

It was admitted in court that Jack's care was inadequate due to a perfect storm of human error and system pressures. But by her own admission, Dr Bawa-Garba did not 'think sepsis' initially when she first assessed

Jack. That oversight, coupled with the failed IT system (which might have alerted remedial teams), sealed Jack's fate.

But the Medical Practitioners Tribunal subsequently found the doctor to have reflected on her actions and to have remediated her deficiencies. However, the possibility that such a judgment was too lenient triggered a series of emotional and legal interjections by both sides, with fellow medics becoming anxious about their own employment vulnerability in over-stretched workplaces.

ANALYSIS

Accountability in a system context

In any complex living human system, there is always a question of the extent to which an individual's performance is truly individual, and for which they can therefore reasonably be held solely accountable for their performance, and whether they should be blamed and punished when things go wrong. This was the line taken by doctors working in stressful situations not dissimilar to those experienced by Dr Bawa-Garba and who were supporting and funding her defence.

In systems terms, the language of the 'individual' is a misnomer organisationally, because it implies 'alone or apart'. The word and the concept misrepresent the various contributing sources of people's performance, their inter-related acts and outcomes in an actual organisation context. Privileging the 'individual' leads to HR policies and practices that understate the effect of hierarchies, colleagues, teams and processes such as goal-setting and appraisal. The individualised focus also raises false hopes for the efficacy of training as a solution to organisational dysfunction.

On this question of personal accountability (and therefore openness to blame) there are two schools of thought. On the one hand, if performance is truly systemic (i.e. someone's performance depends on a myriad of relationships, interactions and interdependencies), then no lone individual can fairly be held accountable for outcomes. In that case, for Dr Bawa-Garba to be charged with manslaughter may be unreasonable and show a lack of systemic awareness by those judging performance.

On the other hand, for an institution to ensure that its desired performance is delivered, it seems reasonable for employees to expect to account (along with others where appropriate) for their decisions, actions and achievements. In practice, an appropriate accountability process is rarely undertaken fairly and robustly. Nor is accountability usually informed by an understanding of how organisations work as systems. Institutional leaders rarely seem aware, able or willing to get to grips with the dynamics of systemic dysfunction.

Four questions needing answers

This common oversight raises four troubling issues:

4. In cases of failure, are the relevant authorities and regulatory bodies aware of, curious about, and able to take into account, the most obvious system conditions, as in Dr Bawa-Garba's contextual work life and environment? It hardly needs any specialist training to be able to seek and notice the prevailing conditions and to empathise and give due consideration to them.

5. At a deeper level, what minimal understanding do the relevant authorities need to have concerning how organisations work as systems in a post-Newtonian world of non-linear cause-and-effect, let alone the implications for management?
6. Thirdly, where lessons need to be learned and improvements recommended and carried through, how is a serious theoretical grounding in the discipline of systems thinking and complexity science acquired, located and practically applied?
7. Lastly, what constitutional and legal powers, frameworks, traditions and other constraints affect answers to the above questions?

Some related observations and questions

A dysfunctional system does not automatically lead to individuals performing inadequately. Nor does its existence automatically excuse an individual's neglectful performance.

It is possible to empathise with individuals' systemic conditions that affect their performance while at the same time being open to the possibility that someone's performance may still be grossly neglectful.

A culture of openness, reflection and learning in relation to mistakes should be encouraged and run alongside the possibility of employment-threatening sanctions where serious personal mistakes have been made.

In a non-linear world, tribunals, hearings and courts should avoid the trap of thinking binary 'guilty' or 'not guilty'? More nuanced outcomes should be available.

Does traditional management training and the century-old Newtonian scientific management paradigm incline employers and 'judges' (in hearings, tribunals and courts) towards seeking an individual to be held responsible for organisation failure?

Do hearings, tribunals and courts have the necessary constitutional powers to include 'trying' the system, or at least to enquire into and give due weight to significant factors in the accused person's work environment/system?

If systemic factors are found to have contributed to failure, how available are organisation-based sanctions and remedies instead of, or as well as, individual-based sanctions such as withdrawal of a professional licence?

How can institutions acceptably respond to criticism and calls from the media, public and relatives for greater openness and transparency when all they really want is to find an individual to blame and punish?

Should hearings/tribunals and courts feel deterred from finding fault and imposing sanctions when faced with the argument that the fear of such action will make individuals less reflective of their behaviour and performance, and less likely to admit to mistakes? Reformists and Dr Bawa-Garba's defence counsel claimed that the strictly legal process hinders the development of a learning culture.

The processes that authorities follow in their enquiries, and their own training, often lack a systemic foundation. It is usually 'individuals' who find themselves in the dock, in media comment if not literally. It is individuals who are assumed to be guilty (or not); the system escapes scrutiny and sanction. It is paradoxical that inclinations to discuss systemic factors is itself a systemic issue.

The handover from enquiries and inquests through to implementing recommendations finds a wide gulf in the system of learning and improvement. Taking the Grenfell Tower case from the examples listed earlier, witness the failure to implement the learning from the Lakanal House fire in Camberwell in 2009 that caused six deaths (that fire had spread unexpectedly fast across exterior cladding). The authorities already knew the risks at Grenfell. Similarly, Dr Bawa-Garba's work circumstances were also well known locally, were tolerated, and yet no system improvement action taken.

In these circumstances, what might represent a 'just culture'?

A just culture

> *"What we need instead is a just culture. Rather than attributing blame, we need to ask why something happened. And then the questions should be who is hurt? What do they need? And whose responsibility is it to make that happen?*
>
> *A just culture seeks to address the rawness of families' grief as well as the hurt of staff who are involved when tragedy strikes. A just culture seeks to learn from events and apply this learning to bring about change."*

(Dr Cicely Cunningham)

Learn not Blame is a new campaign from the Doctors Association UK, prompted by the perceived unjust nature of this case.

There can be little doubt that cases not dissimilar to that of Jack Adcock are occurring more frequently than we like to admit, given under-resourced public services, where chaotic organisations are struggling to cope.

> *"We need politicians to understand problems more deeply … complex issues have systemic foundations."*

Matthew Taylor, RSA chief executive, house journal, Issue 1, 2017

From the medical profession's response to the Jack Adcock case it seems reasonable to conclude the following:

Findings in the Jack Adcock /Dr Bawa-Garba case

> That while Dr Bawa-Garba undoubtedly made mistakes, in the stressful circumstances of absent colleagues and computer failure she worked sufficiently diligently and with care, and that withdrawing her licence to practise would have been too harsh an outcome.
>
> That the GMC and its chief executive mismanaged its relationship with its own Medical Practitioners Tribunal.
>
> That the GMC and its chief executive seemed more fixated on the doctor's personal culpability than on the system conditions which she had to navigate on the day.
>
> That an interest in learning from this sad case seemed a secondary consideration, judging from the reporting of the case.
>
> That a more humanistic management approach and outcome would have resulted from a greater systems focus, awareness and management, notwithstanding that the parents of Jack wanted Dr Bawa-Garba to lose her licence.

(Lind, S., 2018)

> *"Internationally, the emphasis of disciplinary sanctions from now on will more emphatically rest on whether a practitioner is likely to place the public at risk, rather than upon public distress after a tragic outcome of deficient medical care. That is both realistic and humane. We are all fallible. While such an approach will not satisfy Jack Adcock's mother, sadly a harsh disciplinary sanction cannot bring Jack back, and the community is better off with Bawa-Garba back in practice. "*

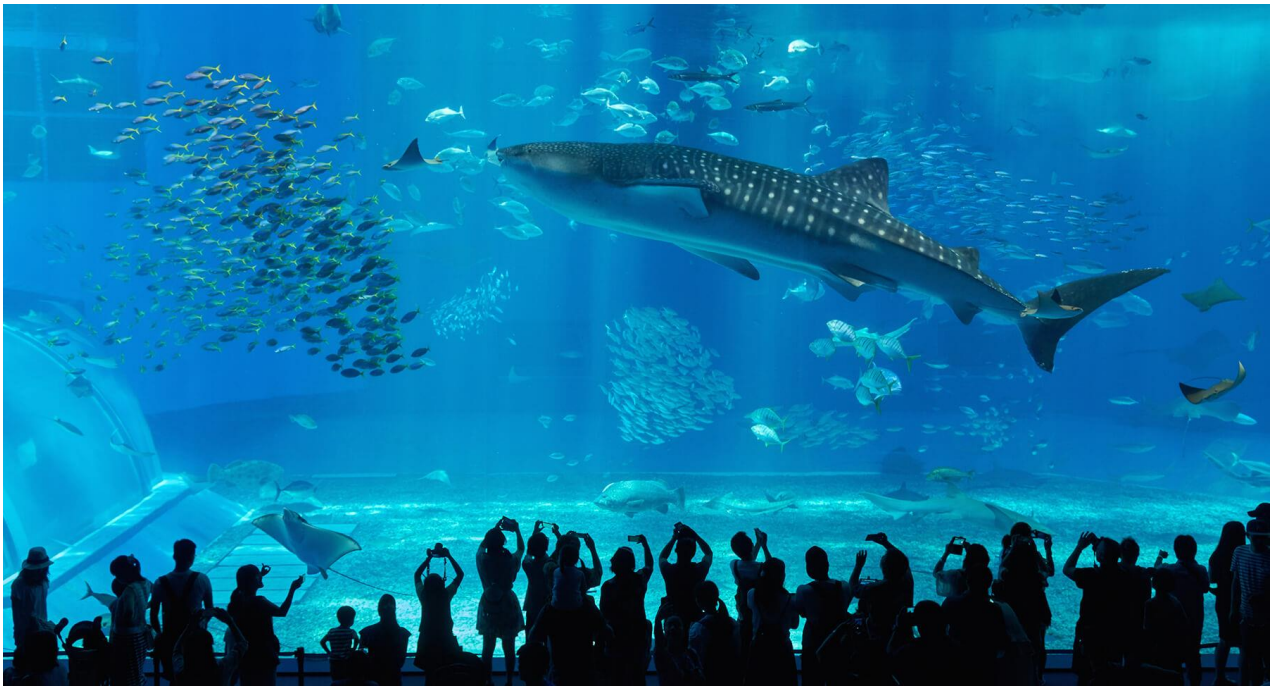
(Extract from 'What happened in the Bawa-Garba case and why was reinstating her the right decision.' The Conversation, Ian Freckelton, 17 August 2018).

Advice on making system improvements

People in positions of authority – including doctors like Hadiza Bawa-Garba – have a responsibility for improving the way the system works, such as reflecting on all the problems she encountered on the day Jack Adcock was admitted and died. Here are seven suggestions to help make this happen (based on Tate, W. 2016):

1. ***Give everyone two jobs***: The first is the job they think they have. The second is the job of improving the first. Appraise the two job roles separately.
2. ***Make tomorrow different***: People should ask themselves "Why am I continuing to do what I am continuing to do the way I am continuing to do it?". Make tomorrow work better than today. This is part of every manager's job. Colluding with the present, or actively sustaining it, is simply managing, not leading.

3. ***Improvement defines leadership***: Bringing about improvement is a true component of leadership. The leadership role needs recognising and managing distinctively as a separate part of an official's performance.
4. ***Think of your organisation being like a fishtank***: In this popular analogy employees are the fish, all at sea (as it were) in a threatening and dirty climate and culture. Instead of taking sluggish ones out of the water, giving them a good talking-to and then plopping them back in the same dirty water, notice the state of the water and focus on your detoxing responsibility.



The Fishtank Metaphor [Image credit leungchopan - stock.adobe.com]

5. ***Manage accountability***: It is generally assumed that an individual has to want to change if change is to happen – that the will has to come from within rather than an outside force being required. But large bureaucratic organisations can weaken people's resolve, with individuals sitting back and waiting for someone else to do something to improve the system.
6. ***Bosses hold crucial cards***: The person to whom an individual (or a team) reports is key. The boss has the organisation's authority to lead a discussion and ask and say what change is needed, then follow through.
7. ***Put things right before waiting for failure***: Routinely invoke a fair and robust accountability lever with the appropriate parties for getting things right, not only when things have gone wrong and people want someone to blame.

Conclusions

Noticing and picturing systemic forces and inter-relationships in organisations is an acquired interest and a vital managerial skill. But caring for people's wellbeing and managing humanistically is a matter of choice and values – for individuals and organisation cultures. The two concepts don't necessarily intersect. An organisation may recognise systems and their interconnecting relationships – for instance, how incentives

work. But the humanity of the situation may be neglected or even abused – again, the misuse of incentives (revealed in Alfie Kohn's Punished by Rewards, 1993). And the converse may be true too, if the organisation is too comfortable and inefficient. I argue that the two concepts should flow naturally together and be mutually supportive: one's eyes are opened to appreciating people's feelings once one sees who is doing what and why, and recognises the damaging consequences. Addressing a bullying climate is a case in point.

Spurred by John Adcock's death and the Hadiza Bawa-Garba case, the General Medical Council (GMC) has launched a programme to train fitness-to-practise investigators to recognise 'human factors' alongside systemic ones (Lind, S., 2018). In the health and welfare sector, David Zigmond's polemic (elsewhere in this edition) challenges regulators of the GP health sector to show greater respect for traditional, small GP practices that get to know and value each patient as a whole person. He makes the case for preserving the subtext in the doctor-patient relationship and providing ease of continuity, rather than closing down such practices – which happened to Zigmond – in favour of more technically focused 'factories', as he describes them.

There are hopeful signs. But taking an example from the 'gig economy' parcel-delivery world, the working conditions, the attitude of owners and the management processes seem to be getting worse. A development that elevates a feelings perspective as an equal consideration alongside a factual analysis is attracting much interest (Nervous States: How Feeling took Over the World, William Davies, 2018). Thinking of the state of the world today, and considering the financial crash ten years ago, Davies concludes that there is a need for a sociological as much as – or even more than – an econometric perspective. As one book reviewer expressed it,

> *"There is a strong sense of Hannah Arendt running through this work. Arendt analysed power and spoke of the west's curious passion for objectivity".*

The reviewer added that:

> *"the present factual bias has produced experts armed with statistics that bear little relationship to lived reality"*
>
> [Moore, S., 'How to feel our way towards the future', Guardian, 28 October 2018].

At this stage in the process of establishing the UK Humanistic Management Chapter there is no finalised methodology in place that can be used to inform and drive analysis and improvement, as in cases like that of Dr Bawa-Garba. What I have attempted to do here is to attune our senses, thoughts and feelings more keenly when encountering systemic failures that have tragic consequences. I make a plea for us to take account of both the systems and the humanity dimensions, and avoid looking for answers through a forensic and analytical lens alone. A change in approach is badly needed when planning and conducting accountability processes. The aim should be to appreciate the spectrum of system and human issues confronting the range of stakeholders. Just think of politicised cases like those of the Bawa-Garba, Hillsborough, Windrush and Grenfell scandals; by not seeing the social dimension and showing too little interest in people's feelings they risked failing in the search for a greater truth.

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William has written over 40 books and articles. He uses the fishtank as a metaphor for the system – everything that is going on around and between people in their organisational context and relationships, impacting on their ability to exercise organisation-serving leadership.

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Rehumanising General Practice?

A cautionary tale

David Zigmond

Small General Practices used to be very common, and mostly popular. Yet, due to current healthcare policies, they are now increasingly rare and almost extinct. What are we losing? This is my story as a long-serving London-based GP: I write of recent experiences of being forced to close my much-loved practice in the teeth of what many perceive as non-humanistic management on the part of regulators.

Keywords

general practice, regulation, inspection, Care Quality Commission, non-humanistic management, clinician-patient relationships, resistance, dialogue, grief

Introduction

Industry regulators employ cadres of inspectors who visit organisations' premises to assess the quality of providers' work. This is an important job and necessarily confers considerable powers. A case in point across Welfare services (note 1) is the Care Quality Commission and its responsibility for assessing the state of GP doctors' practices. Regulators operate by defining a system of a 'best-practice' framework and then construct rules and processes as the basis for assumed objectivity in assessing and then applying a rating (note 2). Inspectors' work is often controversial, generates fear, and tempts those being assessed to lie low and game the system. A damning report can close an organisation. Such power can be maladroit or even abused – displaying a lack of humanity towards those who fall short. A high price can be paid for being honest with inspectors.

I write this cautionary tale as a GP who spoke his mind to inspecting authorities who were insistent on demonstrating command and control at all costs. As always, I attempt to do this in a manner that is courteous, principled and well-argued.

Context

I am a London-based, independently minded GP whose practice was closed down by the regulator, using what I experienced as a heavy hand to direct an industrial production model. By contrast, I, instead, inclined to a personal service that offered greater primacy to doctor-patient relationships. Inspectors found excessive variation against their standard framework. Yet this prohibition of variation often destroys a greater wholesome variety – the kind that may best respond to patients' diverse human circumstances and needs.

Colleagues and patients attest to my impeccable 30-year-old record as a GP, running a practice that was enduringly popular for what I could offer my patients. Much of this is due to my devotion to holistic perspectives of medical care and to my background in psychiatry. By contrast, inspectors perceived me as difficult, resistant, often recusant to current trends, and questioning of the views and imposed formulae of experts. Rather, regarded by many as old fashioned and gentlemanly, I have endeavoured consistently to express polite contention, and to remain open about what I regarded as my thoughtful and selective non-compliance.

This stance cost me my job.

I believe that there is much to learn from this case about how quality of performance can best be regulated, assured and improved other than by resorting to criminal-type litigation, as happened to me. In writing this piece, I hope that an understanding of my first-hand experience may help to make the case for much-needed reform, possibly influenced by aspects of humanistic management.

Background to my story

In 2016, following a sharply officious and uncompromisingly formulaic inspection by the Care Quality Commission, my small general practice was closed down by the regulator of GP practices unexpectedly with immediate effect (note 3).

Location and vocation – some grand entrances: St James Church, Bermondsey (Home to the author's NHS surgery for nearly three decades)

For thirty years, my unusual practice had operated out of a rented section of an active 1830 church in Bermondsey, south London, UK. It had been exceptionally and consistently popular with patients and staff. There was no history of alleged dysfunction or hazard. But my practice was traditional and had long been resisting the tide of larger, multi-partner – even corporatised – primary care health centres increasingly favoured by government (note 4). And the practice was conspicuously and outspokenly old-fashioned in cleaving to an erstwhile style and ethos of personal and family-doctoring.

My GP practice embodied my own character, including my deeply-held beliefs and values about clinician-patient relationships. In place of the recent imperatives to increasingly apply procedural and reductive approaches, I championed the medical profession's better traditional practice: a more personal and holistic approach to medical diagnosis and treatment. I thought that treating physical symptoms in 10-minute slots – slots that have resulted in GPs becoming, also, increasingly personally unfamiliar with patients and their lives – was akin to an automated factory production line. While some medical conditions would reliably respond to generic 'best-practice' solutions, many could not: this is because the patient's particular mental state and personal subtext are often quite as important as any generic considerations.

A case of non-humanistic management?

My practice had come to occupy an outlier status in the GP health sector. It no longer fitted the Care Quality Commission's increasingly formulaic mould; the regulator's requirements and inspection questions were designed to suit much larger practices in modern buildings – they thus followed the government's preference for large, multi-GP practices. Awkwardly and embarrassingly, my practice bucked the trend.

But why should this be such a problem? Why the rush? What was the risk to my patients? And why was the regulator's goal of closure pursued so ruthlessly?

*

The end of one's contractual employment usually terminates all legal responsibility. But what about our moral responsibility toward unattended compromises we know we are leaving? Though my practice had been quickly killed off by the CQC, I wondered: how well can ghosts speak for and to the living? Doggedly, I chose to fight the CQC intellectually, challenging its organising principles and modus operandi. I wrote numerous articles and engaged in lengthy correspondence with CQC's leadership of its GP practices team. If not a thorn in the CQC's side, to them I became a campaigning and time-consuming nuisance.

*

I reject much of the over-managed and routinized factory-type model with which so many doctors are now, increasingly, required to comply. I challenge the CQC's lack of careful understanding and engagement with my community of satisfied and loyal patients and staff. I am saddened by the CQC's lack of wisdom and interest in my employment situation where my long and distinguished career was approaching retirement within a few years. And I reject the CQC's draconian powers where, here, its zealously pursued bureaucratic, so unintelligent, tick-box enforcement model so harshly and thoroughly eclipsed wiser, good-practice improvement guidelines ("Are cobwebs visible in the ceiling space" Yes, Fail. "Is there a book recording dates when fire drills were conducted for the three staff?" No, Fail).

The author receiving his Positive Deviancy award from Dr William Tate

*

For my energetic campaigning, I received the Positive Deviancy category award at an international annual leadership event held in London in November 2016.

Below, I tell more of my personal story.

My personal story

> *"Our factory-type healthcare will deal poorly with those many human ailments that need different kinds of personal engagement for their relief and transcendence. These require healing encounters that mobilise the sufferer's internal resources for immunity, growth and repair. These*

are subtle and delicate activities and – importantly – cannot develop in a factory culture, whose structure and function both depend on rigidity (like a vehicle chassis). They can only emerge and thrive in a family-type milieu where structure and function and strength are linked to flexibility and elasticity (like a tyre)."

[Zigmond, 2015, pp 463-470]

On Friday 8th July 2016, my practice staff received a phone call at 6pm from CQC informing me that I am summonsed to appear at Camberwell Green Magistrates' Court the following Monday morning, 11th July 2016. Because I was travelling abroad, I did not receive the message until a few hours before the hearing.

The Care Quality Commission had applied to "urgently cancel the provider's registration under section 30 of The Health and Social Care Act 2008 on the basis that there were several breaches of the 2014 Regulations which presented serious risks to people's life, health or well-being." All of the accusations against my surgery concerned processes and procedures. My popularity and respect amongst patients and staff were not disputed, nor was my actual record.

My request for an adjournment to seek legal representation was declined and, after an eight-hour hearing, the surgery was ordered to be closed immediately. Patients arriving for their appointments on Tuesday morning were confronted with a 'Surgery Closed' notice on the door.

Consequences of management adrift from humanistic anchorage

Clearly there was an anomaly here that continues to deserve our fuller understanding. Among the many factors contributing to this anomalous judgement and execution are five that are widely observed to be now problematic throughout our Welfare services, yet epitomised in this single outlying practice (note 5):

1. The UK's public health and Welfare sector has witnessed increasing standardisation and regulation regimes that, by definition, then cannot intelligently encourage or respond to a variety of contexts and to more subtle aspects of patients' needs.
2. A tick-box culture results. Put starkly, this reduces all problems and remedies to systems of executive-commands mandating employee-obedience.
3. This has led to a vast command-and-control regime that inevitably requires considerable resources and management. This, in turn, necessitates the development of what I call REMIC (remote management, inspection and compliance) – the increasingly algorithmic and automated ways of monitoring, assessing and controlling the workforce.
4. In particular, this has led to the gathering official disfavour of small practices, partly because of their greater difficulty interacting with burgeoningly complex bureaucracy and compliance requirements. Yet the high popularity of small practices with many members of the public has remained, both because of – and despite – this fact.
5. REMIC, like so many systems of automation and mass production, tends increasingly to become a hermetic system, accessible to, and modifiable by, only a small cadre of designated and privileged 'experts'. Intelligent and open dialogue becomes ever harder outside of this elite; compliance to managed procedure becomes pre-eminent, if not coercive, in the assurance of professional survival.

All this has become clearer with my experience at the hands of the CQC. It has long proved almost impossible for any practitioner to meaningfully engage the relevant authorities (in particular here, NHS England and the Care Quality Commission) in candid discussion. I had hoped that my sudden and enforced retirement might reduce my spectred threat or perceived impertinence-rating: not so. Courteous and thoughtful letters from me (see Section G of my Home Page) inviting from them responses in kind have been answered (if at all) by formulaic and defensive types of wariness that are more informed and limited by didactic regulations and computer templates than any openly thoughtful minds.

Despite my most thoughtful and diplomatic efforts, I received only procedural obstruction to my invitation to a more open dialogue. There are many others – a 'silent majority' – who also wish for such a dialogue but are now too professionally wearied or afraid to pursue this, or in any way directly challenge governing authorities.

So, what, from here, is the best course?

The following, a fictive essay, is one response: I have here constructed an imaginary dialogue between the REMIC authorities and myself (DZ). While the dialogue is clearly fictitious, the problems discussed are very real. In this 'conversation' I have tried to imagine how REMIC would respond were they to take part in such an exchange, now, in a spirit of what might be understood as humanistic management.

A fictional dialogue

How may we replant our human sense? First steps

REMIC: Why are you still contacting us, after all this time?

DZ: Well, I've long wanted a broader conversation … Not just about my own case, but what it represents throughout Welfare services … Many people continue to contact me about it.

REMIC: Look, we're not here for such 'broader conversations'. We're getting on with an important job to help the public. We do that using established and transparent procedures. If you think we haven't followed those procedures correctly, then you have every right to an appeal: that, again is a correct procedure. We note you haven't followed it.

DZ: Well, the reasons are pretty substantial…

REMIC: Meaning?

DZ: I was seventy years old at the time of my decommissioning. My practice income from real work was falling, while my regulatory and compliance expenses kept rising (note 6). Like many small practices I was doomed to extinction.

Most important, though, was that the way I was closed down made it almost impossible for me to ever reopen…

REMIC: Why is that?

DZ: Well, I was immediately stopped from working. So my patients had to be cared for elsewhere, and a final 'closure payment' was made to my practice. But my reception staff etc would need security of future payments and jobs and I couldn't vouchsafe these during a lengthy appeal process … I couldn't continue to pay them for an indeterminate period for an unsure future. Being realistic, they would have to find other jobs. And, being equally realistic, I would never be able to replace them with people of equal calibre. Who would give up a good job to join a battling septuagenarian? I knew I was finished by this strike: I couldn't get back onto my feet again.

REMIC: No, those are not our considerations. But, again, you could have appealed.

DZ: Well I could, but without hope of success, yet incurring much expense and stress. REMIC is a large corporation which simultaneously is the executive, the judiciary and the jury and has funds and lawyers aplenty. I am an outlying septuagenarian with no ready funds or lawyers, who has been very selectively non-compliant with – and therefore in breach of – REMIC-managed contractual regulations. How could an appeal possibly succeed? … So I decided to continue to argue my cause, but to cut my losses before martyrdom.

REMIC: Beyond your own hurt and losses why do you think your cause is so important?

DZ: Well, I see the incremental effect that the machinery of REMIC has had on our healthcare culture. Look at us! We are a sickened and demoralised profession. If you want statistics there are many to show the extent of our dispirited trouble: poor recruitment, career abandonment, earliest possible retirement, retreat into 'portfolio careers', widely varied physical and mental illness, intra-institutional litigation, drug and alcohol abuse, marriage and family breakdown … and …

REMIC: OK, OK. And your point is?

DZ: That if we're not very careful REMIC increasingly generates more problems than it can solve. In my working lifetime I've seen the collapse of my profession's heart, art, spirit, soul, intellect and wit. And other Welfare services, with their own kinds of REMIC, report much the same (note 7) …

REMIC: That's quite a list! We can't be held responsible for all that, surely?

DZ: Well not personally, and not completely. But it's like any partially-sighted yet overdeveloped public system. It becomes dysfunctional because it becomes both hermetic and then difficult to change or steer. And then all participants are forced into one of three roles: perpetrator, victim or bystander. There is, however, a fourth position: opponent, but that has its own problems, as you can see. So direct opposition from employed practitioners is frightened into retreat and hiding.

REMIC: We've heard this from you before and think it's unfair. It's certainly not our intent…

DZ: OK, probably not to begin with. But all sorts of social and political campaigns have a horrible tendency to turn into something quite different. And then avowed intention becomes very different from consequences. Shall I give you some historical examples?

REMIC: No! We don't need all that from you. What we're trying to do is quite straightforward. We're assuring for the public the quality of their health service: its compassion, competence, comfort, efficiency and safety. What can be wrong with that?

DZ: Only that you're conflating your mission with your method.

REMIC: What does that mean?

DZ: Well, few people are going to dispute your mission. Who would? But almost all experienced practitioners who are not defending a governing position have much more doubt about REMIC's methods. How can we possibly fulfil a mission if our method can't even get people to do, or stay in, the job? What kind of care can we offer others if we, ourselves, are dispirited, insecure, harried and harassed (note 8)?

REMIC: One of our concerns about you is that you seem to be against all organisational rules, regulations, checks and disciplines. You don't seem to see the necessity for any of it … In our view that makes you look very risky.

DZ: Hm! I'm in the same boat as you, then: that's not my intent, but those are the consequences. I apologise for you misunderstanding me. Look, I'm not that kind of nihilistic anarchist. I believe all structures, strictures and penalties have their place and value, but that such placement and value are complex matters needing endless thought, editing and navigation. We have to understand how something good in one context can be very harmful in another. Our structures must often be tempered by flexibility. We have to understand how some grand schemes spawn even larger, however unintended, problems …

REMIC: So how much institutional direction do you believe in? Will you submit to?

DZ: Well, I'm certainly not going to give you a figure! Let me answer with a metaphor. The health service used to mostly resemble a well-functioning family, which depended on appropriate trust, commonality, personal understanding, overlapping and interchangeable responsibilities and flexible judgements about these. But our reforms have attempted to disband the 'family' and replace it with a network of factories, where all these 'family' qualities are replaced by rigid command-and-control procedures, protocols and instructions.

Sometimes parents will attempt to bring up their children in this way – they are over-structured, overly strict, intrusive and controlling. They say: 'we are only doing what is best for them, for the family.' The long-term results, though, are usually very different to what they say they intend …

REMIC: But all our procedures and disciplines are there for good reason. Overall they are there for everyone's safety and protection. Abandoning those responsibilities would lead to much greater problems, dangers and harm. Do you not see that?

DZ: OK. I agree that REMIC is not the same as, say, a military dictatorship! What I am saying is that, if we are not careful, there are similarities in process and outcome.

REMIC: But what about our public responsibilities?

DZ: Look, let me repeat an important point: I agree with your concern and your mission, though clearly and often, not your method.

Perhaps it will help my mission to make these distinctions:

- Creative dissent is different from destructive anarchy.
- Outliers to systems are not necessarily bad; they may even be outstandingly good.
- In history, Galileo, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King were outstanding conscientious objectors. In contrast, the millions who automatically obeyed governing authorities brought us … what?

  I'm sure you can fill in the gap.

REMIC: Yes, yes. History, the herd, the compromised individual, the corrupted mission. But what about our question about public responsibility?

DZ: Of course, but I think we've become paralysed with anxious confusion and lost sight of this: in the Welfare sectors most workers want to do good work with good care. Generally, this is what they will do as long as they get good human contact, encouragement and satisfaction from their work milieu. But the inverse is also true: If welfare workers are frustrated in their human and vocational satisfactions, no amount of regulations, rules, trainings and inspections will remedy a failing service. That is what we have now: a tendency to draconian and forensic management attempting to control – yet actually further damaging – an ailing service. Flogging a dying horse.

… and this brings me back, REMIC, to your first question: 'why am I still trying to discuss all this with REMIC authorities?'

Different kinds of grief

In a way I am trying to heal my own grief, of both private and public kinds. Let me differentiate.

There is my private grief for the ending of my much-loved role, my practice, familiar and dear people and daily time-structures, my reciprocated significance for others … If we live long enough, we all have to face such losses, so they are universal and inevitable as well as private. You may be sympathetic, but you cannot otherwise help me with this.

My other kind of grief may be publicly generated but must be privately borne. It is about the cultural loss of certain kinds of relationships and shared values. For the first half of my long career I was blessed by welfare work that – for the most part – could grow healthily in a wholesome and trusting (yet inevitably flawed) 'family'. The second half of this working life has seemed like an accelerating and enforced march to work in a series of mistrustful and depersonalised, REMIC-controlled 'factories'.

What I learned, how I practised, and how I taught were all anchored in this earlier vocational, fraternal ethos. My grief is about the systematic deracination and destruction of all this: it exceeds what I personally have lost; it is more about what I am leaving behind, in the public sphere, for others. So it is a transcendent and transpersonal grief.

This you can, certainly, help me with.

REMIC: So we're not just the bad dictators, then?

DZ: Not so long as you invite discussion and debate. There's more hope for all of us then.

Some conclusions

Regulators' approaches follow cycles, as they try various assessment philosophies, while assuming or pretending they have found the right answer. And then these new 'solutions' become the diktats of whoever is then the current responsible government minister. Eventually the cycle becomes tired, the benefits are outweighed by the burdens, public and professional support wanes, the minister is replaced, and new regulators and inspectors are appointed who call for the adoption of a new model. Where there has previously been a single-minded focus on outcomes, this is replaced by a focus on inputs and throughputs which means a plethora of rules and protocols that are assumed to better deliver political ends … until that formula too, in its turn, tires. Such approaches often play into politicians' need to demonstrate decisive commitment via expedient 'one size fits all' regulations (note 9).

Ofsted's new approach to schools' regulation makes an interesting comparison with this example I have here considered from the health sector. Amanda Spielman, the new chief inspector of schools, outlined details of the new Ofsted inspection regime ('Ofsted inspectors to stop using exam results as key mark of success – watchdog chief outlines new inspection regime judging schools on quality of education', Guardian 11 October 2018.).

Spielman considers that "For a long time our inspections have looked hardest at outcomes, placing too much weight on test and exam results … Instead, schools would be judged on quality of education". She interprets this as focusing on "the curriculum taught within a school, rewarding those schools that offer a broad range of subjects". Spielman's appeal to greater human sense and wisdom was congratulated by the profession for her flexibility as a 'breath of fresh air'.

Perhaps the CQC might take a leaf from Spielman's book and, instead, focus on the real-life quality of each GP's provision of good healthcare – as opposed to mere procedural compliance. In doing so, it needs to look again at its forensic – even draconian – approach (see reference 3 below), one that employed a legal team to close down, with peremptory zeal, an outlier GP practice such as mine of otherwise excellent record and repute. This rigidly procedural style of management then swiftly deracinated a practice for positive variations it no longer had the capacity to observe, to tolerate or to thoughtfully understand.

Indeed, as the CQC effectively claimed in court with regard to my case:

> *"We have rules and regulations designed to ensure good safety and probity. We expect evidence of compliance with these. Failure to demonstrate this to our satisfaction thus becomes a definition of errant and outlawed practice. This GP practice failed to comply, is therefore unsafe, and must be closed forthwith."*
>
> [CQC – 11 July 2016]

Crossing the Rubicon: the author swimming in the Thames after work

Acknowledgements

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References, further reading and notes

Zigmond, D. (2015), *If you want good personal care, see a vet.* New Gnosis Publications

Zigmond, D. (2015), pp 197-205, *From Family to Factory*. New Gnosis Publications

All other referenced articles are available via my Home Page, www.marco-learningsystems.com, Sections D, G and L.

1. In this article *Welfare*, when used with a capital 'W', refers to government-delivered services. This differentiates it from welfare – our unmanaged and 'natural' empathy and beneficence with one another.
2. Using an industrial analogy, the CQC judges and regulates the methods of production, but not the product itself. Thus, in the following example, my practice was closed, but my competence and license to practise elsewhere remained unchallenged.
3. *Death by Documentation. The penalty for corporate non-compliance and Introduction.* Articles 73 & 74, Sections G and L. Written the week after the coerced closure, this provides a freshly graphic description of events.

4. *Obituary: St James Church Surgery 1987-2016: the demise of small General Practices. A personal celebration and lament.* Section D. This portrays the kind of general practice that are subject to plans of elimination, and gives reasons why.
5. *Collectivising the Personal. Seminal lessons from Bolshevism.* Article 100, Section L. This takes a long and broad view of such problematic management. Equivalents are found throughout Welfare services and large events in 20th Century history.
6. The current regulations and financial arrangements have become starkly inimical for small practices. For example, at the time of my decommissioning my practice list size was only slightly below average, yet my hourly working pay could allow a rate only 10% above my receptionists. This has become a common predicament for the few small practices that manage to survive: such practices are now running more on vocation than viable funding.
7. The Centre for Welfare Reform has documented many such problems across our Welfare services.
8. *General Practice used to be the art of the possible, but we have turned it into a tyranny of the unworkable. Reflections on our inspections regime.* Article 75, Sections G and L. This essay was written originally for NHS England, the year before the practice's closure. It forewarned our services' wider, now burgeoning, tribulations.
9. The psychological and social damage within our Welfare services wrought by our current regulation and management regimes is outlined in a report for the King's Fund: *Industrialised healthcare: how do we replant our human sense?* Article 109, Section L.

About the author

Dr David Zigmond is a veteran NHS doctor. He has worked as a psychiatrist, psychotherapist and small-practice GP. For more than forty years he has taught and written about the nature and importance of holistic and humanistic healthcare. In recent years he has drawn attention, particularly, to the serious consequences of neglect of these principles.

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If capitalism is in crisis, is there any evidence that Purpose is the answer?

John Rosling

Globally, business is experiencing a crisis of trust. 'Purpose' has been proposed as a way to rebuild trust and has been suggested as a way to drive organisational performance.

Is there evidence for these proposals? And if so, how does this process work? Research from Universities of Cambridge and Plymouth has created a new Model to show how purpose is 'activated' in organisations to achieve strong performance outcomes.

And that process has humanistic management at its heart.

Key words

Performance, Purpose, Leadership, Engagement, Humanistic Management, Capitalism

Introduction

In his letter to CEOs *"A Sense of Purpose",* Blackrock's CEO Larry Fink makes the bold claim that *'without a sense of purpose, no company can achieve its full potential'*. But what's the evidence for that?

This isn't a good time to be a capitalist.

Globally, business seems to be facing a catalogue of crises:

- A crisis of engagement, with 87% of employees 'not engaged' (Gallup 2017).
- A crisis of productivity, which some economists put down, in part, to this lack of engagement (Green 2006).
- A crisis in trust, with society's trust in business low and falling. Just 52% of people in 28 countries 'trust business to do what is right' (Edelman 2017) and 58% of CEOs identify a lack of trust as an 'imminent threat' to their business (PwC 2017).

Some commentators see signs of an 'end to capitalism' in these crises. Yet, is this really an existential threat to capitalism itself – or just to one interpretation of it? Could it be that the dominant paradigm of business for the last 30 years, as exemplified by Milton Friedman's maxim that the function of business is solely profit and a return to shareholders, is not the only form of capitalism?

Is 'purpose-led business' better business?

Certainly, calls for a 'purpose-led' approach to business are getting louder. And, intriguingly, these calls are not coming solely from the traditionally socially-responsible end of business, but also from the heart of the established capitalist order. Sources include regulators like the UK's Financial Reporting Council in their revised 2018 Governance Code, global investors like Blackrock's Larry Fink and the upper reaches of the FTSE 100 as exemplified by Unilever's Paul Polman.

The language of 'purpose' may be new, but the principles that drive it are, of course, recognisably rooted in humanistic management. These are the principles of managing with empathy - as if people matter - and seeing human dignity and well-being as being of as great an importance, and as much a responsibility of business leadership, as shareholder value or financial return. In a revealing interview with the Financial Times (December 3rd 2017), Paul Polman exemplified this approach to business; *"I believe the reason businesses have been created, is to serve society"*. As for leadership, he urged that; "*to be a great leader you, first and foremost, have to be a great human being, sharing purpose and sharing values - the values of dignity and respect for the people you deal with"*.

These socially mindful roots of business practice go even deeper than that. A rereading of Adam Smith reminds us that, embedded in Smith's original thinking about markets, is an overarching social contract and a sense of self-responsibility, empathy for others and a desire to be seen to be doing the right thing (Norman 2018).

Could this therefore genuinely represent a shift back to a less mechanistic, more humanistic, business paradigm? Perhaps. But for most companies, the new order will be judged and assessed using the tools of the old. This means that, for a purposeful approach to business to gain traction and become the sustainable norm, it must be able to show to what extent it drives business performance.

Which begs the question; is there actually any evidence that a focus on 'purpose' really makes for better business?

The simple answer is, 'not really'.

Whilst there are clear examples of companies that have implemented a purposeful approach doing well as a result, and even outperforming their profit-led peers, there are equally multiple examples of companies piling onto the purpose bandwagon and finding it making very little difference to the beliefs and behaviours of their people or the performance of the business.

Academic research has begun to look at the issue, but suffers from a paucity of objective data. The *causality* is also unclear. So, whilst a review of 56 academic research papers revealed that 89% showed companies with strong 'Environmental, Social and Governance' (ESG) factors outperformed competitors on a market basis (Fulton 2012), the research inevitably relied on a largely external and subjective view of what constitutes a 'strong ESG factor.' It is also far from clear to what extent – and exactly why - strong ESG might cause commercial performance, or whether this is simply a correlation effect.

The Contexis Purpose Model

To understand this dilemma a group of academics led by Cambridge University and entrepreneurs with first-hand observation of the most dynamic, entrepreneurially-minded businesses, worked together over two years to create a new Model to explain how purpose is activated in organisations.

Fig 1: The Contexis Purpose Model

In doing so, the Model seeks to answer two questions definitively: does 'purpose' drive performance? And, if so, how – and can the causality be established and replicated in any business?

Purpose

Before looking at this Model (see Figure 1), it's first worth establishing what we mean by 'purpose'. This Contexis group adopted a working definition of purpose as:

> *"an enduring and meaningful reason to exist that aligns financial performance with a societal or environmental goal, provides clear context that guides daily decision-making and unifies and motivates stakeholder's towards achieving it."*

Taking this view of purpose, the Model proposes an explanation for why purpose influences human and commercial performance in some organisations but not in others, proposing that a *specific set of environmental and cultural attributes* activate purpose in organisations. These attributes are of such importance that they enhance the outcomes of purpose, acting as the pathway between purpose and performance, enhancing wellbeing, satisfaction and fulfilment in employees, and triggering a specific set of behaviours that can be shown to drive measurable commercial performance. The Model analyses the relationships between these attributes in order to establish correlative and causal links. It also measures the strength of all of these performance behaviours to provide a *metric of business performance*. In this way, the Model both provides a measure of purpose performance and seeks to demonstrate the causality in this relationship.

The first of these cultural attributes is **ownership**. The Model suggests that people who feel emotional ownership of the purpose served by the business commit more strongly to the success of their organisation. However, ownership cannot prevail in the absence of **trust**. Without trust people protect their identity and position rather than devoting their passion and energy to the good of the organisation. Finally, the Model identifies that leaders and management need a clear sense of **contextual clarity** to decision-making and this can be provided by purpose.

The Model illustrates that the presence of these attributes, working together, directly influence and enable positive human experience and behaviours in organisations by effectively activating purpose.

The key question, however, is whether the attributes the Model measures really are those that drive human and consequently business performance. Observationally, these attributes are certainly typical of the cultural conditions seen in the best entrepreneurially-minded businesses and appear to bridge the 'gap' between purpose and the experience of employees in the organisation. Is there empirical evidence to show this effect?

Ownership: the source of agility in people

> *"Psychological ownership satisfies three basic human needs: 'home', efficacy, and self-identity."*
>
> [Van Dyne & Pierce]

Ownership: Photo by rawpixel on Unsplash

Let's start with 'ownership'. Ownership is an emotional contract. Those who feel ownership care strongly about the success of their organisation, are ***aligned*** with its goals and feel ***engaged*** in its success and will also act ***autonomously*** to serve the good of the company, rather than waiting to be directed (Van Dyne 2004).

Research has consistently demonstrated positive links between psychological ownership for the organisation and work performance. Studies have shown that feelings of ownership are related to satisfaction, involvement, integration, commitment and work-related behaviours (Pendleton 1998), to concern if a task is unfinished (Parker 1997) and to reported positive attitudes to the firm and its future success (Nuttin 1987).

Importantly, a feeling that something belongs to us can be just as powerful in the absence of legal ownership as it is if legal ownership exists (Van Dyne 2004) which means ownership attachment can be accessibly achieved through *ownership of the purpose the business serves*. The consequence is that psychological ownership of purpose can have a profound impact on organisational behaviours, most immediately on the *engagement* the individual feels to the organisation, their *alignment* with its goals, and the degree to which they feel autonomously motivated to achieve them.

> *"The first requirement for high performance is autonomy. Companies that offer autonomy, sometimes in radical doses, out-perform competitors"*
>
> [D. Pink 'Drive' 2009]

People who feel ownership will take responsibility and act independently for the good of the firm. rather than waiting to be directed. *Autonomy* contributes to agility, efficiency and performance through greater discretionary effort (Cummings 1977). Researchers at Cornell University studied 320 businesses, half of which were characterised by worker autonomy with the other half relying on top down direction. The businesses that demonstrated autonomy grew at four times the rate of the control-orientated firms and experienced one third the turnover of staff.

Purpose, activated through an emotional ownership, also provides a deep source of *engagement.*

Organisations in which employees feel purpose-ownership demonstrate strong engagement, a sense of duty to the success of the business, and a desire to work enthusiastically towards that success. and can have a significant impact on employee performance (Anitha 2014). This has a direct commercial effect. Research by Alex Edmans, Professor of Finance, London Business School found that the companies with the highest employee satisfaction out-performed the market by 2-3% per year over a 26-year study period. In other studies, individual business units with above average employee engagement were shown to generate 10-30% higher profitability (Harter 2002).

> *"Business units above the median on employee engagement had a 70% higher success rate than those below the median on employee engagement."*
>
> [Harter]

Feelings of ownership of a shared and common purpose create alignment of both energy and fit for individuals and alignment. This has been demonstrated to positively influence job satisfaction and organisational commitment (Kristof-Brown 2005), citizenship behaviours and reduced propensity to quit (Cable 2002). Alignment is also important in driving operational performance, with research showing that top performing businesses are 20 times more likely to have every manager's goals aligned to the company strategy (Berggren 2006). Research also indicates that where this company-employees alignment is at the level of values and identity (i.e. purpose), then significant benefits can result (Walters 2013).

Trust: the source of agility in culture

Whilst ownership is a critical cultural marker for purpose-led performance, the Model suggests that its impact is limited in the absence of trust (e.g. Warwick & MacKenzie 2016). Without trust, employee scepticism and the perceived need to protect identity and status provides little opportunity for purpose to gain traction. High-trust cultures have been shown to be 50% more productive, with staff reporting 74% less stress, 76% more engagement and 56% more job satisfaction (Zak 2017).

Trust: Photo by Liane Metzler on Unsplash

> *"Trust is mandatory for optimisation of a system. Without trust, each component will protect its own interests to the detriment of the entire system".*
>
> [Edwards-Deming]

Where purpose is seen to be congruently and consistently applied, it bolsters and sustains trust, creating a positive loop that transforms organisational culture. A lack of trust in peers contributes to job myopia or an unwillingness to engage in activities outside those that are formally defined and rewarded within the employee's job (Mayer 2014). This will be to the detriment of the employee's ability to add value over and above their remunerated role.

> *"An employee with a high level of trust in his [sic] manager will consistently outperform an employee with low trust."*
>
> [Locke]

High-trust cultures tend to be ***learning, open****, and* ***compassionate*** rather than inward looking, fearful and controlling.

> *"A learning-orientated culture promotes an organisational culture that is receptive to new ideas and innovation. Simply put, innovative firms do better."*
>
> [Deshpande, Farley, Wester]

Learning

There is strong evidence that *learning* is the source of strong and enduring personal motivation for the individual which, in turn improves organisational performance. Research into over 200 companies has demonstrated a clear correlation between a focus on learning in organisations and financial performance (Marsick 1997). The same research demonstrated an increased perception of value amongst customers in those organisations with a strong learning culture. In his 2009 book 'Drive', Dan Pink demonstrates a clear correlation between motivation and performance of individuals and their opportunity to learn at work ('achieve mastery', in his words) and demonstrates how this extends to organisational performance.

Learning is most dramatically affected by the level of trust that is perceived by employees within the organisation. Change can only succeed in a permissive environment that allows individuals to attempt new skills and habits and even fail repeatedly (Schein 1993). This both improves the psychological mind-set and strengthens the alliance between employee and the organisation, driving innovation, the level of organisational commitment and the esprit de corps (Marsick 2003). Purpose provides a motivation and context for learning, but it is the presence of trust that allows for learning to flourish in the absence of fear.

Open mindedness

In a volatile and complex world, the pace of change is fast and requires a flexibility of approach.

A key determinant of an organisation's ability to be flexible and to innovate in order to respond to this environment is a culture of *open mindedness*. The importance of organisational innovation has been demonstrated in several studies examining the impact of organisational innovations on business performance, productivity, lead times, creativity, quality, originality and flexibility (Siskin1992).

Management culture has a key role to play in creating and sustaining this. Lack of trust is one of the most common barriers to knowledge sharing (Hernandez–Mogollan 2010). Where the organisation has a clear and engaging purpose, and where this purpose is seen to be consistently held within a culture of trust, openness to new ideas and opinions can flourish.

Compassion

Purpose in the presence of trust also plays a part in fostering cultures of compassion – the act of noticing other people's pain and acting to help ease or alleviate it, going beyond empathy to entail action (Dutton 2014). It is inevitable that psychological pain occurs within all organisations, either as the consequence of a life event or as a result of work culture. It has serious emotional costs for employees and financial costs for organisations (Frost 2003). Grief amongst staff has been estimated to result in added costs and lost revenue amounting to $75bn per year for US employers (Zaslow 2002).

> *"Compassion increases interpersonal trust, improves mental health, motivation and strengthens the cooperation capability of the organisation".*
>
> [Frederickson]

Compassion shown by work colleagues mitigates these impacts, strengthening emotional connections and boosting peoples' ability to function as productive employees (Worline 2002). The experience of compassion at work has been found to have sustained psychological and emotional benefits (Meyer 1991) leading to strengthened pride in, commitment to and care for the organisation (Dutton 2014).

Yet, in many organisations there remains a cultural tendency to see compassion as weakness which can damage an individual's status and prospects. This forces people to operate in a state of 'duality', adopting one set of values at work and another home, which is inherently stressful and contributes to the mental health and performance challenges organisations face. Changing this may require managers to adopt new relational skills to make compassion and valuing the whole person the new normal. A clear and shared purpose is key to this - where a shared organisational purpose is adopted within a culture of trust, compassionate behaviours are more likely to emerge.

Context: the source of agility in management

We live and work in a world of increasing complexity and speed. Studies have shown the psychological and performance difficulties managers face in these high velocity markets (Baum 2003).

Context-led rather than content-led management has been shown to be better adapted to fast-moving and ambiguous environments. Context-led management asks 'why' rather than 'how' and recognises the strategic context behind the decision rather than focussing purely on the narrow solution to the immediate problem. Context-led management demonstrates faster decision-making processes and allows for greater clarity and ability to communicate decisions to others.

> *"High performance people do better if they understand the context. The best managers set the appropriate context, rather than trying to control their people"*
>
> [Hastings, CEO, Netflix]

Referencing to purpose creates this clear and unambiguous context whilst allowing operational management the freedom to adapt to circumstances. When it is fully integrated into strategy, purpose becomes the context for daily decision-making. A 2010 study by IMD business school showed a 17% improvement in financial performance in purpose-led business. But this was only where 'the company integrated purpose with the broader corporate strategy'.

Purpose as context creates **velocity** and ***clarity*** – but also the ability to ***adapt*** in the increasingly complex and dynamic business environment organisations face.

Velocity

> *"Velocity is a measure of speed with direction. It's not simply a matter of moving quickly but in the right direction"*

High-speed decision-making has been found to be a strong predictor of future business performance (Baum 2003). In studies, firms demonstrating fast decision-making performed better in terms of sales and

profitability (Bourgeois 1998). There is a particularly clear association between strategic decision-making speed and subsequent commercial performance in dynamic and high-velocity environments (Judge 1991).

In the dynamic and high-velocity environments business face today *velocity* of decision-making is increasingly important, and this process is aided by a clear shared purpose, acting to drive contextual clarity for management.

Clarity

> *"Strategic consensus has a clear positive effect on performance and has a positive impact on three key performance dimensions: adaptiveness, effectiveness and efficiency".*
>
> [Homburg et al.]

Clarity: Photo by Paul Skorupskas on Unsplash

A shared *clarity* of understanding of the purpose of the organisation along with its related strategies and goals is the basis of a clear context for operating. With clarity about what the organisation is trying to achieve, and how, daily decisions are aligned towards the shared goal and can be made with minimal friction. Repeated studies have shown that clarity of goals results in a marked impact on performance of individual managers and the business units they run because it leads to strategic consensus (Kellermanns 2011).

Clarity has also been shown to be important in maximising performance of individuals from different functional and educational backgrounds (Michie 2006). If managers of different functional units do not agree, there can be significant negative implications for the performance of the business unit (Homburg 1999). Clarity also plays a critical role in job satisfaction, organisational commitment, propensity to stay in the business (Lyons 1971) and service quality (Mukherjee 2006). Ambiguous roles and tasks create greater anxiety and tension and reduce performance (Burns 1961).

Three factors have been shown to reduce clarity: organisational complexity, organisational change and management communication (Kahn 1964). Given that organisational complexity and change are increasingly unavoidable, the vital importance of clarity about the purpose behind a task is becoming more critical. This puts huge onus on properly communicating and embedding purpose.

Adaptability

In an increasingly ambiguous business environment, the ability of an organisation to pre-empt and adjust easily to change is critical. An organisation that is highly *adaptable* will be able to pivot to changing market or competitive conditions and embrace opportunities. A clear purpose that creates contextual clarity for management and an environment of trust engenders this adaptability.

Adaptability is rarely possible in traditional, hierarchical organisations based on control and process. These 'mechanistic' firms have been shown to perform poorly compared to organic firms (informal, adaptable, loosely controlled) in dynamic business environments (Slevin 1995). These more flexibly structured organisations allow management to adapt quickly to circumstances while holding to an agreed framework that provides the context for decisions. Purpose provides the clear framework, and at the same time, the motivation for achieving it. Adaptability is a key management skill, one that is greatly supported by clear contextual management based on a clearly articulated central organisational purpose.

Summary

There is clear evidence that purpose can lead to enhanced business performance and therefore may be a key part of the answer to the current 'crisis' in business.

However, research demonstrates that purpose-led organisations achieve strong performance outcomes not by merely stating a purpose but by activating it within the heart of their organisational culture and operations. Our research develops a new Model to demonstrate how this mechanism works; specifically, how purpose influences performance behaviours in organisations through cultural 'activation'.

The Contexis Purpose Model proposes that it is the presence of specific cultural characteristics that connect people in the organisation to its purpose in a humanly meaningful way and thereby 'activate' purpose to change behaviours. It is these behaviours that lead to enhanced business performance. And the cultural characteristics that activate this process are recognisably aspects of humanistic management, synthesising trust (empathy and dignity), emotional ownership (responsibility) and contextual clarity (consistency, authenticity and integrity of application).

The Model suggests that, without these attributes, there is a gap between purpose and the experience of employees and customers in large organisations. This gap prevents purpose from having a full positive impact and from realising the human and consequently the commercial potential of the organisation.

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About the author

John Rosling is CEO of Contexis. He believes passionately in the power of clear purpose and entrepreneurial thinking to unlock the potential and performance of people and organisations. Over a 30-year career, John has worked with business leaders in big organisations to clarify and implement strategy and transform the way their organisations think.

John's main interest in recent years has been to pursue the 'holy grail' of measuring the commercial impact of purpose and showing exactly how it drives performance in real businesses, in real time. This includes working closely with leading academics at Cambridge and Plymouth Universities to deliver this ambitious goal, the Contexis Index®, through a social enterprise company.

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Date	Event	More info
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15 February, 1.15-4.30 pm, London SE11	**AMED Writers' Group**, *Daemons and dialogues in our writing*, with Louise Austin	
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Early May 2019	**Publication of the Spring 2019 edition of e-O&P:** *OD Matters – Celebrating ODiN at 20*, Guest editor: Chris Rodgers	
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The Humanistic Management Network (HMN) is an international group of practitioners and academics who share a concern that organisations exist to benefit society. Humanistic management is based on three principles; 1) respect for the dignity of each person, 2) ethical organizational decisions and processes and 3) on-going dialogue with multiple stakeholders. Humanistic management (HM) can be a driver for sustained business success and can reduce the cost of conflict, high levels ofContents stress-related absence, and the costs of raising capital. But HM principles are not shared by everyone and are increasingly under threat. As the newly-established Humanistic Management Network UK Chapter, we are very open to your suggestions and ideas about how we can develop and grow.

Contact - Christina Schwabenland: christina.schwabenland@beds.ac.uk

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