

“Do I dare/Disturb the universe?” Learning the game of governance in  
an Australian Mental Health Non-Governmental Organization (NGO)

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## **Abstract**

This thesis explores my participation as a new board director (trustee) in the everyday work of an NGO involved in mental health research in Australia. I have employed collaborative narrative auto-ethnography, which has allowed me to pay attention to the granularity of my experience. This includes joining the board, raising funds from donors, hiring and firing, and doing strategy to develop some reflections on the constraints and possibilities in the role and responsibilities of governing. In doing so I have come to emphasize the importance of ethics and recognition, particularly the recognition of beneficiaries which the NGO is set up to serve, as generalisable insights on governance.

Having influence, and being accepted, have required me to learn to play the game of organisational life. This has involved my becoming more fluent with power, politics and recognition. I have been caught in the paradox of recognising and being recognised. To illuminate these processes better, I have drawn in particular on Axel Honneth to understand recognition, and on Bourdieu to understand the power involved in reciprocity of the gift exchange which links his work with the Chinese concepts of face. Drawing on Hannah Arendt and Foucault has helped me better understand power, politics and ethics, particularly in relation to the mentally unwell. The experience of becoming a new trustee has called out particular resonance for me as a settled immigrant to Australia, but it is also an experience which is generalisable for any person trying to join a new group.

I have noticed certain organising themes of being together as a group of trustees in this particular organisation. The organization privileges conformity, convergence and positivity because of the way it is governed and managed. Conflict appears predominantly as a disturbance: people feel misrecognized, subordinated or misrepresented as ineffectual. The foundation board considers its principal role be that of raising funds, approving the budgets, agreeing with the vision and mission while keeping everything steady. This leads me to explore and evaluate other, more developmental, governance models which may be more fitting with the organization's moral mission. My research suggests a pattern which I am experiencing in the mental health sector particularly: high emotions and conflict

displayed in public appear very much as psychological disturbance or as maladaptation of the individual.

My research focus is on the dissonance between the mission of the NGO, which is to improve the quality of life for the mentally unwell, and the way we treat dissenting voices in the organisation. If we cannot manage disturbance within the organisation, I am prompted to wonder whether we can do full justice to the stakeholders we are supposed to serve. These are the very people who feel misrecognized or unrecognized and who are deemed mentally unwell precisely because they have refused to be 'managed' to conform and who sometimes act out. This has led me to think about Arendt's notion of action which can only happen in the public realm by speaking out and by taking risks on the board so as to become visible to others, and to encourage others to do the same. I have tried to open conversations about what we are doing and why we are doing it, what we value as important, to try and introduce difference. Although my thesis focuses on the governance and management of an NGO undertaking mental health research, my contributions to practice and theory are resonant for the way in which any organization takes up the issues of politics and power.

**Key words:** governance, recognition, face, capital, reciprocity, *habitus*, instrumentalism, stewardship, stakeholder governance, politics, power.

**Key authors:** H. Arendt, P. Bourdieu, J. Dewey, N. Elias, M. Foucault, H.G. Gadamer, I. Goffman, A. Honneth, M. Mauss, GH Mead, C. Mowles. R.D. Stacey.

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In closing, and on a lighter note: for those who are interested, Mao's last dancer and Mowles' last student both live down under. ☺

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## Introduction

I wish to begin by addressing my sense both of betrayal and of gratitude to the actors I have involved in enabling me to carry out this research. I have rendered anonymous all actors and names of organizations. Some characters I write about are no longer involved in the organization. Nevertheless, I ask for forgiveness for my disclosures about them, a question I return to in the ethics section of the synopsis at the end of this thesis. I draw attention to these matters not because of the rights and wrongs of concrete events, but that I will continue to think about the implications for me and for others, and so that other researchers or those in my position might find in them some resonance with their own work. One insight which I have gained from carrying out this research is that we cannot know the full implications of our actions, so it is important to continue thinking about what has been going on.

I compare my task of researcher to that of translator. In describing the process of translating in *On Translation: Thinking in action*, Ricoeur (2006, p.8), the French philosopher identifies two conflicting tasks: that of bringing the author to the reader and that of bringing the reader to the author. He describes an inevitable sense both of faithfulness and of betrayal that lies in the ambivalence of the translator who serves two masters. I share that ambivalence: my faithfulness to research and my sense of betrayal towards my organization. In his pursuit of a perfect translation, Ricoeur describes this very ideal that has nurtured both the desire to translate and the occasional happiness in the work of translating which can also bring about a sense of sorrow (Ricoeur, 2006, p.23). This describes well how I am feeling as I reach the end of this research journey.

### **A current example of my research focus**

Just recently in a mental health research not-for-profit organization where I am a board member, I have found myself supporting a young researcher who has become entangled in a grievance/ disciplinary procedure. I realise that I have stepped out of my role as director/ trustee: I should become involved only if executive management makes a formal request of me to do so. It was the wish of the researcher to manage the procedure on her own: she trusted that the matter would be resolved without my interference. So I limited my involvement to making myself available to her when she needed me. I stood by to reassure her she was not alone. I have come across her

in a committee meeting I helped set up; she is very able, bright and good at her job. In fact, she is the very employee an organisation such as the one I am involved with should wish to keep and promote. She was, in fact, promoted recently; yet she is being edged towards the door after an incident which her superior was shown to be incapable of managing. I have seen this very thing happen to other employees, particularly women, and particularly when they are deemed to be acting in ways which are frowned upon in this particular organisation. They are described as outspoken, or irrational or emotional: they become the problem to which they are trying to draw attention.

I find myself, therefore, ethically challenged. I do not wish to stray too far from my formal role as director; yet I cannot stand by and do nothing. I have seen this pattern emerge before, and have even been caught up in a disciplining of my own behaviour as a new member of the Board. I see the young woman caught up in a game which is publicly rational and calm but which is driven, below the surface, by unspoken assumptions about correct behaviour and about processes which keep the status quo intact. I recognise this precisely because I am Chinese: all my life I have been playing these unspoken power games. It is a theme to which I return in detail particularly in Project 3 of this thesis. In theory I am supposed to be working in an organisation which values natural scientific thinking and calm rationality; in practice we are all engaging in the politics of face and power struggles just as I have been for my entire life, although I was not fully aware of it until I began my doctoral studies.

This anecdote illustrates well the themes around which my thesis turns. They are these: the ethics and politics of trying to be a good director (trustee) of a not-for-profit organisation; fitting in while bringing difference; helping the organisation cohere while offering critique; seeing the job done while prompting my colleagues to think more broadly than just agree to the budget in our board meetings. The thesis is partly about making visible what is usually invisible. I have wanted us to discuss openly our purpose in doing what we do. These topics matter to me because, as an immigrant to Australia and as a mental health survivor myself, it has not been enough to assimilate; nor do I think that the job of an NGO is only to run the business but not walk the talk. I am part of an NGO committed to alleviating mental distress. We should, therefore, be much more skilful at dealing with the difference and distress that being together, agreeing and disagreeing can sometimes bring; we

should not label deviant those employees, particularly women, who challenge the norm. The timing of this research has been very helpful to me, because at the same time as joining X Foundation as a new director, I was also joining a research community in which this thesis has been written. It was an opportunity to notice how we all participate in creating group processes which include and exclude. This thesis is about recognising and being recognised, about the pain and distress that this process can sometimes cause to all involved in it. I have become more skilful at recognising what has been going on for me; I am, for this reason, in a better position to support my colleagues on the Board. I think some of these reflections will be very useful for other boards of directors where similar processes are taking place in both similar and different ways. All boards must have a way of functioning which enables them to do their job; if they don't open themselves up to novelty and to difference, they will stagnate.

### **Brief introduction to governance of NGOs in Australia and the role of trustees**

Australia is probably no different from many other developed nations in having governance structures for NGOs (non-governmental organisations) sometimes referred to as NFPs (not for profit organisations), where a board of independent people meet to oversee the long term development and interests of the NGO. These are voluntary positions usually filled by the 'great and the good', professionals who are usually later on in their careers and beyond family commitments, or even retirees wishing to fill their time usefully. In Australia NGOs are regulated by The Australian Charities and Not for Profit Commission, which allows new charities to be registered as such, offers advice on good governance, and has channels for raising concerns about the activities or conduct of charities. The kind of advice it offers trustees, or directors as we call them in Australia, which I refer to in Project 4, is of a very orthodox and generalised kind and doesn't deal with the implications of the kind of narrative which I began this Introduction, for example.

Australia is a country based on immigration, and as a gesture of recognition financially successful immigrants to Australia, whether first or second generation, will often make donations to NGOs as a way of publicly contributing to their 'host' community. This is certainly true of the Chinese community. There are no records kept of how diverse NGO boards are, but in general most Chinese do not join boards

of governance. At the time of joining, I was the only SE Asian, more the only non-Anglo-Saxon on my board. This has given me an opportunity to pay attention to the difference I bring as a Chinese woman.

I have been involved in mental health NGOs in Australia over the span of 20 years, and have found myself critical of the way they were managed and governed. So rather than just being critical of others I became a trustee / director myself in order to better understand the difficulties and dilemmas involved in trying to govern well.

For orientation, below is a short overview of the DMan research method before I present my research theme and the structure of my thesis.

### Outline of the DMan research approach

The Doctor of Management (DMan) programme at the University of Hertfordshire is a practice-based research degree where students develop their theses drawing on interdisciplinary sources and in a collaborative research community. It is a professional doctorate in management, where the basis for the research endeavour is investigating one's own practice in discussion with other students doing the same thing, and with the input from supervisors. It is informed by the theoretical perspective termed complex responsive processes of relating, which takes an interest in emergence drawing on insights from the complexity sciences and explains it in social terms. Emergence is taken to mean the patterning process that arises as a result of the interweaving of the intentions of actors in their local interactions (Stacey, 2012, p. 21). G.H. Mead, one of the core theorists informing this perspective, 'directed his intellectual efforts towards developing a theory of sociality that encompassed dynamic process, emergence and evolutionary change.' (Simpson, 2009, p.1334). This approach has the quality of an open-ended inquiry into the researcher's particular experiences as they emerge and evolve through a series of projects. In Professor Mowles' view, the paradoxical nature of organisational life has the quality of stable instability or predictable unpredictability; it is, therefore, more helpful to think of society as being in a constant state of flux and change (Mowles, 2018). Being a candidate for the DMan is certainly no exception to this view, with my own sense of what I thought I was researching and the progress I was making with my thesis in constant flux and change. In a way which is consonant with this approach, my research theme has been problem-driven.

The literature I had drawn on in trying to help me better understand my practice had not been planned in detail from the outset. The emergent nature of the thesis which led me from one theorist to another has been an exciting process. Often it is the connection between the personal circumstances of these thinkers and their research interest which I have found inspirational in my own reflexive journey throughout this research. For example: finding out Mauss was a nephew of Durkheim was significant for me in my understanding of his work on sacrifices and obligations. It helped me to reflect on own upbringing about obligations and on my sense of filial duties. During my exploration of face and reciprocity, I found interesting Goffman's understanding of face-work coming as it does from a western perspective. I discovered his personal experience of living with a spouse who suffered from mental illness and of her subsequent suicide. Although it does not feature in this thesis, my reading about Goffman's love of gambling took me to a deeper level of resonance. It helped me to think about my own parent's love of gambling as their way of managing shame. The emergent nature of my research has taken another turn. I have been led to Yates (2019) who argued gambling gives an illusory promise of winning in the face of uncertainty and risk. This paper provided me with further insight into the emotional suffering of the mental ill.

So, this has meant that there is no comprehensive literature review at the beginning of the thesis, but I have chosen literature from project to project which helped me to understand the particular question I was dealing with at the time. Though I have chosen from different traditions of thinking, they do have family resemblances: the scholars are interested in stability and change, paradox and the relations between self and others, just as I am.

**My research theme** has also emerged as the thesis has developed, and I now phrase it as: Playing the game of NGO board governance in Australia: linking politics, ethics and recognition to widen our circle of concern.

### **Structure of my thesis**

In exploring the themes which emerged in an iterative process of paying attention to my practice, discussing it in a collaborative research community, writing, reading, reflecting then paying attention at work again, the thesis is set out as follows:

Project 1 is an experiential autobiography. I pay attention to how I have become the individual I am, and how I have been socialised and shaped by family, work and relationships. It is my first opportunity to reflect on my habitual pattern of joining various groups and to begin to surface my assumptions about the world and how I have learnt them. It is the beginning of my attempt to reflect on my practice and to become reflexive about it. Projects 2 – 4 turn away from the past and focus on the present when I undertook my research, and start with a series of reflective narratives which I treat as my 'empirical data' in order to begin investigating my own practice. I then bring in literature to try to make sense of what is going on for me and others, in the workplace and drawing provisional conclusions from project to project, identifying the themes which I notice as important to me and my research question. In this project I draw in particular on the work of the pragmatist GH Mead and sociologist Norbert Elias better to understand power and interdependence, and the importance of the group. One of my major reflections is how much I have neglected the group to date.

In more detail:

Project 2 – documents my first encounters in X Foundation where I found myself negotiating power, recognition and ethics with the CEO of the organisation who was trying to work out who I am and what I bring to the board. In my turn, it was an opportunity to assess what I thought he needed from me.

My principle resources for understanding the interaction is the work of Axel Honneth who writes extensively about recognition, drawing on both Hegel and Mead. The importance of conflict also becomes a theme for me to reflect upon and the initial negotiation of entry into a new organisation. At the same time, as I was negotiating my entry into the DMan research community, I was able to link the two experiences.

Project 3 turned into an inquiry into reciprocity and face, and where I investigated my own cultural background in order to think deeply about the culture of the organisation I was joining. I was able to think about the similarities and differences between the Chinese attitude to gift-giving and how I understood colleagues in X Foundation in the way they dealt with donors. This gave me an opportunity to link anthropological work on gift-giving developed by Marcel Mauss, with Bourdieu's

reflections on the same. I link Chinese concepts of face and reciprocity drawing in particular on Goffman, and I bring in Bourdieu again to think about social capital and status in the group. All of these scholars help me think about the negotiation of power relationships from a cultural perspective, and I conclude from my own experience, and by surprising myself about myself, that culture very powerfully shapes us, but doesn't determine us.

Where previous projects often turned more on dyads between me and one other person, or on small groups of people, in Project 4 I paid attention to the functioning of the board and what I thought was going on for us as a group. I related this to the literature on governance to work out what I thought was needed and lacking in an NGO focusing on mental health in terms of our relationships within the board, and between the board and other stakeholders. In addition, I think about the role of gossip in public/shadow side of organisational life as a way of maintaining/disrupting power relationships drawing on Norbert Elias and social anthropologist James C Scott. I bring in Foucault to reflect on the society's management of mental illness and Hannah Arendt to reflect politically on the dominant way of managing the organisation I help govern. This leads me to the theme of the board's ethical responsibilities.

These projects have been completed over a rigorous iterative process with my learning set and supervisors. Project 4 in particular went through nine or more iterations and took almost a year to complete. I present my four research projects as they were originally written. I have left them untouched except in minor ways to display the emergent character of this research and to demonstrate the development in my thinking and practice.

The synopsis marks a summary of the key themes and reflections in each project, interwoven with a further reflexive turn. I present my three key arguments about the centrality of power, politics and recognition in governance, the importance of relationships on the board, and the link between governance and ethics. I reflect on my chosen method of research and its limitations. The final parts of the thesis describe my contributions to knowledge and practice and include suggestions for further research.

In brief my key contributions are to have given a granular account of the day to day dilemmas and conflicts of being a board member: trying to do a good job as a board member, but also to pay attention to why we were doing what we were doing, and what gets covered over in the process of being 'effective and efficient'. I write of the importance drawing attention to how we are working together as a way of valuing the quality of relationships for the good of the work and for the sake of the beneficiaries we are set up to serve. An NGO needs to cohere and be well run, but it also needs to work with difference, sometimes expressed as disturbance. In doing so I hope I can encourage other board members to take their experience of working together seriously and the ethical implications of trying to do good by their stakeholders and target beneficiaries, as they fulfil their governance duties in balancing the budget and agreeing the strategy.

## Project One – an experiential autobiography

### My beginning

I was born in Hong Kong to a Eurasian father and Chinese mother. My parents moved to Hong Kong from Shanghai, their birthplace, with my brother who was eight at the time to live with my paternal grandmother, the matriarch. A year after they settled in Hong Kong, I was born.

I had a tumultuous introduction to the world. My birth, which was entwined with the breakup of a marriage, meant my mother decided that it would be best if I were placed in an institution. It was not until I was a grown woman that I began to understand the historical context which influenced my mother to be the woman she was and what my father's unfaithfulness had meant to her. My mother is a proud woman: the concept of face and backbone, strength of character, was a central theme in her upbringing and was also instilled in my brothers and me. Her decision, therefore, to leave the marriage and her children would have been a strong force motivated by saving face in the context of her humiliation and by proving her resilience.

My mother grew up in the 1940s when the cultural norm valued boys above girls. Girls had no earning power; they married out and their future was secured by the family they married into. Sons were expected to fulfil their filial duties and carry on the family name. My mother resisted her own fate by leaving her husband to make a life for herself, but her decision to place me in an institution was a capitulation to the very belief that girls were unloved.

My father was the youngest of five children. His father was an Iraqi Jew. His mother, my grandmother, was a mix of German and Chinese, was adopted by a Chinese family; she received no education. Despite marrying a man thirty years her senior who spoke only English and Hebrew, my grandmother did not manage to learn any English throughout her marriage of twenty years other than the odd phrase - 'son of a gun' and 'gone with the wind' - from watching foreign films.

After I was brought home from the institution, I lived with my father, my brother and my grandmother. One of my earliest memories of a family dinner, a circle of

eight seats, was of holding my chopsticks with my left hand when my place at the dinner table was on the right side of my father. He asked me to correct myself and to use my right hand to avoid clashing with his chopsticks. Subsequently I was forced to write with my right hand. Growing up, I was accustomed to a room filled with strangers, particularly when I visited my mother and stepfather. I watched on and listened in a detached way. I have somehow internalized its meaning as: 'Be considerate, learn to adapt and don't outstay your welcome'. But I would also wish to challenge and to question why.

### **Moving to Australia**

When I was about 12, I left Hong Kong with my grandmother to join my father and stepmother in Australia. In Hong Kong, my grandmother and I rarely interacted, but after we arrived in Australia she became dependent on me as her English-speaking guide. It was a novel feeling to be needed as she eagerly awaited my return from school. It became my first experience of a stable, mutually nourishing relationship.

Each week we had two outings: Thursday evening shopping and Sunday church. The good times lasted just over a year and then my stepmother's adult children, whom I met for the first time, arrived in Australia to live with us. The power dynamics changed: it was two, my grandmother and I, against four, stepmother and her two boys and one girl. The battle between two women went on for about another year. My grandmother, once tall with an authoritative presence, became frail; she lost the position of matriarch and returned to Hong Kong. Once again, I was left in a house filled with strangers.

Having started to read Elias, I can see that part of the discomfort I felt came from the change in power dynamics within my family group. Stacey & Mowles (2016) draw on Elias to argue that power is a structural characteristic of all human relationships: we depend on each other, and so enable and constrain each other. It is only now that I understand my grandmother lost her power position not because she lost her battle with my stepmother, as such, but because her power position was no longer recognised by the more powerful in the group. According to Elias, the power of the powerful depends upon their recognition by others. My stepmother's children recognized their own mother as the matriarch.

## Exchange year in Japan

Halfway through my final year of high school, I was accepted to go on exchange to Japan. A few months after arriving in Nagasaki, I became ill and needed to be transferred to Tokyo for treatment. Whilst I was recuperating and resettling into my new homestay, I read *The Clan of the Cave Bear* (Auel, 1980).

The story depicts a spirited little girl, Ayla, who was found by Iza, the medicine woman of a Neanderthal clan, wandering naked and alone, after a natural disaster. The novel describes Ayla's struggles as she learns to communicate, and to behave in the manner expected of her. She is considered the 'other' in part because she is Cro-Magnon. What so captivated me at the time as I recovered and reflected on my family from afar was her constant testing of boundaries. Her thought processes lead her to break important clan customs, as she struggles to conform to the rigid expectations placed on clan women.

I wondered initially about the relevance of this book and why, of all my experiences in Japan, I chose to write about it. I realized it was my thoughts on survival, consciousness and the process of social relations that brought it to mind. Similar to Ayla's, my initial communication with my host family was primitive, without language. Neanderthals possessed only limited vocal apparatus and rarely spoke other than with the odd guttural sound. They didn't smile or shed tears, but they had a highly developed sign language. In one particular scene, Ayla is being shown how to assume, as clan women do, a submissive posture by keeping her head down if a male clan member approaches. It took my thoughts to the scenario of the two dogs Mead (1934) used to explain the social constitution of meaning. Where when one dog makes the gesture of a growl, it could prompt a fight, a flight or a submissive response in another:

[Meaning] is not essentially or primarily a psychical content (a content of mind and consciousness), for it need not be conscious at all. The structure of meaning can be found in a threefold relationship, from gesture to adjustive response and to the resultant of the given social act. Response on the part of the second organism to the gesture of the first is the interpretation of gesture-and brings out the meaning-of the gesture, as indicating the resultant of the social act which it initiates, and in which both organisms are thus involved. (Mead, 1934, p. 80)

Stacey and Mowles (2016) explain Mead's understanding of gesture-response that meaning is not simply located in the gesture or the response but in the circular interaction between the two taken together in the living present. At the level of self-consciousness, such a gesture becomes a 'significant symbol', one that calls forth a similar response in the gesturer as in the one to whom it is directed. The development of more sophisticated patterns of vocal gesturing, the language form which Mead described as a gesture of significant symbol is, therefore, of major importance in the development of consciousness and of sophisticated forms of society. Meaning is mostly conveyed in language, but significant symbols can take other bodily forms. The novel made me reflect on the gesture and response of my family situation back in Australia, where I too was forced to accept a submissive position in the group.

This year in Japan marked a new beginning. I was housed by a couple who didn't have children of their own. In my mind, my host mother, took on the role, as in the novel, of the medicine woman of the Clan, Iza. Iza trains Ayla to be a highly respected medicine woman so she will have her own status and be valued by the Clan. Similarly, my host mother taught me to speak Japanese, which has been instrumental in securing my career and independence.

### Management trainee

The lack of control I had in all my circumstances growing up has influenced the way I feel about power. I feel safe in relationships where the other needs me more than I need them. Elias (1991) sheds light on my desire to please and to take pleasure in pleasing others. This bears on power dynamics. According to his argument, power is not a quality that one possesses: it reflects an interdependent relationship between all humans. The basis of power is need. When we need others more than they need us, they have power over us (Stacey & Mowles, 2016). I was unaware at the time that, early in my career, I replicated the relationship I had had with my grandmother with a chef named Walter (below), with whom I worked during my internship as a trainee. The only difference on this occasion was that the choice to leave was mine.

After completing my year in Japan as an exchange student, I returned to Australia at a time when the tourism market was booming and Japanese speakers were in high

demand. I acquired my first job in hospitality initially as a Japanese translator with an international 5-star hotel in Sydney. Not long after I began my employment there, I applied for the management trainee program; I was subsequently invited to join the management team as they prepared for the opening of a new hotel in Brisbane, an hour's flight from Sydney. It was two years of practical, experiential training in each department. The goal was to learn the entire hotel operation from many perspectives beginning with the rank and file and gradually moving towards managerial level.

The most memorable time was that spent in the pastry kitchen. Aside from the sweet memories, I had the opportunity of working with Walter, a brilliant head chef, whom everyone feared because of his arrogance and beast-like temperament. One day the Food and Beverage manager approached me. He asked that I cover for the Sous-chef, who had recently resigned or had been dismissed. Walter was anxious for assistance. I was excited to be hand-picked and at the same time nervous because of Walter's reputation.

To my surprise, two months became six: Walter and I worked well together. I paid careful attention to instructions and did all that he asked of me. I was the first to arrive each morning. By the time Walter arrived, most of the prep work was completed, and most mistakes rectified. Slowly I gained Walter's trust and approval, and I gained confidence in my own capabilities. As I became more experienced, I experimented: I became more creative in order to impress him. I took the initiative to supervise closely, to lead the new young trainees. I made sure their work was of adequate standard, all the while trying to make this small kitchen a warm and enjoyable environment for all.

Slowly Walter's demeanour changed. He became more relaxed but remained arrogant towards any outsiders who entered his kitchen. Walter asked if I would train to become his Sous-chef, his second-in-command. This was a significant moment for me; the news travelled quickly through the entire hotel. Although I felt pleased that Walter had chosen me, the happiness soon turned into feeling pressured by management for a quick response. I agonized over what would be a polite way to decline his offer and to tell him that I had other plans and dreams that I needed to follow. Until that point, I had had no desire to become a chef. My wish

was to make my way to a position of power in the whole operation, not just in the kitchen.

As I came towards the end of my traineeship, I learnt the many elements which can go wrong each day in a highly fluid situation. The smooth operation of service delivery was dependent on the many groups of people and skillsets coming together: this is the web of inter-dependencies very much as Elias described it. At the management level, particularly as a manager on duty, I had to identify and defuse situations both front and back of the house. To think under pressure was critical. Crises can range from emergencies in the middle of night, to evacuation because of fire, to an angry guest who needed to be soothed. Negotiating between personalities and having to change perspectives are the skills which I found to be the most useful features of my learning during this time. I was involved in politics, although I didn't realise it at the time.

In thinking about my experience in the hotel trade, leadership and management was influenced by James MacGregor Burns (1978) and his work on leadership, where he assumes that leaders should focus on the beliefs, values and motivations of those they lead, as though they can directly affect them. Below is an excerpt from a paper I wrote subsequently in my Masters degree (Leadership in Mental Health). I was still reminiscing over my experience as pastry sous-chef:

It was not until I tried to put pen to paper about the construct of leadership that I appreciated how broad and complex such a concept could be. Unlike baking a cake where I can deconstruct and decipher the exact science to a great dessert, good leadership is a combination of art and science, a complex configuration of variables consisting of attributes, attitudes and behaviours of individual leaders, combined with the dimensions of the construct: the relationship between desired outcomes and the leadership activities; leadership and follower relationships, leadership under particular contexts and finally the dynamic interaction of all those factors.

Even much later and at Masters level I still assumed that leadership was located primarily with leaders as individuals, rather than paying attention to my own experience of working in many groups. In many respects, the DMan programme shares similar qualities to the improvisational nature of group work in hotel operations. We are interdependent: at the same time, each of us has an individual

research task to accomplish. We have to manage the uncertainty of the comings and the goings of colleagues, the negotiating of power relationships between learning sets, faculty members and with the wider research community, not to mention those with my own self amongst selves. What is different from Burns' theory, is that the theories informing complex responsive processes of relating do not assume that so much power resides with leaders, or even that they can directly affect beliefs and values. Rather, leadership is a group activity where some people do have more power than others, but this isn't just to do with being designated leader. It was certainly true of me as Walter's sous-chef. I had status and power despite being quite junior because of my relationship with him.

### **Transfer to Hong Kong**

I had two interviews for two jobs. The first interview was for a managing position with the sister hotel of my previous job. The second was for a sales and marketing position of another equally upscale, French operated international hotel. In my first interview, I met the Front Office manager. She had my file before her and seemed very certain that I would accept the offer as she kept me waiting for quite some time. I felt like a school girl waiting to see a Chinese school principal.

My second interview was with the Sales and Marketing Director, Richard. It went well: I was offered a job as a Sales-Coordinator which I accepted immediately as I was eager to begin my new life in Hong Kong. As the newest employee, I was given the junior tasks. This meant all the administrative work, including the coordinating and corresponding with overseas organizers of incentive groups, an onerous task that doesn't always necessarily come to fruition. At the same time the senior executives handled the higher tasks of entertaining the corporate clients and tour operators. It was a productive learning experience for me. I had found my niche. I worked with clients to create spectacular events and once again I proved myself to be useful, independent and reliable. Within two years, I was promoted to the position of Assistant Director of Sales and Marketing. This created a lot of envy.

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<sup>1</sup> Mead's (1934) theory of the social self: that we are always emerging as selves in response to the gestures of other selves. We cannot realize ourselves until we see ourselves reflected back in the actions of others (Mowles, 2015, p.108).

One day Richard announced his resignation as he had accepted another job offer. I was shocked and frightened as, like Walter, he was a fine teacher who trusted in my capability and allowed me the freedom to be creative. Soon after his announcement, I accepted a job offer I had once declined, to be the Assistant Regional Director of Sales, overlooking three properties. It was not long before I missed my old job of being involved with the day to day operations.

### **3-star hotel**

It seems that opportunities find a way of arising just as I need them. I was approached by another hotel: a Chinese-owned 3-star hotel offered me the position of Director of Sales and Marketing. The General Manager of the hotel, Patrick, was straightforward and agreed to match my existing salary.

Soon enough I met my new team that consisted of women only. Other department heads were also predominantly women and it was obvious that Selina, my sales manager, was the leader: she had been there for the longest and conducted herself in an authoritative manner. My arrival was met with a marked disappointment by my team: I felt their resistance and unfriendliness. Subsequently I discovered that Selina had hoped to assume the role as Head of Department if a replacement were not found. The corridors were like a Sunday market filled with gossip. The communication flow in this hotel was primitive, mostly done by word of mouth. The members of the sales team were free to come and go as they pleased: they were not required to report on their work. Frustrated and dissatisfied with this system, I went to Patrick for some guidance. To my disappointment, he said that things run differently there from how they did in an international hotel.

I decided to take the initiative and toughen up. In my own mind, I thought the culture and work ethic had to be changed so that there was more order. I had my secretary notify every staff member, in writing, of a mandatory sales meeting to be held, in English, each Saturday morning (in HK Saturday is a half working day). Each person was expected to submit and discuss her weekly activities, detailing sales visits, phone calls and reasons for doing so. I had learnt this structure of working from Richard, my previous boss. It was something I recalled my colleagues and I looked forward to. I chose to have these meetings in English to increase their confidence as my aim was to target the American and Australian corporate market.

It was obvious from the piercing looks from my colleagues as I passed them, that I had become the most hated person. At our first sales meeting, I took the initiative to model what I expected of them, as a team on equal terms, rather than a hierarchy. In doing so, I shared with them the summary of the work I had completed and my intended agenda for the upcoming week. In a positive way, this caught them by surprise. After a month or two when everything began to settle and the sales team, except Selina, grew accustomed to all the changes, it felt as if they almost enjoyed having the structure to work with. They seem to relish the novelty of practising their English skills.

Selina was very much against everything that I had implemented. Our relationship remained stagnant, but one Saturday evening we reached a turning point. That evening I was supposed to meet with a major local travel agent to solicit all the agency's Japanese group business. It was always very taxing to entertain tour operators: drinking was always involved. I decided it would be good to ask Selina to accompany me as she was strong in her ability to consume alcohol and she was an excellent Karaoke singer. I must have caught her off guard as she paused in shock and hesitantly mumbled, "I guess the hotel's reputation is at stake as you are such a light weight." She was referring to my drinking. I thanked her for agreeing. It was the most awkward yet exhilarating moment of doing something unexpected and not knowing how the situation would turn out. We went together to meet the clients and I watched Selina with delight. She was in her element. It was at that moment I felt how painfully disappointing it must have been for her that Patrick had failed to promote her and that he had hired an outsider. When the night came to an end, we showed our guests out of the hotel. We stood alone and the awkwardness returned as we bade each other goodnight. I looked Selina in the eye and felt as though we were finally meeting for the first time.

To my surprise Patrick was not particularly impressed. We invited him to join our sales meeting but he did not once attend. I saw that in fact he did not ever ask for change: I believed that change was needed. I was critical the moment I walked in as I compared the primitive style of this 3-star operation to the sophistication and prestige of my previous 5-star hotel experiences. I was filled with fantasies that I was going to lift this place up. I thought I could bring about change without paying

much attention to the existing power dynamics. Reflecting now I can see how influenced I was by the individualistic leadership literature which assumes that leaders have a lot of power for radical change.

I realised, too, that my concern was not Patrick: it was Selina to whom I was paying attention. I don't fully understand why I felt the need to win her over; it may be that I was caught up in the past, influenced by my fear of strong women who determined my survival and my happiness. Patrick was rarely there and, even when present, he was ineffective. It could have been possible that I identified with Selina's blind loyalty towards Patrick. Was I curious to understand the insecurity and uncertainty she faced as a result of that relationship? In this instance, I felt that I was the intruder who took away her rights. I gradually came to see Patrick as weak in his character and in his leadership role. He lacked a duty of care towards his staff. He had made false promises to Selina.

Stacey and Mowles seem to shed light on my dilemma of being set up by Patrick to disappoint Selina, then to have to go on working with her:

*It is the everyday conversational activity, in both its public/vocal (social) and private/silent (individual mind) forms, that experience emerges as themes organising the experience of people being together while at the same time those themes are organising the ordinary, everyday conversation. (2016, p.470)*

They make the distinction between legitimate and shadow conversations. Legitimate conversational themes conform to official ideologies; conversational shadow themes often are those organising themes which take the form of gossip and rumour done by small groups of people. These communications shape and are shaped by power relations.

The actions I took at the time - implementing Saturday sales meeting; allowing casual attire day - were, in part, the result of my wish to be included in the conversations they were having amongst themselves. The strategies I implemented were in the end welcomed by my team, if not particularly by Patrick. But it is only now, as I reflect after so many years, that I see I might have contributed to the

hidden themes, invisible to me at the time, the gestures of power I was making in supporting or undermining the management regime.

This new insight requires a deeper exploration. From the experience of writing this, I realise there is a nexus between a somewhat quietly detached man (CEO) and an intensely strong-minded woman (Chairman) that I was noticing in my current work at X Foundation, a research organisation where I am Director (trustee). I would like to pay attention to these relationships in Project 2, and to examine them reflexively.

It was about a year later that my mother asked me to return home. By then, our department was in a relatively good position: we had secured a portion of the targeted Japanese wholesale market and had expanded the Australian and American portfolio of corporate clients. Although I felt pleased with my department, I lost the incentive to find out what to do next. I used my mother as an excuse and announced my resignation to my team. To my surprise, Selina was actually the most upset. I felt strangely nourished by that. It made me realise the importance of directly addressing difficult relationships in the workplace and the importance of recognition of power relationships.

In *Managing in Uncertainty*, Mowles (2015) discusses the functional importance of conflict in contrast to the orthodox ways of understanding the job of management, where conflict is to be contained or avoided. He asserts that politics are a part of organisational life, that dealing with it directly requires us, as managers, to be self-critical by taking into account our own prejudices and 'the importance of acknowledging and working with the emotional content of conflict on the grounds that, without so doing, it resurfaces in other ways and can make the work more intractable' (p.128). Similarly, German sociologist and philosopher George Simmel (Cosser, 1956) took an interest in micro-level analysis, which led to many insights into the dynamic of social life. 'Society is merely the name for a number of individuals, connected by interactions'. For Simmel, conflict was inherent in social life. Lewis Cosser, who developed Simmel's work, notes that Simmel argued that:

'Social conflict necessarily involves reciprocal action and is, hence, based on reciprocity rather than unilateral imposition....For example, conflict might lead to a strengthening of the position of one or more parties to the relationship, increasing their dignity and self-esteem through self-assertion. Thus, conflict might produce

new ties among the participants, strengthening their existing bonds or establish new ones. In this sense, conflict might be considered a creative, rather than a destructive force' (Coser, 1965, p.12).

In the case of Selina, I put on hold my own disappointment with her. Instead, I put myself in her shoes: I acknowledged the disappointment caused by my arrival. I was, therefore, able to find a creative way forward. I realise that it is not always possible to turn conflict to the good.

### Postnatal depression and psychology

I returned to Australia for a family matter without any intention of staying on, but by chance I ran into my husband-to-be. We had met when I was 17. Now, 10 years on, we married within the year; we had our first child, a boy, followed two years later by our daughter. About four months after she was born, I was diagnosed with postnatal depression. By the time my daughter turned two, I was frustrated by the predicament I was in. I was powerless, dependent upon medication in order to function each day. I decided to return to university to study psychology better to understand mental illness.

A number of family members had had depression. I was drawn to psychology dealing with abnormalities and dysfunctions of the brain. One essay I wrote was to review if anything of value had been learned from studies of the neural basis of schizophrenia about brain function in healthy individuals. At the time, attempts to locate one specific region that might be responsible for abnormal behaviours, had instead, identified a complex, distributed circuit that was active during hallucinations (Silberswig et al., 1995). Other literature indicated that inappropriate activation of reinforcement mechanisms would result in abnormal behaviours including hallucination and delusional thought (Carlson, 1995).

While it was exciting, the scientific understanding of faulty hardwiring in the brain was unhelpful in my personal search for understanding. For the time being, I accepted my predicament as a genetic predisposition, a biological issue. Over the next ten years, I attempted to wean myself off antidepressants.

Nevertheless, my curiosity seemed always to return to thinking about what causes the reinforcement mechanisms/ pathways to be activated inappropriately. Over the years, the experiment we were conducting with laboratory rats based on Skinner's theory of reinforcement (1938) has remained vividly with me. I was frightened of touching the rats and had to arrange for someone else to handle them. This research explored systematically the behaviour of individual organisms in a simplified form by measuring the rate of lever pressing by rats as a function of the environmental conditions to which they were exposed (Blackman, 1991).

This led me to consider the reinforcement of human behaviour and the meaning underlying this behaviour in a range of social and cultural processes. A theory that has resonated personally related to reinforcement of punishment. The theory of learned helplessness was conceptualized and developed by American Psychologist, Martin Seligman (1972). He conducted experimental research on classical conditioning by using three groups of dogs placed in harness, who, when a lever was pressed, would experience an electric shock. He discovered that, where the shock was inescapable, dogs would simply lie down passively and whine when they were being shocked.

If I had taken the attitude of my own issues as purely hereditary or inescapable in the case of learned helplessness, I would have accepted my circumstances in the way my father did. I would have lain down passively and lived out my depression to the very end. I found the biological explanation of what I was experiencing inadequate and unhelpful: I was determined instead to look for meaning in what I felt and this led to a number of decisions about my life which I document below, including training as a therapist.

Something I have read from Dewey (1925, p.50) resonates with me now, but I can see that this kind of longing drove me to find alternatives: 'The striving to make stability of meaning prevail over the instability of events is the main task of intelligent human effort'. The instability of events is a given in life: it is by making sense of our experience in the here and now that we can learn from our experience. This was one of the drivers for me to join the DMan programme because of its orientation towards making sense of uncertainty.

## Corporate life to psychotherapy

For the first ten years of my marriage, along with raising two children, I became very involved with our private capital concern that invests and facilitates how companies and investors come together. My husband's primary role as an investment banker leads him to meet people from all walks of life. Despite my hotel training of hosting events and the ability to appear hospitable, the intense social calendar, the events and charitable functions that came with the business, began to take their toll.

Not long after my father's passing, I remained as an in-house analyst for our company. To use the hotel metaphor, my husband fulfilled the front of house function while I managed backstage. With much initial protesting by my husband, I withdrew from most of the social events. Exactly ten years on from my psychology degree, I returned to postgraduate studies in psychotherapy, followed by a Masters degree in Brain and Mind Science (MBMSc).

On reflection, I see that the MBMSc was based as it is on cognitive theories of the brain, assuming that we are rational, autonomous individuals, an observer viewing human experience from a detached position. These were exactly the theories I had learned studying psychology. Since coming on the DMan, I recognize the dualism inherent in this self-view: viewing myself as a separate individual, immune to the social process which is somehow outside of me. To take Mead's ideas instead (1934): human consciousness arises in the social act, in communicative interaction, so that there cannot be one without the other. We become selves because there are other selves. It strikes me now that this is a radical alternative to the individualist theories about mind.

In my first year of studies in psychotherapy, I was interested to look at my family of origin from a multigenerational perspective. Murray Bowen (1988), a family systems theorist, describes how the multigenerational process is anchored in the emotional system and includes emotions, feelings, and subjectively determined attitudes, values, and beliefs transmitted from one generation to the next. He states that by identifying particular themes, patterns and roles/positions in triangles that have been passed down, one is able to gain more clarity in one's own reactivity towards family and other relationships. The goal is to become more objective in making self-directed choices, while remaining emotionally connected with others rather than

withdrawing or wanting others to change (Bowen, 1988). The idea of intergenerational transmission of values poses a fundamental challenge to the naïve ideas about leadership promoted in the hotel industry.

It was my hope to discover other ways of being with my mother without the sense of being separate. In a way similar to Bowen's theory, I find that I have always conceptualized my holding environments. This marks a spatial metaphor, implying that an individual's more disruptive feelings are somehow contained, which is influenced by psychoanalytical thinking. In particular, I have seen my family of origin as a system, an imagined whole where I find myself stepping out when the system becomes too pressurized. For example, I left the country. I then reflect and work on myself before I step back into the family, understood as a system.

Mowles (2008) suggests that when there is an assumption that individuals reflect upon their own actions in order to re-orient themselves towards the known standard of organisational values, this is close to a cybernetic approach. Cybernetics works on the principle of positive and negative feedback (Forrester, 1969). Feedback allows us to self-correct with the aim of bringing the system back into equilibrium, usually to a set of predetermined standards. It is this kind of thinking which informed the family therapy literature based in systems thinking, and which I accepted uncritically. Although family therapy looks at relationships it subsumes individuals to the needs of the family understood as a system.

I see now that I was always drawn to an individualistic view of self and took up these systemic ways of thinking in a way I took for granted. In becoming part of the DMan research community, I have been exposed to Mead and Elias' ideas which understand the self as social and comprising the actions of human bodies, rather than as parts of systems. The self finds itself not by locating the source of personal change in the individual alone, but through a social process of interaction with others. I feel less responsible and more compassionate towards myself.

### [A different way of listening](#)

By the second year of my studies as a therapist, I had to undertake an internship. I chose a non-profit organisation, NGO W, in order to work with a marginalised population, often homeless people, many of whom suffered from mental illness.

My first client at NGO W, Sam, came to me from other counsellors. She was labelled clinically with borderline personality disorder. Her habitual pattern of relating began with rage. Being with her was one of the most testing and yet most moving experiences of my life. There was nowhere to hide with Sam; I would have to be totally congruent in the way I was with her. *Congruence* is a term Carl Rogers (1951) (humanistic person-centred approach) used to describe one of the core conditions necessary in a therapeutic relationship. It means being present as a therapist, available and aware of the flow of the client's feelings and their joint experiencing (Wilkins, 2003). Sam would catch me out by shouting profanities if I didn't reveal what I had thought was inconsequential, but which seemed to be a barrier to our relationship. She introduced me to a new dimension of listening. It was like tuning the frequency of a radio. The endless static can be irritating and piercing to the ears. The longer I focused on looking for a radio station, the more difficult it became to tolerate the static. Once I gave up looking and began to sink into the static itself, I began to hear, albeit only in microseconds, what she was communicating.

It was establishing a therapeutic relationship with Sam, whom everyone feared and dreaded, that earned me my status at NGO W. My appointment diary was being filled as the staff and clients began to see me and took my work seriously as a counsellor. It was during my time there that I gained an intimate understanding of NGOs. I became interested in their management. By the end of my two years there, I was left with many questions with respect to ethics, values and duty of care, which I was keen to keep exploring.

During this time, I was reading R.D. Laing, a Scottish psychiatrist whose approach I found very helpful in my work at NGO W. Laing was an 'anti-psychiatrist', seen by others in his field as a pariah. I was drawn to his existential view of schizophrenia: it seemed compassionate, humanizing and de-pathologizing, in contrast to the inhumane psychiatric care some of my clients were receiving.

A schizophrenic who feels more exposed and more vulnerable to others may say that he is made of glass and that precisely is the way he experiences himself. What is existentially true is lived as 'really true'. (Laing, 1991, p.37)

I also drew on my own experience of having been considered to have inappropriate behaviours. I could be seen as destructive in one household and highly productive and creative in another. This led me to this conclusion: what is acceptable as a norm in one group could be deemed inappropriate or unacceptable in another social group. A schizophrenic becomes labelled mentally ill in one society but in other groups he or she might be called eccentric. 'Sanity or psychosis is tested by the degree of conjunction and disjunction between two persons where the one is sane by common consent'. In his critique of clinical psychiatry, Laing (1991, p.31) says that to observe a patient objectively is impossible without 'affixing predetermined meanings' to interpret particular behaviours. Interpretation is a function only of the relationship with the patient.

This resonates with me. I think back on my earlier scientific research on locating the brain dysfunction to interpret the 'abnormal' behaviours of schizophrenia. It might indeed arise from brain dysfunction but now I also see a schizophrenic as a human being sitting across from me whom I have come to know and with whom I have a therapeutic relationship. Through instinct, from my own experience and from reading, I learnt to take a critical distance from some of the theories I had learnt during the MBMSc. Now drawing on Mead (1934, p.138), I understand that reflective consciousness or reflexivity refers to a world as experienced by a self that is capable of being both a subject and an object to itself.

The individual becomes an object to himself only by taking the attitudes of other individuals toward himself within a social environment or context of experience and behaviour in which both and they are involved'.

Mead helps me understand what I have already been doing, being able to take myself as an object to myself. Observing my own processes has been the most valuable development in my learning and has proven to be most useful in my work as a therapist. At times my heightened sensitivity and my ability to process multiple perspectives at once can become overwhelming. I become reactive and emotional. It is often in these moments that I find myself suddenly playing out past experiences, which are often intense. This is the point where I return to reflecting. I explore my own role in the way that I'm thinking. I now realize that reflexive practice has been what I have been doing without my having a name for it.

## Community meetings at the DMan

As a further reflection on different cultures, and how they have different assumptions, joining the DMan programme was instructive. The residential weekend at the DMan begins each day with a community meeting comprising faculty and students. It runs for exactly ninety minutes with everyone sitting in a circle and is run in the tradition of group analysis (Foulkes, 1964). There is no particular agenda: individuals are free to raise what is in their minds. Some of the discussions at times evoke an immense anxiety in me and others.

The embodied experience of the community meetings evoked feelings in me akin to my childhood experience of a family dinner: not quite belonging; wanting to fit in; feeling self-conscious; and, at times, rebelling vociferously.

Since the last iteration of this project I have attended my second residential. I wish to provide new insights into how quickly these embedded experiences can take over. On the last day, in the community meeting, a faculty member was sharing his reflections of overreacting emotionally the day before. He used the term *having a fit*. I felt triggered. I asked him, "What is it like to have done what you just described as a fit?". He responded, followed by another senior colleague who was attending his last residential before graduating. This colleague asked if I were acting in a disciplining manner. In an instant, I felt self-conscious and exposed. Not to appear as though I were criticising a faculty member, I used the word *guru* to describe the faculty member as a way of trying to beat a hasty retreat. The idea that I had challenged an authority figure was unsettling. But, on reflection, I see that what was unsettling was the unbearable shame of being publicly disciplined. This recalled the experience of my father's comment about the chopsticks when family members and guests looked on in silence.

From the literature of DMan, I have become familiarised with the idea of the self as radically social: the individual is simultaneously forming and being formed through interaction with others (Mead, 1934). One way of being formed is through our feelings of guilt and shame which make us conform with social norms. In this way of thinking we are enabled and constrained by the social process as we enable and constrain others (Elias, 1987) in a complex responsive process of relating (Stacey, et. al, 2000).

Mowles draws on Elias (2000, p. 368) as he describes this process:

Elias argues that the socialisation of children creates scars and contradictions which means that we are still guided by affect, “a wall of deep-rooted fears” which operate blindly and by habit and as a consequence often create “collisions with social reality”. We are governed, he argues, by rising tides of guilt, shame, and anxiety which inevitably impact upon our relations with others. (Mowles, 2014, p.252)

If they are illuminated, these moments where our past and present collide can be empowering and also disabling. The remaining hours at the residential and the long journey home offered me an opportunity for reflection. In the next fortnight, I became preoccupied by a search for understanding. What did the word *discipline* imply? Why did the atmosphere in the room intensify for me?

The German moral philosopher Gadamer, whose best-known work is *Truth and Method* (1975), writes this: ‘The principle of hermeneutics simply means that we should try to understand everything that can be understood’ (Gadamer, 1976, p.31). His method of research seeks to make conscious the prejudices inherent in the way we interpret experiences through language.

Prejudices are not necessarily unjustified or erroneous, so that they inevitably distort the truth. In fact, the historicity of our existence entails that prejudices, in the literal sense of the word, constitute the initial directness of our whole ability to experience. (Gadamer, 1976, p.9)

He asserts that the nature of interpretation is influenced by the effects of history operating without conscious awareness. His notion of hermeneutical reflection involves, in part, the process of consciously experiencing the meaning of linguistic concepts normally taken for granted or typically assumed. He refers to this process as developing ‘effective-historical consciousness’ (ibid.). Mowles also refers to these prejudices as assumptions which are taken for granted; he encourages reflexive practice as a way to self-understanding: ‘We call into question how we know what we know in how we come to know it’ (2015, p.60). Later I will comment on the distinction between reflection and reflexivity.

My initial reaction of feeling chastised by the senior colleague when he used the word *discipline* caught me by surprise. I lost my clarity. I felt excluded and apart. It has been four weeks since the above reflection. Coincidentally, I reacted to a recent e-mail correspondence with the phrase *be disciplined*. It prompted me to revisit what meaning this word holds for me? There it was. When I reverted to thinking in Chinese, the meaning implies *lacking family teaching*. It was a phrase used as criticism of someone else's child. Whenever I hear it, this phrase brings about a sense of being on the outside.

To master a foreign language means precisely that, when we engage in speaking it in the foreign land, we do not constantly consult inwardly our own world and its vocabulary. The better we know the language, the less such a side glance at our native language is perceptible, and only because we never know foreign languages well enough, we always have something of this feeling. (Gadamer, 1976, p.16)

Learning a foreign language does not mean we negate or leave our own world; it provides an opportunity to overcome the prejudices and limitations of our previous experience of the world. "Like travellers we return with new experiences". (1975/2013, p.464). Calling the word *discipline* into question has furthered my understanding of the prejudices which I, and others, hold.

Reflection is the ability to detach oneself from our involvement... Reflexivity is where we 'bend back' our thinking on itself and on ourselves in order to call into question our own role in understanding what it is we are trying to understand. (Mowles, 2015, p. 61)

To increase our interpretative power collectively requires calling into question our own prejudices that operate unconsciously.

Reflexive questioning, I am arguing here, brings in the important dimension of the group: it enables the opportunity to ask what the implications are for us of what we find ourselves doing together. It allows us to talk about who we might be becoming and, in doing so, it keeps moral questions alive and perhaps also carries the potential of allowing us to act with greater intelligence. (Mowles, 2015, p.71)

My experience in the community meeting gave me an embodied and felt sense of my prejudices, my pre-judgements, which was an active example of how we experience ourselves in relationship with others.

## Summary

By seeing what emerged in the engagement with my past, I have allowed myself to write freely for this project, guided as well by my unconscious. A few narratives have been doubtful in their relevance for my learning set and even for myself, but they seem to have revealed their significance in these final moments of editing: The story of Ayla, in a novel I read while I was living in Japan, unarguably stood out, even though I was asked by a member of my learning set to consider deleting it. It held for me the meaning of survival, in the tension between a primitive and sophisticated form of society, and the quality of human relationships through the medium of language, which prompted me to write it. My understanding of power through Elias has given new meanings to the battle between my grandmother and stepmother. For a similar reason, the vignettes of Selina and Walter have remained as my attention turns to new theoretical ideas with politics as a part of organisational life. Power dynamics, conflict and unofficial ideologies, particularly culture, are aspects that can't be overlooked or avoided. Perhaps I have neglected them in the past, or not been conscious of them. Sam's narrative seemed less relevant to ideas about management, but I saw the parallel between Sam and Walter. The status I gained in the organisation through working with Sam at NGO W was comparable to the recognition I received from management for being valued by Walter, so recognition is another theme which presents itself to me to consider. Lastly, the sharing of my embedded experience at the community meeting was equally significant. I encountered personal prejudices, meaning pre-judgements, in the way I interpreted experiences in the manner of Gadamer and Mowles when I heard the word *discipline*. The central activity of the DMan is to engage in reflexive enquiry. The residential provides a forum to experience these social processes come to life.

These are the themes to have emerged so far: I have developed an enhanced ability to adapt. I am habitually familiar with uncertainty. Through my upbringing, I have learnt to navigate myself through tricky, complex relationships where I have to hang on to my feelings, keep the other person on side and somehow in each instance effect

change and regain power and dignity for all. Selina, and in some respects Walter and Sam, were good illustrations.

At the same time, my fluency in improvisation has often meant placing others' needs before my own. It has at times left me in a vulnerable position in group relating. I have felt constrained; I have behaved in a particular manner; I have adjusted to others' values; I have been caught in the dynamics around power and obedience. It appears that my enhanced development has in one aspect inadvertently covered over my underdevelopment. I have acted on impulse<sup>2</sup> and it is this very gift of fluency which has kept me from finding out why I do what I do.

I am beginning to see that I have been quite oblivious to my own political actions. It seems I have an acute sense of the changing balance of power and of what it takes to survive.

From the day of his birth, a baby has power over its parents, not just the parents over the baby. At least, the baby has power over them as long as they attach any kind of value to it.... The master has power over his slave, but the slave also has power over his master, in proportion to his function for his master – his master's dependence on him. (Elias, 1978, p. 74)

I seem to be innately aware of what Elias had just described in the interdependence of power relationships. The alliances I've established with Walter, Richard and even to some extent Sam and Selina were guided mostly by impulse. This lack of discipline in thinking about 'why' I do what I do has made me also neglect the 'how' I did what I did. In thinking about it now, I see that it was at times identifying with those characteristics I see in others, such as Sam's and Walter's rage, Selina's loneliness and vulnerability, Richard's faith in his leadership. To sum up, I believe an important research theme involves seeing and being seen: one begins to acknowledge one's own sense of self in relation to other selves.

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<sup>2</sup> An 'impulse' is a congenital tendency to react in a specific manner to a certain sort of stimulus, under certain organic conditions.... They are best termed "impulses," and not "instincts," because they are subject to extensive modifications in the life-history of individuals, and these modifications are so much more extensive than those to which the instincts of lower animal forms are subject that the use of the term "instinct" in describing the behaviour of normal adult human individuals is seriously inexact" (Mead, 1934, p.337).

I began my narrative of exclusion initially with the title 'Outsider'. I have since deleted this. I realized it was the saving face to cover my fear of rejection and my pride in acknowledging a desire to belong. One cannot be expelled if one is already on the outside. I have also adapted ways to minimize or bypass the social processes by playing a subsidiary supportive role, and at the same time, by using power to effect change. Working under Walter and Richard provided that: inside the dyad, I was shielded from politics. My existing position in my private company over the years has also become one where I can analyse the politics but have someone else execute decisions. I recognize the exception of the influx of Chinese clientele in recent years, where I find myself once again in the front line. I alone can communicate with them fluently.

As mentioned earlier in one of my vignettes, I have noticed in my current work at X Foundation a nexus between the Chairwoman and the CEO. Last year, the Chairwoman approached me to consider taking over her position while she would remain on the board as a director. She was frustrated with the ineffective board members most of whom had been chosen by the CEO in the seminal stages. Instead, I accepted the invitation to join the board on the condition the Chair remain in her position. This seems to be my preferred position to set an alliance with someone who is already entrenched within the culture. It is this which will help me find my place. There have been many developments since. I wish to explore them in the next project.

### **Research question**

As mentioned, I had been invited to join the Board of a scientific NGO. In project 2, I wish to explore how power dynamics play out in my role as a Board member and how I experience being recognised/misrecognised in my negotiation into the group. Both in terms of what has to be managed as a Board Member for an NGO and also as myself, I am also keen to research themes of power, ethics and values which have played an important role in my development, even if I have not always been aware of them.

## Project Two – Negotiating power, recognition and ethics

### Introduction

Project 1 led me to realise how my upbringing has conditioned my relationship to authority and to those in power positions. In relating to others, and learning to survive, nonetheless my focus on their needs keeps me from paying attention to myself. Last year, I was invited to join the Board of a neuroscience research institute: X Foundation. I knew that I might have an opportunity to investigate some of these concerns, including how I came to exercise power myself. As my time at the NGO has unfolded, I have come to see that I was, indeed, already locked into similar patterns with senior people. Two examples will illustrate how I have made an entry into this particular organisation: they will describe the complex responsive processes in which I was involved.

The two situations which I recount have helped me to become clearer about what I am researching. The situations operate in terms of what has to be managed as a Board Member for an NGO and also as myself, as I try to negotiate the themes of power, ethics and values which have played an important role in my development. Another feature of the narrative is the theme of recognition. A gentle nudge from my supervisor helped me to recognize not only the individuals involved within the narratives, but also my own longing for self/mutual recognition. With the benefit of hindsight, I can see how obvious this was. In the summary of Project 1, I wrote, I now realize, presciently: 'I believe an important research theme involves the seeing and being seen, the enabling effect where one begins to acknowledge one's own sense of self amongst selves'. To explicate this further, I will draw on the literature of Axel Honneth (1995).

To provide context, I begin by describing my early experience of feeling used and dismissed by the staff at X Foundation. This became the catalyst for my desire to initiate an incentive program to break through the barrier between Directors and staff. This initiative served both to provide a background to the situation that forms this narrative.

I turn to the two situations, each of which gave me perspective to examine both the organization in which I was involved and my own proclivities and ways of thinking. Firstly, Vikki, the Chairperson who invited me to become a director resigned. It was

she to whom I had been reporting directly. I felt abandoned. As mentioned in P1, my preference to play a supportive role to a strong leader allows me to minimize or to ignore the social processes, somewhat shielded from politics, while, at the same time, it allows me power to effect change. For example, I worked with Walter the chef, and in my earliest formative experience I acted as a translator for my grandmother, the matriarch, at least until she lost her battle to dominate the family and left me behind to negotiate with my stepfamily. This situation at X Foundation was comparable. Vikki's resignation forced me to realign my allegiance and to contemplate what it was I wished to achieve. My intention was to translate scientific research into something more accessible, using language which would appeal to a general audience. I now had to negotiate with Patrick, the CEO, as an individual member of the Board, without my sponsor, marking my first step towards separation from Vikki. This negotiation was a dance. It is something to which I am accustomed, but I have not done it at the same time as I examined my own needs and experiences.

The second example is a historical event involving Vikki and me prior to her resignation. This event provides context to explain how my amplified emotional reaction to Patrick was compounded by earlier events where I had felt misrecognized. It also sheds light on the emotion-laden words that permeated my previous iteration of this project as I am now aware that such an emotional response is an indicator of something that often warrants further reflection.

### **Origins of the Donor Engagement program: feeling used and dismissed**

The Donor Engagement program was an initiative which came about at my suggestion. It emerged as the result of repeated experiences of being asked by X Foundation staff to assist them in their endeavours, often at short notice, to help raise funds. I introduced the organisation to potential donors. I attended donor meetings. I provided corporate leads/connections. I arranged media interviews. But nothing I provided appeared to deepen the relationship with the managers I was working with. The *thank you* became code: *Kindly leave your goods by the door and we will take over from here*. Afterwards I would not be consulted by the fundraising team if there was further communication with specific donors. I felt used and dismissed, as though I had done my bit in giving them leads, and thereafter I was surplus to requirements. I became unenthusiastic and less responsive to their requests for help. I was able to re-engage only with my own thinking. I saw a possible parallel process

between my experience and the donors to X Foundation, where donors may also have had an experience of feeling valued but forgotten after a gift had been solicited. My idea for the initiative of a Donor Engagement Programme took concrete form after a meeting I attended with Ronald and Jane, from the fundraising department, when they visited another NGO/donor who was demanding to feel more loved. This NGO/donor was a fine example of what I had been concerned about: they sent a clear message about the lack of attention they received from our executives and about their desire to feel valued by X Foundation before they would consider further commitment.

### **Showing commitment to break the barrier between staff and Directors**

I considered how to go about enriching the donors' experience and about encouraging relationships between management, Directors and staff. It was during a discussion in the January residential with my learning set that I began to refine the idea of an incentive to encourage engagement. On my return, I rang Ronald, Major Gifts Manager, both to lay out my ideas and to underwrite this initiative of a donor appreciation program. It would involve an allocation of funds for the use of hosting events periodically: the process would bring donors, management and the research team into a more intimate and mutually informative forum. The focus was to be on strengthening relationships with past or existing donors, on creating opportunities, not for asking for more donations, but for engaging them in conversations about concerns that they and their immediate community may have with issues relating to mental health. Doing that would also bring Directors, management and staff to the same understanding of donors' expectations and bring us closer to the wider community. I also saw X Foundation as a vehicle whereby the community and their mental health concerns could be brought to the attention of a medical/scientific research institute.

After my verbal commitment to him on this undertaking, Ronald became very enthused, with steady updates and feedback. He became increasingly unguarded and openly shared his challenges within management. He told me that neither Gavin his boss, nor Patrick his CEO were very communicative. It was rare for either of them to set foot outside of the office, let alone meet with donors, except perhaps with major donors. At times he had gone to speak to Patrick on matters concerning

donors but in the middle of a conversation Patrick would become non-responsive. Building donor relationships was left entirely to Ronald and his assistant Jane.

The theory of recognition, which I explore later in this project, has given me a new perspective from which to think about the staff's behaviour and their own struggle for recognition. The concern could be that involving me in the process of negotiating with donors or sponsors would make them look less competent in the eyes of their manager. This does not take account of the fact that their manager would also like to look competent and to be recognized.

The following is the first element of the narrative.

### Narrative 1 - My meeting with Patrick after Vikki's resignation

At the beginning of March 2018, I received an email from Patrick addressed to all X Foundation Board Directors. It announced the sudden resignation of Vikki, the Chairperson of the Foundation. In Project 1, I mentioned a subtle and complex relationship between Patrick and Vikki: each seemed to doubt or question the other's competence. At times the tension between them would surface during Board meetings.

For many months, Vikki had led me to believe that, once the merger with other NGOs took place, Patrick would not be asked to continue as CEO. According to Vikki, Patrick had received a poor appraisal for his performance the previous year. I was shocked when I received from Patrick the news of Vikki's resignation. It clarified her seeming preoccupation and her lack of feedback to me during the prior four months. I decided, therefore, to call a meeting with Patrick through Fiona, his EA, to establish a direct working relationship during this interim period.

I had already formed a close relationship with Fiona. She had been invaluable in helping me to navigate my way through X Foundation. Only with her was I able to settle in as quickly as I did. She had at times confided in me about some of her difficulties with Vikki, so we seemed to have a shared understanding. At the same time, she had also been unfailingly loyal to Patrick, her boss.

As I arrived, I was greeted by Fiona and asked to go in. Patrick stood up from his desk and we gave each other a peck on the cheek as we sat down. I began by telling him that I was still in shock about Vikki's sudden departure. He told me that Vikki

had wanted to resign for some time. He asked if I was aware that Vikki had indicated to him and John, Chairman of the parent company of X Foundation of which I was part, that I was a possible replacement for her. He was also probably eager to find out from me the purpose of my visit. I said that, although I had an awareness of her ambitions for me, I had also told Vikki that, even apart from the constraints on my time, I wouldn't be the right person. But I did agree with Vikki that there was no one at present on the Board who was a suitable candidate.

Patrick brought up the sad news that of one of the Directors, Glen, was gravely ill. He visited him in hospital a few days before and could not see him leaving hospital. I had not met Glen at all since I had joined the Board. It seemed that Patrick was testing to see where I stood with this issue. I was very aware of the divide between Vikki and Patrick. Her frustration was with ineffective Board Directors mostly chosen by Patrick in the seminal stages. She wanted them to step down. I told Patrick my belief was that with all the discussion of restructuring, renaming and resignations, there were enough changes for the moment. Perhaps it was important now to stabilize. I didn't think it would be appropriate to disturb Glen with requests to resign when he was fighting for his life. I believed this was a time for solidarity. He said, 'I couldn't agree more'. It seemed that I had passed the test. I was independent of Vikki.

I then moved on to let him know I was truly enjoying working with Ronald, the Major Gifts Manager. I advised him on the few potential donors who were poised to make donations. My next topic was the donor engagement program which Ronald and I had been working on. I described the project as opening up opportunities for conversations with upper management to assist our team in their task of understanding what donors and sponsors needed and expected from us. He seemed puzzled. Had Ronald not told him? He asked me to say more. I explained it was my intention periodically to host intimate events for relationship building, predominantly with past and existing donors. He thanked me, but he insisted it must pass the media test. Had I heard of the *Sun-Herald* moment? I asked what that meant. The answer was confusing: 'It's like if you get caught in a strip club.' I think he thought we were going to lay on lavish entertainment for donors which could be viewed in some quarters, particularly the press, as inappropriate for an NGO. His response was unexpected: I managed a laugh. I reassured Patrick I was just there to help. I saw myself like an interior decorator. I had my own ideas, but I needed to

know what was not to Patrick's tastes. Knowing that would save both of us time. It was time to go. I was trying to signal to him that I was there to support him by finding out what he really wanted.

Four days later brought an email from Patrick. The subject was 'Entertainment and poor media coverage'. This email suggested that I was making a bigger issue than it actually was. Self-funded functions for donors were routine: the annual gala dinner and events at Directors' homes were two examples. Unwittingly he was supporting my point that, outside of annual fundraising events, there were no relational events with donors, ones based on understanding their needs. He then reiterated our earlier discussion: 'As I noted, we need to always assess the media test, i.e. are we totally confident that any expenditure is appropriate and consistent with our charitable status and standing? With recent outrageous behaviour of NGOs misusing funds by UK charities definitely the sort of scandal we never want to have, even the continuing saga at the University of Sydney are the types of issue we need to avoid. The attached from SMH (*Sydney Morning Herald*, Sydney and Australia's equivalent of the British *Independent* or *Guardian* newspapers) is where we definitely do not want to be!'

### **Making sense of the meeting**

My intention had been to establish my neutrality from Vikki in the hope of an amicable start with Patrick. I believed it was important for Patrick to understand my stance with the current Board memberships. The opinion I expressed about Glen, the Director in hospital, came from a personal perspective based on humanity, friendship and loyalty. I was conscious of separating myself from Vikki: in this particular instance, I chose to side with Patrick.

Like Patrick, I valued relationships over Directorial duties. I thought he would be receptive to my proposal to build relationships with donors. But it didn't seem to appeal. He focused on his administrative role of minimizing risk and he was anxious over recent press allegations. Perhaps he was exercising his authority. In working on it with his subordinates, I had bypassed him. I found disappointing his comment

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<sup>1</sup> NGOs in UK and Australia have been caught up in spending donor funds on irresponsible and inappropriate activities, which allowed the press to criticize the giving of public and private funds for charitable activities.

about the strip club. The dance move changed: I followed my instinct and improvised the next move. I acknowledged that X Foundation was his territory. I allowed him for now to have his way.

Four days later, Patrick reiterated his fixation on the risk of creating a poor image for X Foundation. He referred again to the current scandals of NGOs misuse of funds. He had a right to be concerned, but his manner was upsetting. I reacted in a similar way: I did not wish to justify my position. I felt disrespected. I too closed down the conversation. I am not one of his staff but a Director: he has as much to answer to me as I have to him. I might not ever know the reasons for his negativity and resistance. Was he frightened of being further exposed to unnecessary risks after just having managed the dispute with Vikki? My initiative to build relationships could also be seen as indirectly expressing dissatisfaction with his stewardship. For Patrick, the potential of risk overrode any potential of gain.

### **Exploring literature for deeper insight**

It was apparent to me at that point that the meeting with Patrick was about power negotiations and about our contrasting values. In Project 1, my early understanding of power through Elias gave me a new understanding of the change in power dynamics in a social group that I am a part of, that we are interdependent, and that power fluctuates between us. I wish to analyse further Elias's notion of power and the light he shone on the enabling and constraining effects which were at work in the negotiations between Patrick and myself.

### **Power**

Elias (1978) understands power and politics as inevitable aspects of social life. His concept of power and the notion of interdependence mean that power is not a quality that one can possess, but a structural characteristic of human relationships. The constant reconfiguration of power relations between people is an ongoing process depending on who needs the other more: we enable and constrain each other in the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion from the group. This marks an understanding of politics as the everyday negotiation of these interdependencies of power.

In my negotiation with him, Patrick attempted to understand my stance on current Board membership. I knew where Vikki stood: she wished to put pressure on all existing Board members to resign in order to fill the Board with members of her own choosing. This was why I was recruited. I expressed my opinion with regards to the Director, Glen, who was gravely ill: he should remain on the Board without being disturbed. It was also my way of separating myself from Vikki. In this instance, I was with Patrick and not against him. This was to acknowledge myself as part of a group of which he was the leader: I signalled to him that I wanted to be included.

Elias (1978, p.78-103) uses the analogy of a card game to understand the constant fluctuation of power in the process of human relating: there is no card game but for the constant play and counter play of those involved in the game. He illustrates the interdependency and social aspects of power as an everyday phenomenon amongst people or groups where individuals learn to depend on each other to perform particular functions. No one in the game can control its evolution. He uses the term 'figuration': the movement of one person affects, and is affected by, a web of interwoven intentions and plans.

Elias gives this summary to explain that although there are very powerful people in organisations, such as Patrick, even they are not in control of the back and forth negotiation over influence:

It is simple enough: plans and actions, the emotional and rational impulses of individual people, constantly interweave in a friendly or hostile way. This basic tissue, resulting from many single plans and actions, can give rise to changes and patterns that no individual has planned or created. This interdependence of people prompts an order *sui generis*, an order more compelling and stronger than the will and reason of the individual people composing it. (Elias, 2000, p. 366)

I came to see where I often lose sight of this interdependency of movement or 'how we respond to each other's gestures' (Mead, 1934, p.47). This in turn affects and creates unpredictable outcomes which are not of one person's own intention and plan. Mead's theory of communication involves the conversation of gestures, where meaning lies not in the gesture of the individual alone but arises in the responsive interaction between actors (ibid). According to Mead, human beings have the capacity to take into account the attitude of the other. As we engage in gesturing and responding with others, we are at the same time engaged in private

conversations with ourselves where we are able to evoke in ourselves the attitude of the other, which he terms the 'generalised other'. This is how we are able to anticipate how another person might respond because we invoke in ourselves a similar response to the one we might expect from someone with whom we are communicating. In the interactions with Vikki and Patrick, we were gesturing and responding to each other, anticipating and adapting to each other's anticipations. The relationships of power were not equal, but what unfolded was not in any single person's control. In what follows, I intend to elaborate on Mead's idea distinguishing between two types of consciousness and the I/me dialectic of identity formation. Before doing so, I wish to reconsider my understanding of my action in the way I bypassed Patrick by working directly with the fundraising staff.

### Understanding the interplay as complex

I reflect now on how I was making sense of the complex relationships between Vikki, Patrick and myself. It was simplistic to think that it was my preference to bypass Patrick. Understanding the self as entirely social (Mead, 1934; Foulkes, 1948) means paying attention to how we are forming and being formed by each other in the social realm. The power game between Patrick and Vikki was happening long before I joined. Politics is inevitable in any organization, as I have explained above, if we are all interdependent and are required to negotiate in our everyday dealings with one another. What I was doing, to borrow Elias' term, was participating in and therefore co-creating the figuration. If I look at it with more detachment, as in the card game analogy, Vikki was using me to perform certain functions for her to increase her bargaining power. In exchange, the alluring quality of feeling needed by her provided a safe zone for me, which reinforced my responding to her gesture by behaving in a way familiar to me, that of obedience and loyalty. At the same time, Patrick didn't encourage any form of relationship with me: he saw me as someone in Vikki's camp. Loyalty towards Vikki created an unanticipated potential conflict of loyalty to Patrick.

Thinking back, I recalled an awkward moment in the early days not long after I had joined. I was having coffee with his EA, Fiona, in the coffee shop before meeting a team of scientists whom she had arranged to be present. Patrick entered the coffee shop and saw me at a distance; without any acknowledgement, he turned and

walked away. I recall telling Vikki about it afterwards: "What an odd ball that Patrick is. Who does that?" I lost interest in Patrick and hung on tighter to Vikki. From that experience, and as I am writing, I realize the dynamic character of enabling and constraining effects through the process of inclusion and exclusion in and from groups (Elias, 1978). These dynamics provoke emotions and challenge our sense of identity and belonging. For example, feeling recognized and praised positively reinforces the likelihood of repeated performances. The threat of exclusion can act equally to reinforce negatively particular behaviour, or conformity, or allegiance. In a charitable organization, dynamics of inclusion/exclusion may be particularly felt among the donor community, when their acts of generosity put recognition right at the core of the gesture of giving. The withdrawal of attention, love or recognition after a gift has been solicited does not necessarily discourage: there are those who would work harder or donate more in order to feel needed again. A central aspect of Elias's idea in the process of inclusion and exclusion from a group is the way in which power is experienced. The dynamic can encourage someone to perform certain functions for the group they wish to belong to in order to form or maintain membership and their sense of identity.

What is being negotiated here is who needs whom more? There is no absolute: the power ratio can shift in anyone's favour according to the needs of the person or of the group (Elias, 1978, p.71). My description of the dance between Patrick and me was one of the enabling and constraining the effect of each other's steps, as each of us took turns to lead. At the same time, we were guided by each other's movement in response. The curiosity was mutual: it was in both our interests to have each other on side. To an extent I needed Patrick for my sense of belonging to a group and for my desire to connect. I came to recognize him as more powerful than Vikki, something which I had discounted. To say that Patrick needs me would be an overstatement, but I think he benefits from having me present for what I can deliver in terms of contacts with individuals of high net worth.

Towards the end of the meeting with Patrick, I felt constrained by his remark about a strip club. It felt abrupt; I felt out of place and confused. Reflecting on my response when I referred myself as an interior decorator, I was acknowledging the power he held, but by calling the meeting to an end I was exercising my right not to be

intimidated by him. I was playing a game of poker: bluffing and assuming a brave front to keep my dignity.

### **Patrick's abrupt manner continued**

On other occasions I found myself agitated when interacting with Patrick. This became more visible since the first meeting I described above. At one particular time at the end of a Board meeting, the second one since Vikki's departure, we were leaving the building together. He was having a lengthy discussion with Cathy, one of the Board members who nominated for the position of Chair. She had been actively pursuing Patrick for a long time: they often engaged in lengthy conversations after Board meetings ignoring everyone else, including Vikki. This particular time, I had wanted a private moment to discuss something regarding the choice of a X Foundation ambassador. I waited for their conversation to end. We were approaching our cars, and I asked Patrick if I could have a quick word. His reply was blunt: 'I really have to go'. I felt offended, but I said it would only take a second. As it did. It was unnecessary to respond in the abrupt manner he did. The respectful answer would have been: 'I am in a hurry. Can I call you a little later?'

Mead's theory of the social self distinguishes between consciousness, self-consciousness and identity formation through gesture and response. It is a theory which might shed some light on the flow of experience between Patrick and myself: first, his provocative remark and second, his abrupt behaviour towards me.

### **Distinguishing between self-consciousness and consciousness**

In *Mind, Self and Society* (1934), Mead makes the distinction between two types of consciousness. One arises from the field of experiences that we are aware of and attend to in our everyday activities. That consciousness answers to a particular pain in our body such as an aching tooth, what Mead termed "consciousness of objects that are experienced." We become detached from the pain, remaining objective in Mead's terms, if we act accordingly to take control of it. Mead (1934, p.169-170) then suggests managing difficult emotions in the same manner as you would physical pain. He used the example of an anaesthetic in describing the disassociation of experiences so that the suffering is no longer your suffering: 'what we can be rid of is not the offense but the reacting against the offense'. This is not asking us to deny and to disassociate completely from an emotional event but to step back and be dispassionate through self-distanciation. He took the idea from Hegel (1807) that

consciousness of an object necessarily carries with it a consciousness of self, that this pain belongs to someone. But if we can 'partially separate one's self from the experience' (Mead, 1934, p,170), by using our ability to take on other attitudes beyond that self as our approach to manage emotionally laden events, we come to what he terms "self-consciousness." The idea of self-distanciation, being able to take the attitude of the other to oneself in the 'conversation of gestures in one's own conduct,' is the heart of Mead's idea of consciousness and self-consciousness. You take up the attitude of the other and engage in a private conversation by responding to your own gesture as you imagine the other would reply. This happens spontaneously and as you are communicating with someone else. This is Mead's theory of how reflective processes contribute to a sense of self (ibid.p.167).

### **The 'I' and the 'me'**

Each individual has also then to assume the attitude of the community, the generalized attitude of many other selves, as part of their social process. Mead (1934, p.174-175) makes a distinction between the 'I' and the 'me' in this consciousness of self. The 'me' is the generalized attitudes of many others, the voices in our minds when we imagine other people responding to what we are saying or doing. The 'I' is the spontaneous impulse that reacts to the social attitudes of a group one belongs to. Both aspects of the 'I' and 'me' are essential to the development of the self and are inseparable. One must assume the attitude of the others in order to belong and to know how to function within a group. At the same time, in our attempt to interact, we find ourselves also bumping up against or reacting to those social attitudes with our spontaneous 'I', which can be a surprise even to ourselves. Then we find ourselves adjusting, and changing in this co-operative process within the community to which we want to belong.

As a man adjusts himself to a certain environment, he becomes a different individual; but in becoming a different individual he has affected the community in which he lives. (Mead, 1934, p.215)

The relative prominence of the 'me' and the 'I' depends very much on the situation. If it is in our interest to belong to a particular group or community, the 'me' comes more to the fore. That becomes the basis of the individual entering into the experience of others – 'it is the source of his emotional response to the values that

belong to him as a member of that community' (ibid., p.199). But Mead also says: 'If an individual reacts or goes against the convention of that particular group, it is the 'I' who asserts himself over and against the 'me' (ibid.). The fluctuating back and forth between the 'me' predominating and the 'I' predominating of the inseparable I/me that constitutes the self, is experienced as the fluctuation of identity as we struggle to belong. Thinking back to the way I responded to the situation by calling the meeting to an end, I caught myself by surprise.

Mead is claiming that a negotiation with members of a group is also a negotiation with the self: it is a paradox of wanting to belong but wanting to remain an individual both at the same time. It is through our spontaneity as we act that we become fully aware of ourselves, but at the same time this spontaneity may risk our exclusion from the group to which we strive to belong.

I have explained above how we call out in ourselves a similar response to the one which, through our gestures, we evoke in others. We gesture to ourselves and to others both at the same time; this then evokes a response from them and from us, simultaneously. This continuous process of gesturing and responding is how we come to know ourselves in relation to others, but is also how we negotiate our identities and our inclusion into, or exclusion from groups. This is exactly what was going on before I fully joined X Foundation in my conversations with Vikki, and in my subsequent negotiations with the funding team, and latterly with Patrick. I wish now to examine Patrick's abrupt behaviour through Mead's idea of answering one's own gesture.

### **Gesture/Response as stimulus**

This two in one, the ability to call out in oneself what we evoke in others, is at the heart of Mead's theory of communication, and concept of selves:

The critical importance of human language in the development of human experience lies in the fact that the stimulus is one that reacts upon the speaking individual as it reacts upon the other. (Mead, 1934, p.69)

Mead used the example of a bully who is at the same time a coward. He argued that the bully arouses in himself 'that attitude of fear which his bullying attitude arouses

in another, so that when put into a situation which calls his bluff, his own attitude is found to be that of the others' (Mead, 1934, p.66). At the same time, in order for someone to be bullied, the circumstance implies that the person can hold together the whole social act, understanding the role of the bully and the bullied. How the bullied then makes use of the gesture depends on the I/me dialectic of that particular moment influenced by his or her history as to whether the bullied complies or rebels.

Mead's description of the bullying attitude helped me understand why, four days after our meeting, Patrick was continuing to write to me about this fear of scandal. Perhaps his provocative remark about a strip-club scenario followed by his follow-up e-mail could be understood as a gesture by which he himself was provoked into strong feelings. Was it, perhaps, one of intimidation and of fear of being shamed? To date, I haven't responded or even acknowledged receipt of that particular correspondence. Perhaps my silence agitated or infuriated him even more as a sign of my reluctance to engage with his concern. I did feel shocked and perhaps intimidated by what I considered his abruptness. This evoked in me a spontaneous gesture of exerting power and independence by ending the meeting and withdrawing. Was his refusing to allow me a moment after the Board meeting part of the dance in which we were now both engaged, one of power and interdependence? Both of us were fencing, denying power to the other's needs or concerns.

### [Fear of portraying the wrong image or avoidance of relationships?](#)

My preoccupation with what was going on for me in the conversational gesture and response with Patrick originates in what I noticed in the theory of complex responsive process, with which, as a research student, I am becoming more familiar. Stacey & Mowles (2016) argue that an organisation:

...is conversation and organisation and strategy emerge as patterning of conversations. Through exploring the work of Mead, what also emerges is the ongoing iteration of the selves of the interdependent people who are members of the organisation.....Strategy is about what people in organisations do and who they are, and this is exactly what identity means. Strategy is about the evolution of what people in an organisation do and how they become who they become. (2016, p.403)

The authors are suggesting refocusing our attention away from large abstractions such as vision or mission, by thinking instead about what we are already doing in our everyday interactions with others in an organization. Paying attention also means noticing in ordinary conversations what is being ignored or seen as foolish or futile. Whatever is going on, the conversation may serve another purpose which may be overlooked. With this insight, I realized that I had dismissed Patrick as being eccentric or lacking emotional intelligence. I felt wrong-footed by his bizarre comment and his rude and abrupt behaviour towards me; I narrowed my focus and found myself caught up in thinking about him as an individual, and in particular as a bully. I had lost sight of the purpose that this was serving from a complex responsive perspective: there was something being communicated that was worth paying attention to. My experience and observation of X Foundation to date had revealed a prevalent way of relating between board members and between staff, that discourages the exploration of relationships. Most of the time, communication between board members, between senior managers and board members, between me and the fundraising team was sporadic. Particularly in terms of my relationship with the fundraising team, I had come to experience this as feeling used and then dismissed, as I imagined donors must also have felt.

As a board member I saw my colleagues being much more interested in talking in abstractions about vision and mission (X Foundation's mission statement is to 'Discover, conquer and cure') than in what was going on between us. There was a sense of an idealized end, perhaps of a blind faith in the scientific mission, which X Foundation was advocating. What happens in the here and now, our day-to-day interactions, was ignored: we didn't have the language or the practice to discuss it. However, from my own experience of micro-interactions particularly with the CEO, some of which might sound trivial, I realised that there was much more at stake than appears on the surface.

I was beginning to wonder if the clinical approach employed in scientific research - abstracting human experiences as mere functions of the brain - was being taken up unconsciously in the way people related to one another at X Foundation. The kinds of conversations permissible in X Foundation were rational, abstract, and sometimes idealised. As I had tried to demonstrate in my interactions with Patrick, there was little patience with exploration, reflection and making sense together.

I remarked above that Stacey and Mowles (2016, p.403) refer to the way in which the organising themes of people's experience of being together are expressed in language. Complex responsive processes as a perspective argues that each member of a group has his or her own personal organizing themes in all their interactions, and that these are determined by the history of relationships of particular individuals. These themes are then taken up, mostly unconsciously, in a group where everybody else is doing the same thing. There ensues a general conversation which prompts particular responses in the individuals present which are unpredictable. Each person is simultaneously provoking the others and having responses evoked, and at the same time taking up the attitude of the generalized other as they engage in a topic of discussion in common.

We are suggesting, then, that both personal and group themes always arise between people in a community but are always at the same time experienced in individual bodies as changes, marked or subtle, in the feeling tones of those bodies. (Stacey & Mowles, 2016, p.340)

This explains my interest in paying attention to my own experience of engaging with Patrick as a way of reflecting on my own pattern of relating, but also as a way of thinking about what was going on in the organisation more generally. Both in Board discussions and particularly after the interactions between Patrick and me, my experience of X Foundation was a closing down of conversations. As a consequence, my enthusiasm to initiate the engagement program was lessened. My time with Vikki was similar. On many occasions it was mostly she who spoke. I felt pressured and sometimes forced to respond to her. She would not accept a *no* from me, whether it was an evening dinner or her own inviting of herself over to my home inappropriately. It was an intense experience: I was confused by her affection. There was no true opportunity to offer my opinion if I saw things differently, except on this one occasion:

## Narrative 2 - Vikki the Chairman who has since resigned

Vikki lives in Melbourne and travelled to Sydney bi-monthly to attend Board meetings. My tasks on the Board were twofold. One was undesignated but understood between Vikki and me as being a support to her; the second, my formal role, was to help introduce new corporate donors. During a board meeting, Vikki

announced she would be hosting in October the coming Director's home event to raise funds for X Foundation. The entire X Foundation Company Board and Foundation Board membership were asked to invite their business contacts in Melbourne to attend.

A month before the event, Vikki asked me privately if I could conduct a recorded interview with her son, Nelson. He suffers from bipolar disorder. The interview was to be used at her event to raise awareness of the condition. She did not want our communication team to be involved: she said that the interview needed a therapist's touch. Vikki was persuasive. I was once again caught between feeling valued because she appreciated my skills and feeling that I was succumbing to her demands. This experience of being pushed into something by her was becoming familiar, much as I felt co-opted into being her ally on the board. When we parted, she said she would ask Nelson to call me. She added that she did not want Nelson to know about this function and that this recorded interview was for internal use only.

I was lost for words. I spoke briefly to Nelson on the phone, but I had already decided by then I couldn't do it. I wrote to Vikki. I made clear that ethically I would need a signed approval by Nelson saying that he fully understood and agreed to how the recording would be used. Without it, I couldn't conduct the interview. I apologized for letting her down. It was an agonizing process, but I knew I had done what was right. I appreciated that I had said *no* to her for the first time. She did not reply: we left it there.

The fundraising event for X Foundation took place in her home. It had a low attendance. Vikki had mobilized the two Boards of Directors, staff and scientists. The event had come at a high cost with very little money raised. It was a miscalculated pitch on her part. I imagine this could have contributed to being excluded from the seat on the Board of the new alliance for which John, Chairman of the company, had been actively recruiting. This new alliance also created tension and jealousy between board members to compete for positions on that Board. The day John announced the new Board memberships was the day Vikki resigned. Her resignation possibly undermined her influence in her previous negative critique to John of Patrick's performance. Patrick's ambition was to become the CEO of the new alliance. To his disappointment, John appointed Patrick and Heather, another CEO of the other

alliance as interim joint CEOs. Patrick could hardly contain this disappointment when he added that he found very little in common with Heather.

I have given some of the background here to help provide insight into the possible origin of the amplified emotional reactions in what follows.

### Processes of recognition in Hegel and Honneth

So far, I have explored Elias and Mead's theories of human interdependency, consciousness and self-consciousness arising from social process of communicative interaction and power-relating. I have more to say about what else might be going on in X Foundation as we try to work together. I want to introduce Hegel's earlier concept of intersubjective recognition, as interpreted by Honneth (1995) to add another layer in understanding the impasse between Patrick and me, and to understand more generally what might be going on in X Foundation, and possibly to put into context the emotion-laden words I used.

Axel Honneth is Professor of Humanities at Columbia University and of Social Philosophy at the University of Frankfurt. He also serves as a Director of the Institute of Social Research, and so writes into the critical tradition. Honneth's work focuses on social-political and moral philosophy, especially relations of power, recognition, and respect. In one of his most important works *The Struggle for Recognition: The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts* (1995), Honneth expanded Hegel and G. H. Mead's notion of the intersubjectively formed self to describe a social anthropological theory of mutual recognition as the engine of moral development.

Honneth took from Hegel the idea 'that full human flourishing is dependent on the existence of well-established, 'ethical' relations – in particular, relations of love, law, and 'ethical life'-which can only be established through a 'conflict-ridden developmental process, specifically, through a struggle for recognition' (Honneth, 1995, p.xi). The roots of Honneth's approach stem from the model developed by Hegel during his early writings in Jena. Honneth found unhelpful Hegel's later turn from the intersubjectivity of selves to more metaphysical considerations. Instead he included the work of Mead for a naturalistic pragmatic approach to identify the intersubjective conditions for individual identity formation, in particular, the notion

of the 'I' as the creative force for asserting one's new claim to identity (ibid). I will present Honneth's reconstruction of this theory after a brief discussion of Hegel.

I am interested in Hegel's concept of honour for understanding what was at stake between Patrick and me, and the possible motivations behind what I experienced as a provocative statement of the strip club analogy. I explore this through Honneth's reading of Hegel in relation to the theory of mutual recognition.

Honneth (1995) explains Hegel's early theoretical concept of recognition as being derived from coupling Fichte's 'reciprocal effect' (in brief, a mutual requirement to act, forming a common consciousness that underlies legal relations) and (in reaction to) the Hobbesian concept of struggle. Hegel uses a theory of conflict to make explicit the opposing dynamic in the structure of mutual recognition. In the interaction with another self-conscious human being, each one is able to recognize and reconcile with each other's shared abilities and qualities. They reach a mutuality. Each individual is also able to learn more about his or her own distinctive identity, often confirming that by means of conflict. This is the movement of recognition between human beings that forms the basis of an ethical relationship consisting of a process of alternating stages between reconciliation and conflict.

Hegel begins his philosophical account in the *System of Ethical Life* (1802/3). He describes elementary forms of interpersonal recognition which he presents as 'natural ethical life'. He describes the initial social process where the growth of individuality occurs. Honneth describes how Hegel's early ideas anticipate what we have now come to understand through psychoanalytic theory, particularly in the work of Donald Winnicott (1965). The first stages of recognition begin between parents and children. In what starts out as a heavily asymmetrical relationship, the baby is very dependent on the parents to meet its needs because the baby experiences the mother as undifferentiated from herself, but gradually learns that they are separate beings. From being raised in a family, children learn to negotiate their feelings of being negated, of sometimes not having their needs met. This describes a developmental process riddled with conflict: as part of his or her formation, the child negotiates dependence, with the significant caregiver who divides attention to other responsibilities, and independence. Over time and through socialisation the child participates in more and more groups and continues to experience the paradox of separateness and integration. This is similar to the

dynamic I described above in the paradox of independence versus group membership, which can provoke strong feelings in us like shame through participation in other social relationships (Honneth, 1995, p.98).

Hegel used the sense of an intermediate stage of 'crime' to denote injuries acquired through various kinds of struggles in these initial relations of recognition. Elias (2000, p.368), who draws on Hegel in this thinking, also refers to the scars that the socialisation process leaves on children as they develop into adults. Hegel was interested in the internal course of struggle resulting from these disruptions to social life. He traced out social conflict beginning with 'the most demanding form of intersubjective diremption, namely, the struggle for honour'. Two opposing parties have the same goal: to provide evidence to ensure their 'integrity' as a person remains intact. 'This conflict is based not on a violation of a person's assertion of rights but rather on a violation of the integrity of the person as a whole' (Honneth, 1995, p.22). Hegel describes honour as a condition where individuals can identify positively with all their traits and peculiarities. In order for that to happen, they need the approval and support of their interacting partners.

'Honour' is thus used to characterize an affirmative relation-to self that is structurally tied to the presupposition that each individual particularity receives intersubjective recognition. (ibid)

In any case where both opposing parties are in pursuit of the same goal, namely the struggle for honour, each attempt to convince the other that his or her own personality deserves recognition. It is here that Hegel used the metaphoric term of a life-and-death struggle. The metaphor depicts an existential threat to the individual should they fail in the struggle which would result in an insult where the whole of a person is at stake.

Hegel expresses this in grand terms and as though life and death are at stake. I did not experience these processes to this extreme degree, but what I take from Honneth's interpretation of Hegel is an insight into why extreme feelings may be provoked in people's everyday encounters with each other. Patrick's provocative remark, followed as it was by a stern caution, became an embodied experience for me. I believe that something challenged my/our survival psychically that led me to think of Hegel's 'struggle for honour'. In my previous iteration, I described my outrage at Patrick's email and that I felt insulted by him. It was not until a member

of my learning set questioned what was provoking such a strong reaction that I had to concede it warranted further reflection.

Why had I experienced Patrick's gesture as identity-threatening? Mead stated that the moral situation is a crisis of the entire personality (Joas, 1997)

In the moral situation the individual experiences a conflict between certain of his own values and others, or between his values and those of partners in the situation, or the values embodied in the 'generalized other' (1997: p.133)

Patrick's email evoked such an identity crisis in me: I felt misrecognized by him. At the same time, I was equally unable to comprehend his concern. As I began to reach a reconciliation with Patrick, I recognized my own behaviour when I closed down the meeting. In the way I reacted, I learned about myself.

Earlier in this project, I described how my denigration of Patrick emerged from what had taken place between us. I was confronted by my own anger towards Vikki. In a previous iteration I wrote this: 'What seemed a developing friendship turned out to be manipulation and domination.' The sense of being 'used and dismissed' motivated me to act as I called for the meeting with Patrick. Hegel's 'struggle for honour' resonated. I defended my integrity and, at the same time, denigrated Patrick's. I suggested that the strip-club remark revealed his own ethics. My emotional reaction, and possibly Patrick's, was compounded by feeling disrespected by Vikki. What was stirred up between Patrick and me was the intersubjective field where we collided in the struggle over honour. Honneth writes, 'each was attempting to convince the other that his own personality deserves recognition'. In the face of conflict and by identifying with Patrick within this movement to reconciliation, I considered how we come to recognize our mutual need for recognition.

### **Recognizing relation**

Like Hegel, Mead thinks that we become individuals by coming to understand ourselves through learning the attitude of the generalized other, with an understanding of our obligations, and our rights. Mead refers to the 'dignity' one is granted as soon as one is recognized, through the granting of rights, as a member of such a community (quoted in Honneth, 1995, p.79). I realized I had not ever recognized Patrick's role and status at X Foundation. Perhaps I did not give him the

respect his position deserved. In the previous section, where I commented from the perspective of complex responsive processes, I described the organizing experience in X Foundation as one of attenuated communication and the shutting down of relationships. I was discouraged from continuing the initiative to recognise donors I had started with Ronald. On the other hand, my exploration of the intersubjective field, my relationship with Patrick may have seemed thin and fragmentary. At the same time we had woven our mutual needs for recognition into an interdependency: each provided something the other person needed.

As I mentioned at the beginning of the project, the theory of recognition has given me a new perspective from which to consider the staff's behaviour and their own struggle for recognition. It seems an appropriate time to turn to Honneth's approach to the development of self-confidence, self-respect, and self-esteem. He asserts that each of these 'practical relations-to-self' can only be acquired and sustained intersubjectively by someone whom one also recognizes and who is significant. With regards to the staff at X Foundation, those at the bottom of the hierarchy where the scientists are the stars, respect and the granting of rights are scarce. Reaching out to Ronald and expressing my interest in him and his team perhaps changed our relationships at this point.

### **Patterns of Intersubjective Recognition: Love, Rights, and Solidarity**

The formulation of Honneth's theory of recognition distinguishes different forms of social integration. His recognition theory retraces the three spheres of interaction back to patterns of intersubjective recognition, which are supposed to correspond to the distinct types of individual relation-to-self. The relation-to-self takes the form of self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem in the individual. Honneth's account of basic self-confidence, as discussed above, is grounded in Winnicott's (1965) object-relations theory in the relationship between the mother and the baby. The general point that Honneth draws from this theory for his concern with struggles for recognition can be understood as an experience of mutual love relationships. Recognition is characterized by a double process, one in which the child learns to gain independence and, at the same time, to remain emotionally connected with the loving subject (Honneth, 1995, p.107). This is the dynamic that I explored above in the paradox of independence versus group membership.

Honneth claims that the practical relation-to-self with regards to self-respect is concerned with viewing oneself as a person with the ability to relate as a legally equal partner with all other humans (Honneth, 1995, p.134). Self-esteem can be understood as a practical relation-to-self that allows individuals to feel their traits and abilities are recognized as valuable by other members of society. Honneth claims that a good society is where individuals have an opportunity to flourish and where the common values match the concern of the individuals in such a way that every individual is in a position to have a sense of esteem. Esteem is accorded on the basis of a shared project, in cases where there are shared concerns, interests, or value, one can speak of solidarity (Honneth, 1995, p.xvii).

As a way to understand these phenomena, I turn to question whether we have common values at X Foundation. In particular, I am interested to know if as board members in the organisation we have understood and agreed to the organisational values, particularly when conversations exploring meaning and reflecting on relationships have appeared unwelcome. As a board, it is difficult to know what we think and the degree to which our thinking is shared because we had so few opportunities to struggle in Honneth's understanding of the term, unless we have just done it as a bureaucratic exercise.

From my personal understanding of values and from the literature I have so far explored, I would argue that what we come to value is situated in the tension between the opposing dynamics within the movement of recognition. We recognise each other and what is at stake in the struggle for recognition. This is what Hegel implied in introducing the theory of conflict. In this interaction with other self-conscious individuals, one can recognize oneself and others, and reconcile with each other person's shared abilities and qualities. By means of conflict, each individual may also learn more about his or her own distinctive identity.

In similar formulation Mead argues that we come to know who we are, and recognise ourselves in those moments in the here and now when we try to make sense of what is going on between us;

The possibilities of the 'I' belong to that which is actually going on, taking place, and it is in some sense the most fascinating part of our experience. It is there that novelty arises and it is there our most important values are located. (Mead, 1934, p.204)

This suggests that value is located between the 'I' and the 'me', and between the conflicts between people about what's important. It is here where there exists the tension between the creative potential of the 'I' and its moral counterpart, the 'me,' that allow possibilities to see ourselves and each other differently.

### [An ethical way of resolving moral conflict and the negotiation of values in practice](#)

When it comes to ethics, Mead (1934, p.388) describes a moral problem as one which involves conflicting interests. He asserts that all of the interests involved in the conflict must be considered.

Mead suggests that the only way to resolve a moral dilemma is to lay out as many value positions as possible which relate to the specific problem. He advises taking into account all of those interests in a particular situation and regarding them impartially. We need to put aside our own immediate interests when they come into conflict with those of others that, until that point, we had not recognized. Mead acknowledged that the difficulty here, 'is to make ourselves recognize the other and wider interests, and then to bring them into some sort of rational relationship with the more immediate ones' (Mead, 1934, p.388).

When I first thought about the situation I was dealing with, I could register only my own interests being denied by Patrick. If I apply Mead's suggestion, that was presumptuous and naive. I took my interests as a given that, idealizing my own values, were going to be equally privileged by others. Not only did I fail to recognize Patrick's interests, leaving aside that they might be different, I failed to imagine that they existed.

Even if I take on Mead's ways of looking at values and conflict, it is still no simple task to understand, let alone find a solution to, all the interwoven intentions and plans, conscious and unconscious, of many others, particularly when we are working as a board. Perhaps it is possible to distil objectively the conflict between Patrick and me into this opposition: his fear of scandal and of being caught literally wining and dining, perhaps also as a way of keeping me in my place as a new board member, set against my wish to build bridges with donors which certainly requires a figurative wining and dining. To solve this particular conundrum, any conversation we had to resolve it would need to find ways of discussing means and ends. The conversation would need to shine a light on both sets of anxieties which had

crystalized for both of us around the remark of the strip club and what I experienced as his inability to stay in relation with me more generally. This is a pattern I experienced more generally in board meetings and my relations with fundraising staff. The conversation about treating donors differently masked what may have been going on for Patrick as he tried to assess my political ambitions for being Chair of the board.

### **Returning to the narrative: Putting theory into practice**

Two months had passed since Patrick and I had spoken. His EA requested a meeting and suggested that he was happy to come to me. I acknowledged his considerate gesture by offering to meet on his turf.

I noticed that I have opened up a new-found curiosity and a consideration towards Patrick. This emerged from exploring ideas which point to the relational nature of what goes on in communicative interaction, in which there are no simple heroes and villains. It gave me insight into what was happening between us and the interdependency each was providing for the other and into our mutual needs for recognition.

We met in Patrick's office: the meeting appeared to be about Board memberships. He said that we did not have a suitable replacement for the Chair position but that there was a need to repopulate the Board and Council memberships since many were now on the new Alliance Board. He expressed his frustration about this new Alliance set up by John. He was treading carefully: he was struggling with words. Was he about to break the news of having selected someone from our existing Board? Was he concerned as to how I would react? He brought up Vikki's original plan for me to be the chair. I said that I was flattered by Vikki's intention but told him again that I had no desire to be her successor. He was relieved. He asked, "So I read the tea leaves right." Jokingly I added, "Ask me in a few years". This was my way of letting him know that I was happy with things as they were. But the meeting did not involve any news of an appointment; I was not certain what the meeting was about. Perhaps my continued enthusiasm, unaffected by Vikki's departure, surprised Patrick. Perhaps he wished to be sure he did not misread the situation which might have been interpreted as my ambition to become the Chairman.

Reflecting on the meeting, when Patrick described Vikki's intention, I realised that I had spoken first because I was afraid to hear what he had to say. I was afraid to find out that he didn't think me good enough. But if he did, I didn't want to hear it: that would put me in a conundrum. I would have felt obliged to accept a position for which I was not ready. I spared us both from a moment of feeling exposed. The remainder of the meeting had a lightness to it. I was no longer preoccupied with the concrete matter. What became important was my wishing to come to know Patrick. I let go of moments where a point might be lost in translation. Patrick disclosed the names of potential Board members and the skill which would enhance our existing Board members. They needed the opportunity to step up. I gave an example of our last Board meeting. We unanimously rejected a proposal from our communications team for promoting Mental Health Week. Directors felt rushed for a decision and questioned the ineffectiveness of such a costly exercise. One Director said that she would have been able to suggest a more effective alternative venue had she been consulted. This was a good example of the lack of sufficient time to give due consideration to matters at hand. I suggested to Patrick a setting aside of time for discussions. This would encourage Directors' engagement in the process, and would make them responsible for the successes or failures of ideas. This process should not sit entirely on the shoulders of the communications department. He took notes: he was taking me seriously. But towards the meeting's end as he recapped from his notes, it was clear that he was still crunching numbers. He thought I meant that he should ask the Board members for their preferences as to how and where the money should be spent in marketing campaigns.

I turned my focus to our dance of gestures and responses. I recognized myself through Patrick in this peculiar awkwardness between us. If I were to mute the sound, the scene began with a light stepping around each other. Each took turns as the other listened. There were moments of impatiently jumping in, feeling self-conscious for interrupting and being interrupted, followed by a polite backing down to allow the other to speak. At one particular moment Patrick lowered his head and covered his face with his hands. I was quick to back away from whatever I had bumped up against, but I saw his face begin to open. Towards the end, to my surprise as we said goodbye, we stood by the door for an extended moment. He talked about his love of cycling. We were getting to know each other in a different way.

## Conclusion

In the course of writing this project I have become more reflective about my practice. By paying attention to everyday encounters with other colleagues I have been working with, particularly key authority figures, I have tried to understand the exchanges more relationally. That is to say, by drawing on a mix of theorists, all of whom understand the self to be thoroughly social, I have been led to realisations both profound and confronting. I realise that my feelings of being used and dismissed reflect my own psychological issues: this is important experience to pay attention to, but it should not stop there. It requires me to imagine what might be going on for other people who provoke these feelings in me. It may reflect a transference process with an authority figure, as my therapeutic training might previously have led me to conclude; or, drawing on the perspective of complex responsive processes of relating, it may disclose a feature about the organisation and the relationship with its members which everyone is experiencing to a degree. Perhaps it is, in fact, all three. From the standpoint of a social behaviourist, Mead suggests that:

...an individual organism determines or seeks out in some sense its own environment by its sensitivity. The only environment to which the organism can react is one that its sensitivity reveals. (1934, p.245).

This passage shows Mead was heavily influenced by Darwin. Mead argues that we have probably stopped evolving physically but certainly not socially. The salient point here for me is to pay attention to the environments we find ourselves drawn to and to notice what it is that is provoked in us as a consequence. We seek a place where issues may be processed through the creative tension between the I/me and the we. My hope is that in paying attention to the I/me/we, and to the conflict and the struggle for recognition which ensues as a consequence, we may notice the potential for novelty emerging.

The exploration and potentially generative attempt to understand the tension are not about landing on some firm known. Rather, they thrust us further out into the stream onto a stepping stone which presages the next reflective moment. This process is kaleidoscopic. In a moment, a settled pattern of shapes and colours

becomes another pattern. The value lies in the momentary enlightenment which emerges during the disruption of the apparent elements and their mutability.

In this project I have described two or three micro-episodes of interaction with staff when I tried to negotiate my way into a new organisation with a new role. The transition immediately provoked habituated patterns of behaviour for me and provoked strong feelings, some of which I described in P1. These are to do with my ambivalence towards authority figures, the potential for feeling excluded, and for feeling shamed. Previously I would have taken a relatively individualistic view of what was going on and perhaps privileged my own experience of feeling used and dismissed. By drawing on Mead's theories of communication through gesture and response, Honneth's ideas of the struggle for recognition, and a social view of ethics, I have been able to find new potentialities for staying in future relation with whom I seek to co-operate. This is not to deny my own experience of feeling used and dismissed, but to use this as a starting point for further exploration. My ideas for creating relationships with donors which are more than instrumental have not yet gained acceptance by X Foundation, but I am hopeful that being able to take a relational view of what is going on will afford me more possibilities. I will explore these in Project 3.

## Project Three – Reciprocity and Face

### Introduction

In the previous project, I found myself engaged in power negotiations with the CEO and my mentor on the board, and I noticed how our perspectives on values differed. This involved me in the politics of the organisation, something I had so far been protected from by my Chair, and protected from in general in my previous organisational life, or perhaps I had chosen to ignore it. Non-engagement is also a form of politics. What also became apparent were our interdependencies: our mutual needs for recognition stirred by the Chair's departure. Through an exploration of the radically social ideas of Hegel, Elias, Mead, and Honneth, I developed a greater reflexivity towards my participation in the organisation I had just joined. They helped me better to understand the complex web of power: gesture and response, conflict, recognition and values. I was able to uncover the layers of my narratives and offer insights into the many ways of understanding experience in my everyday encounter with others. In this project, I turn my attention in my role as Director to the subject of mediating power and cultural diversity between my Chinese donors and X Foundation. Specifically, I look at those patterns of interaction which emerge in processes around gift-giving and how I play into them because I think they speak to my emerging theme of mutual recognition.

I have chosen two narratives both to explore and to illustrate this project.

### Narrative 1 - Scientific research driven by demands of donors

Last year soon after I joined the Board of the X Foundation, my immediate task/focus became soliciting potential donors for our upcoming fund-raising gala dinner in its second year of running. I hosted two tables of High Net Worth Individuals (HNWIs). During the evening, guests participated in tours of our research facilities, and teams of leading scientists described their research and engaged in a Q & A with potential donors. A major portion of the funds raised that evening was from my guests who had accepted the invitation with the tacit

understanding that they were expected to donate<sup>2</sup>. One major gift donor was a long-time friend<sup>3</sup>, Veronica, who donated \$70k to X Foundation. She had enjoyed the evening and was impressed by her tour given by one of the scientists.

In the subsequent months, Veronica expressed an interest in supporting research in Parkinson's Disease (PD) as a family legacy in memory of her late grandfather, who had suffered from it. Ronald<sup>4</sup> (Major Gifts Manager) met with Veronica after my introduction. He told me that he had worked to put a proposal together based on her feedback and interests. At the beginning of this year, we presented to Veronica a research proposal for PD. I was aware of this event, but I was surprised that I hadn't been asked to attend. I was then expecting Ronald to let me know how it all went. Two days later we had an exchange of texts. Ronald reported good news and bad news: Veronica did wish to donate but the way she wished was not workable. Ronald advised me that it was a question of logistics: he would resolve the matter. After a week, I sent another message to him. I suggested that it might be helpful to describe the meeting with Veronica: she and I had planned to meet the following day. Should the topic of this proposal come up in our conversation, I wanted to prepare myself for a balanced viewpoint. Ronald returned my call promptly but was flustered. The presentation went well until it took a bad turn at the very end. According to Ronald, this research proposal presented to Veronica 'based on her interests' involved a recruitment of 250 patients with an estimated cost of \$3 million dollars. Veronica indicated towards the end of the meeting she might be inclined to put up funding for 25 subjects. Ronald assumed the rationale behind that was Veronica's willingness to commit to \$300K, 10% of the proposal. He added that Patrick (CEO) was now considering a 'counter proposal' (amending the research) to accommodate Veronica. On the other hand, Gavin (Ronald's immediate boss) added

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<sup>2</sup> Philanthropy in this form is a form of social networking and way of accumulating favours by supporting each other's charity in the business arena. In Chinese it is a way "to give face" to your host.

<sup>3</sup> V is Chinese. We have no business dealings, but we share a social circle of Chinese relations. She donates a significant amount to numerous charities annually and has, over the years, supported many of mine.

<sup>4</sup> As discussed in one of the narratives in P 2, Ronald is the relationship manager who liaises with donors. He relies on me (as a Director) to make an introduction to some of the major gift donors.

to the pressure on Ronald by telling him to just get it done. My interpretation of this was to keep Veronica engaged to commit in any way she was able.

### **Reflecting on the proposal**

Ronald had not consulted me or disclosed the amount of the proposal until it was declined. I watched it unfold: the fundraising team were inexperienced and seemed overly eager. It was obvious that, based on her late grandfather's lived experience, Veronica's interests in falls detection and sleep disturbance were driving the design of this research. Whilst I was not privy to the facts from Patrick or Gavin, the way Ronald conveyed it as being 'a matter of logistics' was disturbing. It seemed an attempt to accommodate donors and/or potentially to protect his own sense of insecurity of not knowing how to manage this situation. There might also exist a culture of gender 'arrogance', in the context of predominantly male authority figures (CEO and his boss) needing help from women (the donor and myself), which might be uncomfortable.

### **My meeting with Veronica after the \$3M proposal came apart**

At the meeting with Veronica, I took her lead on what she wanted to discuss. It was important that she knew that it made no difference to me whether she chose to be involved with X Foundation or not since we had a relationship which predated my becoming a board member. Veronica did eventually raise the topic as she began to critique the proposal. She thought the recruitment process was unintelligent and made suggestions for a more efficient screening process. She also found the design, which was looking at falls and balance among PD patients, lacked understanding of the postural instability brought on by PD. I listened as Veronica demonstrated her informed opinions about recent findings of the research. At the time, I wasn't able to make good sense of it, apart from being aware that Veronica wanted my recognition or my admiration of her as intelligent and capable. I did wonder why this conversation on the specifics of effective research was not being directed to Ronald who had presented the proposals to her or with the lead scientist(s) if she genuinely wanted to challenge them. There were other areas where I thought her views were simplistic. I could easily have been caught up in a clinical conversation but, instead, I found myself tongue-tied. I was curious as to what was actually happening between us. I felt a sense of shame or embarrassment. I felt responsible for bringing her into something amateurish and unsophisticated. I told her that this experience

offered much to learn for X Foundation and for myself, and that it might be useful to take this up with the Foundation. I said, half-jokingly, that if and when she received a revised proposal, we should send it off to the Fox Foundation (a specialist PD charity) as scientists applying for a grant. We could see in their feedback how we fared. I was showing my loyalty and implicit trust in our longstanding relationship as against my new, and yet to be firmly established, relationship with X Foundation.

### **My follow-on conversation with Ronald**

After meeting Veronica, I thought over what my involvement should be and how best to assist Ronald. He was urgently seeking my counsel. This time, he was forthcoming: Gavin had since put forward a revised proposal for \$1M. Ronald was uncomfortable: what did I think? I thought the best advice I could offer was to address Veronica's concern for a more efficient, less costly screening process as the way forward. I certainly did not want to add to his misery to convey the negative sentiment which Veronica had expressed about the initial proposal. It could be counterproductive and possibly would result in shaming the person who took this initiative or who, without due consideration, had put it into practice.

Earlier in my P2, I gained a new perspective in understanding the behaviour of both staff and management. Not involving me in their negotiation with donors, prompted me to see X Foundation's desire to secure personal relationships with donors as a way of gaining recognition in their own right. I was disappointed that they didn't feel the need to consult me in helping them understand Veronica and her needs. The Chinese cultural aspect of *face* and reciprocity would be one where they had little understanding: X Foundation is a white, Anglo-Saxon organization dominated by men in executive positions.

At that point, my only suggestion for Ronald was that it would perhaps be better not to go against what Gavin had asked. I reassured Ronald that my relationship with Veronica would not be compromised. In my evaluation of the situation, I thought it best to remain on the periphery rather than risk stumbling into circumstances I did not fully understand. I didn't wish to be caught up in clarification of or in salvaging a process from which I had been excluded because I didn't know what game was being played. I felt at risk of inadvertently exposing someone (within the organization and possibly even Veronica) to being shamed unnecessarily or unjustly. The fact that X Foundation had not requested my involvement until the very late

stage, (other than Ronald and in his case, perhaps out of fear for his own survival), indicates to me that it was a reactive move on his part. I am certain that he was unaware of the risk to which he was exposing himself with management by disclosing to me their internal conversations regarding the revised proposal as an overly eager attempt to prompt Veronica to commit. My meeting with Veronica also indicated she did not need my intervention<sup>5</sup>. If she did, I would have followed it up as I would have thought it was my obligation in return for introducing her.

### **The turn of events**

A month went by after the revised proposal had been sent. To Ronald's frustration, Veronica had not responded to any of his correspondence. It was early April, and our third gala event was imminent, this time with the theme of PD. I thought that, when they decided on this theme, they believed that Veronica would agree to donate. They had been anticipating the announcement to be that evening in the hope of rallying other potential donors to follow suit. Ronald was nervous that Veronica might have abandoned the idea of donating during the process with the failed proposals. He asked if I could ring her to gauge if she had in fact lost interest in X Foundation. Veronica and I then brought each other up to date on the events of the past months. I also told her my dog had passed away. She became supportive. To my surprise, she accepted my invitation immediately: I was moved by her gesture. This time, I made explicitly clear that she was not to feel any obligation or pressure to donate but to attend as my companion. It was a good evening, and I seated Veronica next to me amongst my other guests. The following day, I received a phone text from Veronica thanking me for a wonderful evening with a screen shot of the form she filled in to donate \$200k to support the recruitment of a Chair in Parkinson's Disease Research.

### **Reflections**

Neither Veronica nor Ronald had commented further on the revised proposal, but Ronald appeared perturbed by any mention of Veronica. He begrudged the fact that he had spent so much time on her proposal and seemed to have moved on to other potential donors in my contacts. I believe there were many elements at play which

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<sup>5</sup> I mentioned previously 'we' would look at the revised proposal together and joked about sending it to the Fox foundation but as yet, she hasn't raised the second proposal with me.

led to Veronica's decision to donate. As mentioned in P2, in any activity power is experienced by people interacting as a dynamic, relational phenomenon. In the world of NGO/recipient donor relationships, what is being negotiated in the power relationship is the need for financial support. In this situation, Veronica, as the donor, was in a greater power position, but in another layer of complexity her relationship with X Foundation was mediated by my position/relationship with her. To borrow Elias's term, the 'figuration' of my relationship with Veronica which predated this episode was making the game complex.

In his exploration of game models, Elias (1978, p.78-103) drew the conclusion that people, or groups, form power figurations in which they depend on each other to perform particular functions. Power is, therefore, played out in dynamics of enabling and constraining each other in relation to needs: money, status, love, knowledge, recognition or other elements.

Veronica, I would imagine, was constrained in the way she acted towards X Foundation because she had our relationship to consider. She could have easily rejected them if she saw fit, without any need for justification if I were not part of the process. My presence constrained (and enabled) her in the way she behaved towards them. She might have had concerns as to how it would affect our relationship or how I would interpret or judge her.

In writing this, it became clearer to me that at the time I felt embarrassed, as did she. While she became in an instant very 'informed with scientific knowledge' in her critique of the PD proposal, I became 'stupid'. I felt unable to respond to some of her more simplistic viewpoints. I felt indebted to her. I believe the cultural aspect that Veronica and I share, the 'Chineseness' of our relationship, played a role in influencing our way of behaviour in this situation. It was this factor, our shared culture and heritage, that has led me to another set of understandings which have helped me understand and contextualise my cultural heritage.

### Face as a motivating factor in gift exchange

In *The Gift* (1922/1990), his most influential work on reciprocity, Marcel Mauss refers to the universal parallels in the act of gift-giving. I will draw on some of Mauss' findings together with the work of Canadian-American sociologist Goffman's (1956)

notion of 'face-work' to explore some of the ritual elements that motivate reciprocity. I will then layer that with earlier scholars and Chinese intellectuals, some of whom Goffman had drawn on, to provide a cultural context in understanding the embodied sense of embarrassment or of shame in which Veronica and I were possibly engaged. Following that, I will apply my understanding of Bourdieu's concepts of habitus, capital and field in his treatment of gift theory to pave the way for another complex Chinese relational concept: *guanxi*.

In this section, I will draw on parallels between Mauss' finding and Chinese culture, in particular of *face*, as the motivating factor in exchanging gifts. I will then explore an aspect present in communication, specifically the implicit aspect of face to face interaction which Goffman describes.

Marcel Mauss, primarily known as a French ethnologist and a historian of religion, was a nephew of Emile Durkheim, Head of the French school of sociology. Mauss was particularly interested in the heuristic value in the study of elementary forms of social patterns. He analyzed social functions of institutions and studied the mechanisms of social cohesion (Fournier, 1994). Despite living in Durkheim's shadow, Mauss was nonetheless able to distinguish himself from his uncle.

He acknowledged that society was built on solidarity; but he believed that it also requires reciprocity for its survival, and though maintenance of the social order requires consensus, it also depends on the interpenetration of different social groups. (Fournier, 1994, p.3)

According to Mauss, it is through the relational reciprocity, negotiating the acceptable norm of interpersonal behaviour, that we can achieve social cohesion. *The Gift* (1922/1990) begins by describing the native North American potlatch (in essence, to feed and to consume) as an extreme form of a total system of giving that is found in every region of the world. Mauss' exposition of the forms of potlatch across that region identified the three major themes which are universal: the obligation to give, to receive and to reciprocate. He describes the rendering of 'total services': how gift exchanges are not merely material obligations but carry an emotional component added to the motives of reciprocity.

Mauss' observations ring true in terms of my relationship with Veronica: the emotional aspect to which he draws attention to is very much imbued in children as a part of a Chinese cultural upbringing. The positive emotions induced by reciprocity through *renqing* (human feelings) are one way of cultivating *ganqing* (sentiment or feelings of emotional attachment). Chen & Chen (2004) explain the components and interpret the meanings:

*Qing* by itself means feeling but takes on different meanings when put in different contexts. For instance, the compound of *ganqing* emphasizes the affective attachment between two people but the compound of *renqing* emphasizes the sense of obligation owed to each other.... *renqing* is built up through the exchange of gifts for events such as marriages, birthdays, and funerals. (p. 314)

*Renqing* denotes a complicated social relationship in the Chinese culture. It often conveys how deeply people are affected by reciprocity as a moral process. Mauss captures the many facets of the gift-exchange that also depicts the nature of Chinese cultural practices. He writes:

... such exchanges are acts of politeness: banquets, rituals, military services, women, children, dances, festivals, and fairs, in which economic transaction is only one element, in which the passing on of wealth is only one feature of a much more general and enduring contract. Finally, these total services and counter-services are committed to in a somewhat voluntary form by presents and gifts; although in the final analysis they are strictly compulsory, on pain of private and public warfare. (1990, p.7)

In this description, Mauss is referring to the cultural etiquette of belonging to a particular group, clan or tribe. It inevitably entails adherence to the 'norm' as the pain of violating would be to have to succumb to some form of private or public humiliation. In his treatise on values, Joas (2000) makes a distinction between norms and values. He suggests that values are compelling in a voluntary, committed sense. He describes them paradoxically as 'voluntary compulsions'. They are, therefore, intimately connected with ethics. On the other hand, norms are experienced as compelling in a restrictive sense and are, therefore, intimately connected with morals. These culturally compulsory practices of reciprocity disguised as voluntary are, in fact, heavily laden with moral judgement. Mauss' depiction of the gift economy makes visible the interplay of norms and moral obligations which Joas

(2000) describes. The actual idea of the gift exchange comprises all the elements, the symbolic, interpersonal, and economic that the actual act of gift represents. It makes people more aware of what they are doing (Mauss, 1990).

Mauss also points to motivating factors in gift exchange such as honour, prestige and respect. He identifies *face* as fundamentally important not only in Chinese culture but in North America and other regions of the world. He writes:

Each Kwakiutl and Haida (North American First Nations) noble has exactly the same idea of 'face' as has the Chinese man of letters or officer. It is said of one of the great mythical chiefs who gave no potlatch that he had a 'rotten face'. (1990, p.50).

Here the expression is even more exact than in China. In addition, in Maori law, the fact that nothing is given in return entails the loss of mana, of *face*, as the Chinese say (ibid., p.113).

Despite the fact that the concept of *face* is associated with the Chinese, the phrase 'to lose face' (*diu lian*) made its way into the English language and continues to be used in situations unrelated to Chinese culture<sup>6</sup>. Another such example, adopted from its Chinese and pidgin English roots, is the phrase 'long time no see' (Andre, 2013). Beside the fact that English gained an expression 'to lose face', it also coined a second phrase, 'to save face', which has no equivalent in Chinese. While the original, 'to lose face', refers to a post-factum situation, 'to save face' is instrumental with a negative connotation (ibid.). The two colloquial expressions originated as a stereotyping of the Chinese by the British to depict the great lengths to which someone will go to avoid 'losing face' associating it with a lack of respect for the truth (Davis, 1836, Smith, 1894, cited in Andre, 2013).

In *The Chinese* (1836, cited in Andre, 2013), Davis discussed the manners and customs of Chinese people. Similar to the ethnographic work of Mauss, Davis recounted the niceties of gift-giving; the courtesies involved in 'excessive' politeness at Chinese banquets. He described how the Chinese would consider it rude to refuse a request

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<sup>6</sup> Numerous terms were introduced into English in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, often via Portuguese, where Chinese trade in British colonial territories, in particular Macao and Canton (Guangzhou) became the front line of linguistic interaction between various European languages and Chinese.

<sup>7</sup> The earliest appearance given as example under the newly updated entry on 'face' in the Oxford English Dictionary is from 1899 (Andre, 2013).

directly and would, therefore, lie. This is of particular interest in providing insight into the awkwardness experienced between Veronica and me. This depiction resonated as I thought about my own upbringing: similarly I would feel an agonising discomfort in rejecting someone. To this day, I go to great lengths to avoid such a situation. I appreciated the shocked surprise Veronica would have felt when she received the '\$3M' proposal from X Foundation and the subsequent obligation she would have experienced being placed upon her.

This brief exploration of *face* and reciprocity shows that the solicitation of gifts and the grounds upon which gifts may be given are subtle and nuanced, particularly from a Chinese perspective. I think that much of this nuance is invisible to my colleagues in X Foundation, so the potential for giving offence is great. Although gift-giving and reciprocity is universal, it is experienced everywhere differently according to local context and expectations.

### **Face-work**

Having explored Mauss and his understanding of *face* as one of the motivating factors in gift-giving, I now wish to examine the implicit aspect in our interaction that then unfolded. In *On Face-Work*, his consideration of 'micro-sociology', the study of face-to-face interaction in natural settings, Goffman describes *face* as an emotive representation of self, delineated in terms of approved social attributes. He describes the development of 'lines' and how they become the basis, essentially, for individuals in social situations. He writes:

The term *face* may be defined as the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact. (1967, p.5)

In a footnote, Goffman acknowledges that he had read Smith<sup>8</sup> (1894), whom I reference above. It is highly likely that Smith influenced his metaphors drawn from theatrical performance. Goffman accords the Chinese *face* as a mask that they wear and refers to a 'line' as something that someone 'tends to act out', the role he is

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<sup>8</sup> Arthur Smith (1894), one of the earliest English authors on this subject argues that *face* is based on a love of theatricality among the Chinese; 'face is a mask that the Chinese wear, and as such it is contrasted with 'reality' and 'fact', which are associated with Westerners (p.16-17, cited in Andre, 2013, p.70)

assumed to have taken on for himself (1967, p.11). I think there are similarities between Goffman's idea of face-work and Mead's theory of the self, concerning the paradox of the 'I' and the 'me'. It is the generalized attitudes of the others we assume as our own to which we find ourselves adjusting. This changes ourselves in this co-operative process within the community to which we belong.

While the concern for face focuses the attention of the person on the current activity, he must, however, take into consideration his place in the social world beyond it.  
(Goffman, 1967, p.7)

Here in particular, Goffman seems to be describing the type of negotiations Mead (1934) refers to as the I/me dialectic. In Mead's terms, if it is in our interest to belong to a particular group, we tend to assume more of the 'me', the perception of the generalized other in that group, in order better to fit in.

I am taking up these ideas in relation to what I described above and in reflecting on the gala fund-raising evening. Ronald and his bosses interacted very little with Veronica and instead gave their attention to some of my other guests. This might have further evoked a loss of face in Veronica. She may have felt less honoured, or even excluded. If these negative feelings were to be publicly expressed, the situation would lead to further damage to her *face*. To exhibit negative emotions overtly is, from a Chinese perspective, particularly for women, not only undesirable but shameful. To borrow Goffman's term, the tension that arises in personal experience, can lead one to feeling literally 'out of face'. Goffman uses the term 'poise' to refer to the capacity to suppress and conceal any tendency to become shamefaced during encounters with others as he writes:

...for through poise the person controls his embarrassment and hence the embarrassment that he and others might have over his embarrassment. Whether or not the full consequences of face-saving actions are known to the person who employs them, they often become habitual and standardized practices; they are like traditional plays in a game or traditional steps in a dance.....It is as if face, by its very nature, can be saved only in a certain numbers of ways, and as if each social grouping must make its selections from this single matrix of possibilities. (1967, p.13)

The appropriate presentation of our *face* in public is so ingrained and habituated in us from our Chinese upbringing that we become, effectively, our own jailer in

making whatever we are doing be consistent with *face*. In *The Civilizing Process*, Elias (2000) described the bruising social process which children go through in order to self-regulate and bring their behaviour into line with social expectations. “A wall of deep-rooted fears” which operate blindly, formed by habit and as a consequence of the fears create “collisions with social reality” (ibid, p. 368). The struggle we find ourselves in in our everyday interactions with others can feel very constraining because of the small number of *faces* which we feel, as a result of our socializing process, are available to us. In this instance, it is possible Veronica might have abstained from certain actions to avoid enduring further difficult circumstances or, as Elias has pointed out, she might also have avoided a habitual response guided by affect in situations which evoke a fear of possible exclusion in the future.

But Goffman argues that, ‘an encounter with people whom he will not have dealings with again leaves him free to take the high line that the future will discredit’ (1967, p.7). He claims that, in situations where we have no intention to remain in relationship with the other, we have more freedom to act ‘out of line’ without the fear of being judged. For example, Veronica could have left or snubbed X Foundation as they would have had little importance for her. Veronica would have taken into consideration the possible loss of face for me as her host and for herself which puts at risk our relationship. MacGowan (1912), another one of the three sources cited by Goffman, noted that ‘because the Chinese are conscious of their own face needs, they can be extraordinarily sensitive to the face needs of others, going to great lengths to help others preserve their face’ (cited in St Andre, 2013, p.70). Veronica was not only saving her own face but also ‘giving face’ to me.

I am convinced that my colleagues at X Foundation would have had very little understanding of this complex game of *face* in which Veronica and I were engaged, or would have understood it in different terms. The Chinese cultural aspect is certainly one which had been overlooked not only by my colleagues, but also by me which only with the benefit of hindsight had I come to explore. Meanwhile, the culture in X Foundation (briefly touched upon in P2) seemed to be an avoidance of any exploration of relationships. It focused instead on a more instrumental, perhaps transactional way of understanding and working with people. In one conversation with me, Patrick expressed the opinion that, whatever it might be, the amount of the initial gift donation reveals the individual’s capacity to donate by tenfold. It is not

surprising, based on this assumption, that a \$3M proposal was presented to Veronica after receiving her initial 70K donation. This rational and calculating approach to understanding human behaviour neglects the relational aspect and/or the game of social relationships. I would like to draw on Bourdieu to explicate further what I think are the more generalized elements at play.

### *Illusio*

Bourdieu offers a game analogy in another conception of the way we become caught up in our socially constituted interests. He drew on Huizinga, a Dutch historian and cultural theorist, for his term, *homo ludens*, to describe the notion of social reproduction as constituted by one's engagement with the game. By taking the game seriously, we give rise to *illusio* (Bourdieu, 1998, p.78). *Illusio* derives from the Latin word *ludus* (game). It refers to the fact of being caught up in and by the game, of believing the game is worth the effort (Bourdieu, 1998, p.76). This happens when players in the field attribute importance to a social game, with their dispositions to recognize the game and recognize the stakes (socially constituted interests) involved. Relating this to the complex web of interdependence between Veronica, myself and my colleagues, I believe Veronica's involvement in X Foundation is because she is invested primarily in her relationship with me.

If I apply Bourdieu's use of the game analogy with Goffman's argument of the 'lines' we assume, together with Elias's notion of power, it would mean something like this: the less the investment in the game, the less is at stake, and thus particularly when you have something that others need, the more power you have over them. There is more freedom to act out of line and exert power in a relationship which has little relevance for you. In this light, perhaps, Veronica's choice to exclude me from some meetings gave her more choice of 'lines' and more power. She was, therefore, better able to control the game.

All of the above has been an exploration of a clash of cultures. What I have difficulty in grasping is what type of game/s my colleagues at X Foundation believe they are playing. I am baffled by their behaviour and what seems to me their neglect of nurturing relationships. As mentioned in P2, an existing NGO/donor demanded to feel more 'loved' before considering a further commitment. The message is crystal clear about the donor's desire to feel valued, and about feelings of being used and

dismissed after a gift had been solicited. I have been trying better to understand an organisation which so much needs donations to survive but fails to take into account the needs of the donors except to feel righteous about their mission. And to presume the donors would, therefore, feel a sense of satisfaction from donating to such a worthy cause. I will take this up again as to what might be other possible reasons, other than perhaps insouciance, in my final reflections after the next narrative.

### **Interim summary**

I have so far explored the concept of reciprocity through Mauss' anthropological examination of the universal nature of gift-giving and the mutual obligation it then implies; I have used Goffman's facework to help illuminate the implicit aspects of communication which Veronica and I shared as a result of our culture, gender and disposition. These concepts are very familiar to me, and lend extra detail in particular to Elias' perspective on the radical interdependence of people. This would be similar for most Chinese for whom it has been a way of life for millennia. Yet in the West, which has become more individualised over the last few decades, this has led to forgetting the relational ties which bind. Before introducing another complex relational concept of *guanxi*, the motivations behind the gift-culture, I would like to offer a brief overview of the social matrix of relationships and connections that dominate Chinese culture by shedding light on the type of relationship I share with Veronica as a generalizable phenomenon and not one unique to this narrative.

### **Chinese relationships**

Chinese has a phrase: *li shang wanglai*. It is taken from the *Analects* of Confucius: 'for the sake of propriety / etiquette (*li*), people must engage in social intercourse (*wanglai*)- or giving and repaying is the thing to be attended to'. Although it relates to etiquette and propriety, in *The Book of Rites* (*Li Yi*, a book by Confucius), this teaching applies to every aspect of social life (Chang, 2016, p.106). Chinese society is defined by relations and obligations to our primary relationships because our obligations extend from family to society (Bian, 2006). To this day children in Chinese families are taught to address friends/acquaintances of parents as Uncle and Aunt. The Chinese underline the importance of this interrelatedness by extending their relations beyond their families, constructing pseudo families with outsiders.

If I were to interpret the above Chinese phrase, and add to it other similar injunctions, my translation would be this: in order for one to be included and accepted in the community upon which one is dependent, one must learn a correct way of being, that is, to attend to relationships with a sense of duty, obligations, humility and generosity. This is achieved by giving and repaying with abundance, and, most of all, by showing gratitude and respect for position (knowing one's place). Furthermore, having a firm grasp of *li* (propriety and etiquette), brings prestige and honour, or what Bourdieu (1986) might refer to as a form of cultural capital, to one's own family, which can then be, refined and cultivated amongst one's community. This mirrors the solidarity and social order that Mauss advocates (to be discussed in a later section).

The line between the teaching of moral conduct and subordination is a blurred one and is not the same as having values. The distinction by Joas (2000), drawing on Dewey, to which I alluded earlier, is that norms are inseparable from but different from values. Values are 'voluntary compulsions': idealisations we choose to have, or perhaps which choose us. These culturally compulsory practices of reciprocity are experienced in a restrictive way, filled with moral obligations and judgement. By making more explicit the character of Chinese culture, I am drawing attention to the compulsory practices of what it takes to be part of a group. The norms of interpersonal behaviour / etiquette of reciprocity are necessary to ensure one's survival (Mauss, 1990) in Chinese culture. But I am also making a parallel with the negotiation I have been going through in order to become a member of the X Foundation board. In my interactions particularly with the previous chair, Vikki, and my dealings with Patrick, the CEO, I have been trying to understand what is required of me to belong, and how I might contribute.

### Guanxi in Chinese Culture

I now contrast the Chinese concept of *guanxi* with Bourdieu's notion of capital and fields to unravel another layer of structure in examining the game in which Veronica and I were caught up.

In recent times, *li shang wanlai* (for the sake of propriety, giving and repaying is the thing to be attended to), the phrase previously described, and which is grounded in moral conduct, is rarely heard; it has been replaced by *guanxi*, specifically, a Chinese

idiom for social networks. It often relates to the reproduction of power and the everyday practice of Chinese social relationships (Zhai, 2005). Chinese philosopher, Liang (1893-1988, cited in King, 1985, p.63) argued that Chinese society is neither individual-based nor society-based, but relation-based. The focus is not fixed on any particular individual, but on the particular nature of the relations:

Chinese *guanxi* building can be characterised as ego-centred social engineering of relational building ...based on shared "attributes" such as kinship, locality, surname, and so on, which are the building blocks the individual employs to establish "pluralistic" identifications with multiple individuals and groups. (King, 1991, p.79).

This reliance on social relations, the embeddedness and the notion that Chinese people have a natural tendency to manufacture reciprocal obligation, is fundamental to Chinese culture (Bian, 1994). The art and etiquette of *guanxi* rests implicitly (rather than explicitly) on mutual interest and benefit. Once *guanxi* is recognized between two people, each can ask or offer a favour with the obligation or expectation of a return of the favour sometime in the future (mirroring the idea of Social Exchange Theory to be discussed later on). *Guanxi* can, therefore, be understood as the means to exchange or to increase one's capital.

### **Accumulating capital**

For me the Chinese concept of *guanxi* is a very close approximation of Bourdieu's notion of accumulating capital. Bourdieu understood social positions to be organized predominantly by two types of capital: economic and cultural (Waquant, 2006). The dominant class has the potential to possess a large volume of either capital in contrast to the dominated class deprived of both. Amongst the dominant class, those who possess more economic capital are business owners or people in high executive positions vis-a-vis those who possess more cultural assets such as intellectuals and artists. Maintaining or improving one's position in the social space is achieved not only by increasing what one already has in abundance but also by pursuing strategies of conversion of one form of capital into the other. The objective is to be even more distinguished amongst one's own class and, furthermore, to impose the hierarchy of capital most favourable to one's own endowment (ibid). I have already provided some background knowledge to understanding the complex concept of *guanxi*. This aspect of my connection with Veronica, tightly held as it is by our culture, means an implicit understanding of the game in which we were

engaged. Rather than being about economic gains, our exchange of gifts, favours and obligations is about recognition: symbolic capital. In essence, symbolic capital means the capital of recognition (Bourdieu, 1979). We were engaged in the mutual exchange of recognition.

By contrast, I find myself temporarily wrong-footed in my relationships with my Anglo colleagues in X Foundation, which seem to rest on a different set of understandings about what is important in our exchanges, particularly in our relationships with donors.

### 'Reciprocity of Face' – one good turn deserves another

I am now combining the concept of *face* and reciprocity and the way they are both deployed in Chinese culture. I do this to understand better what was happening in our particular figuration around X Foundation.

The most important intangible gift exchange in the Chinese culture is in the form of *face*. In the cultivation of *guanxi* through the exchange of gifts or favours between two parties, it is of critical importance to avoid causing undue embarrassment or humiliation. In the Chinese language, the two terms used for *face* (*mian-zi* and *lian*) commonly convey status, prestige, and respect, as well as a social sanction for enforcing moral standards and an internalized sanction (Hu, 1944, p.45). The key point in the concept of *face* is one's reputation and its regulatory mechanism. Face functions in a way similar to Mead's I/me dialectic: we struggle to keep individuality and interdependence in relation.

I now return to my meeting with Veronica, when she became in an instant very knowledgeable and capable, and I became tongue tied, not knowing how best to engage with her. From a phenomenological perspective, the acute sense of shame which emerged in our experience, based on my understanding of Mead's gesture and response, was possibly co-created. The awkwardness between us was difficult to put into words. Reflecting on it now (it was pointed out to me by my learning set that I have a hypervigilant sensor for shame), the indebtedness and gratitude could simply be my habitual way of responding to situations. Drawing on Smith (1894), Goffman points out the Chinese usage 'to give face' is to arrange for another to take a better line than he might otherwise have been able to take (1967, p.9). I tend to

gravitate towards protecting the face of others. This could be a part of the ritual code of gift-giving in the form of face.

Perhaps Veronica was caught in a position where the amount they asked for was either outrageous in her opinion or a long way from what she had indicated to my colleagues in their meetings. By not becoming involved, I could have spared us from any mutual embarrassment. Because I told her I didn't care whether she gave or not, and because I allowed her to feel the freedom as I trusted her judgement, she reciprocated by coming to the event. Whilst I am not privy to why she did what she did, Veronica also placed me in a power position over the men. First, she stopped responding to Ronald (exerting her power position) and then she arrived at my invitation and followed that up with the largest single donation. She very neatly managed to achieve two ends at once: I now also feel indebted to her for making me look good. On reflection, my colleagues had played a very clumsy game with Veronica, something they could have avoided by apprising me of their negotiations.

### **Reciprocity – the temporal dimension plays a crucial role in Chinese culture**

As pointed out earlier, Veronica's generosity to attend and donate is sustained by our strong ties through the accruals of *renqing*: the exchange of gifts and favours guided by the norms of interpersonal behaviour / etiquette of reciprocity of our culture.

Chinese culture is accustomed to gift-giving. Continuation of reciprocity leading to uncertainty is avoided as the parties involved are taking turns at being in debt, and the relationship grows along with the exchange of gifts and favour (Yang, 1994). In saying that, one also has to anticipate losing out on an investment. It seems the concept of reciprocity has its own set of Western cultural distinctives. I wonder whether Western culture is more familiar with the practice of 'immediate' reciprocity as distinct from the 'time-delay' reciprocity, as discussed by Mauss, to which the Chinese or some of the ancient cultures are accustomed.

When they offered to announce Veronica's gift donation publicly on the evening, Ronald and his bosses made an assumption that it would be an incentive to entice her. This brings to mind Mauss' description of the most primitive form of exchange, the barter regime of immediate exchange of goods and services as the more appropriate depiction of what was going on. I believe that, inadvertently, they had

insulted her. As it emerged, Veronica made her donation the following day - after the event. In the *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, (1977), and following from Mauss, Bourdieu focuses on the separation in time of successive gift-giving: the gift appears to be an isolated act of generosity. The operation of gift-exchange, Bourdieu writes, 'presupposes (individual and collective) misrecognition of the reality of the objective "mechanism," of the exchange, a reality that an immediate response brutally exposes.' But he goes on:

If the system is to work, the agents must not be entirely unaware of the truth of their exchanges, which is made explicit.... while at the same time they must refuse to know and above all to recognize it. In short, everything takes place as if agents' practice, and in particular manipulation of *time*, were organized exclusively with a view to concealing from themselves and from others the truth of their practice...".  
(Bourdieu, 1977, p.6)

As Bourdieu points out, it is all a question of style, the choice of timing and occasion, so that the same act can have a particular meaning and unfolding. In this instance, X Foundation's attempt at 'immediate reciprocity', the making explicit of instrumental goals, crudely violates the art and etiquette of gift-giving where eagerness to discharge one's obligation is considered a form of ingratitude (1977, p.6). In contrast I am proposing that Ronald and his bosses have a more simplistic, instrumental view of philanthropy.

### **A sudden turn**

Ronald resigned<sup>9</sup> and Gavin (Ronald's boss) has taken over the responsibility for major gift donors. Interestingly, twelve months on from writing this narrative, one of our research scientists has received a major grant to develop a prototype of a garment to assist PD patients. We were very excited to share this news with Veronica. Gavin took a different approach from Ronald. He worked very closely with me and consulted me as we invited Veronica for a visit, predominantly to thank her and to reassure her that her donation had been put to good use. This meeting went very well. Veronica became excited after the demonstration; she voluntarily offered further funding of \$200K per year for the next two years and proposed commercialising this product to the public. Veronica expressed an interest and had

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<sup>9</sup> Ronald's resignation was unrelated to this incident. His disclosure of dissatisfaction with his bosses was mentioned in P2.

requested to sit on the council to supervise this project in person. In my private meeting with her, she had requested that I also join her on this scientific committee. She asked for my reassurance that I had no plans of stepping down and of leaving her on her own as Director once my term was over. I gave her my word that I would definitely remain at X Foundation while she was involved but perhaps not directly with this project. I would not be involved with her idea for a company. Patrick was hesitant to embark on the business aspect of the project, an area outside of X Foundation's expertise, but, once again, everyone became very excited. Similar to the previous time, it prompted Gavin and the team to be very busy in preparing the proposal. This time I was consulted throughout the process and agreed to it before the proposal was presented to Veronica.

To everyone's disappointment, Veronica stepped back from the deal at the very last minute. Instead of responding to the scientists or Gavin, she rang me and offered \$50K. She had realised during this process that it would be too time consuming and that she was already too busy. I didn't apply any pressure but thanked her for her very generous offer. I said that I understood completely. It had been a fortnight that we were kept waiting for this \$50K. Gavin's main concern was that it would be a second blow of disappointment for the scientists. The conversation was uncomfortable and upsetting for both Gavin and me: we did not understand what was happening. I suggested it would be unfair for anyone else to call Veronica but me. Reluctantly I made the call. We had some casual exchanges and I reminded her about the donation. I had to control my emotions and my eagerness for a better explanation, and to express my disappointment in how unprofessional this behaviour was. The money appeared two weeks after she made the commitment. It is beyond the scope of this project to explore the reasons for all of this other than to say that there another game has emerged. We were all left perplexed.

To my surprise, Gavin expressed gratitude for my support. He behaved very differently from what I was expecting: it was he who consoled me. The disappointment in that moment brought about a sense of loneliness. I asked Gavin if there were anyone supporting him (including Patrick). His concern was focussed on the team of scientists who were competing and seeking support and continuity for their survival. I took the opportunity to query the politics within X Foundation around how funding is prioritized amongst the scientists. His answer surprised me:

“It is just the way it is in the research sector; it comes with the territory and everyone is competing for funding. It is an isolating environment, every man for himself”.

Perhaps it is this very competitive, individualised culture in X Foundation which I have found so difficult to understand, despite my many years living as a naturalised immigrant to Australia.

### **Interim**

Before continuing onto my second narrative, I would like to acknowledge the extensive research being carried out in the area of philanthropy and to clarify my own position as to where I sit within this paradigm.

### **Individual versus social in charitable giving**

A large body of research is available in the social sciences on philanthropy. One recent meta-study reviewed 500 articles researching the determinants of charitable giving from many perspectives: marketing, economics, psychology, sociology, social psychology and biology. The authors arrived at eight predictors of philanthropy (Wiepking & Bekkers, 2012). These are the eight mechanisms identified: awareness of need; solicitation; cost and benefits; altruism; reputation; psychological benefits; values; and efficacy. The factors moderating these eight may include, for example, situational conditions and psychological benefits which might weaken or strengthen their effect. The focus ultimately lies in the causal inferences of the individual’s determinants for giving. The authors concluded that it was impossible to capture in one elegant model all the motivations that underlie the charitable action of any given individual. A philanthropic act is commonly the result of multiple mechanisms operating at once.

There is, however, another school of thought which shares characteristics of Mauss’ and Bourdieu’s treatment of gift theory. Social Exchange Theory (SET) is a cognitive theory which assumes that individuals make a cost/benefit calculation about the advantages of giving or not. Mathur (1996) used cost/benefit analysis as one of the mechanisms in exchange theory. The proposition is that donors want to maximize the rewards they receive from giving: rewards should exceed costs. This corresponds to one of the key tenets of SET (Blau, 1964, cited in Bock et al. 2018). In the same study, Bock et al. (2018) used SET as a theoretical foundation to explain why

materialism and charitable giving can coincide. They suggested that a materialistic person may be generous due to egotistic motivations rather than agapic, self-sacrificial, or more altruistic motivations. Pitt et al. (2001) echoed this with a similar sentiment: 'we give in order to receive'. He suggested donations motivated by reciprocity would follow a social exchange model even if what is received is only symbolic in nature. I found this way of understanding highly individualistic, and insufficient to explain what I believe is going on.

By contrast, the social psychology of Mead challenges the existing schools of thought which explain individual behaviour. He had this to offer:

The objective of the act is then found in the life-process of the group, not in the separate individuals alone. (1925, p.264)

An individual act should be conceived in the context of the larger social act that involves the group. In *Philanthropy from the point of view of ethics*, Mead writes that 'charity implies both an attitude and a type of conduct which may not be demanded of him who exercises it'. He goes on to say that an 'inner obligation exists' between his other commitments (1930, p.1). My understanding of this is that our attitude towards a given situation and our obligation to act are situational and context dependent. This perhaps explains where the difficulty lies in trying to capture the philanthropic act in a singular fashion, as we find in SET. There are always competing objectives. Values are weighed against each other when they come into conflict in particular situations, timing and with particular actors.

In addition, each individual is socially formed and at the same time forms the social. Even in the immediacy of the situation that seemingly involves the giver and the recipient, the way this donor interprets a particular situation is influenced by, and an implication of, a community of which he 'is a member and is thereby an expression of its customs and the carrier of its values. These customs appear in the individual as habits: the values appear as his goods. These habits and goods come into conflict with each other' (Mead, 1930, p.10). From Mead's (1925) perspective, the focus is not in providing an explanation for the individual's conduct through a study of the individual act, but that an explanation is to be derived from social conduct that implies the existence and influence of a complete social situation. The normative position is one which encourages a widening of concern, in looking at the

individual but also at the social and how each is at the same time being influenced by the other. I find Mead's theory of sociality that encompasses dynamic process, emergence and evolutionary change more helpful than SET in understanding the concept of reciprocity.

### Reproduction of power - another aspect in the philanthropic arena

There has been a growing interest in applying Bourdieu's concept of the field in the study of philanthropy (Barman, 2007, 2017, Adloff, 2015). In an earlier extension of this approach, Ostrower (1995) examined how the wealthy employ charitable giving as a source of symbolic capital to distinguish themselves from their peers, so characterizing elite philanthropy as a field in itself. While it is debatable whether philanthropy can be considered a field (Waquant, 2017), my research on this project has helped me to understand how charitable giving can act as such. It can be used as a means for people to find, maintain or manipulate 'their sense of place' (Goffman, 1956, 1967), or image of one's position in the field / social space (Bourdieu, 1989).

*The representations that individuals and groups inevitably engage in their practices is part and parcel of their social reality. A class is defined as much by its perceived being as by its being. (Bourdieu 1979/1984, p.564, italics in the original)*

The condition of being recognized as having a particular social status or identity involves the belief by the players engaged in the field that 'to be is to be perceived.' This is perhaps the fundamental game that is assumed (Bourdieu, 1998, p.111). My inquiry has led me to a greater clarity in regard to donor relationships. I now realize these elements/themes of identity and power become more polarized in a charitable organization as the needs of the individual being drawn to 'give' are put front and centre. The withdrawal of attention/love/ recognition after a gift has been solicited does not necessarily discourage someone from donating more, as in the earlier case of Veronica feeling neglected by my colleagues. At the same time, the opportunity to assert one's power position can also become transparent. This last act by Veronica was her opportunity to be recognized and perceived by X Foundation (and by me) for her 'status'. A central aspect of Elias's work on the processes of inclusion/exclusion is the way in which power is experienced by those who need it

more. It can encourage someone to act/perform certain functions in order to form or maintain membership or to assert status and identity.

In the field of philanthropy amongst HNWI, the potential and willingness to donate can 'buy' power/status and recognition through social networking / *guanxi*.

Bourdieu's idea of accumulating capital is one way of understanding this particular aspect of HNWI donors. It marks a further opportunity to impose a hierarchy of capital and/or strategies for conversion of one form of capital to another. I have chosen the following narrative of a HNWI donor who was perhaps wishing to do that. She was seeking to be recognized in a new community. But in this narrative, I exhibited a different response from the way I acted before, one completely outside of my 'norm' in relation to reciprocity, gift-giving and power/status relationships.

## Narrative 2 – Judy and the surprising outcome

I explored earlier the highly civil and sophisticated form of reciprocity in traditional Chinese culture. With the recent outpouring of HNWI investors from mainland China, I have experienced my business dealings with Chinese clients as relationships sometimes permeated with brutality and instrumentality. The work can be intense, exhausting and unrelenting. I now have a knot in my stomach just flying into China<sup>10</sup>. The art and etiquette of reciprocity have turned into 'doing honour' to one's host through excessive consumption of alcohol through elaborate banquets. Mauss' depiction of the Tsimshian, Tlingit, and Haida chiefs in their practice of wealth destruction reminds me very much of my time spent in China in recent years. 'In effect, and in reality, not only are useful things given away and rich foods consumed to excess, but one even destroys for the pleasure of destroying' (1990, p.95).

Through such gift-giving a hierarchy is established. Mauss considers their action to give is to show one's superiority, to be higher in rank, to be a 'magister'. To accept without the opportunity to reciprocate, or the ability to give more back, is to become a servant, to become small, to fall lower as a 'minister' (ibid., p.95). For two years I acted as a translator for a Chinese client: we travelled on his private, family owned jet. He had an entourage of minders including myself to accompany him on these

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<sup>10</sup> I noticed my own bias being born in Hong Kong (British subject) at a time of strong Western influence and with an abundance of materialism. At this time, the North/South divide in China had mainland Chinese (northern Mandarin dialect) as lower status than those speaking the Cantonese dialect. The tables have certainly turned: Hong Kong is now a vassal of mainland China.

business acquisition trips. His lavish expenditure and childish prodigality underlying this seeming generosity became so overbearing that I felt controlled and violated. At the end of each trip, we would all be spent: severely sleep deprived, suffering grave indigestion and liver toxification.

I give some insight into the business background to explain my sense of detachment when I was introduced to Judy through a business associate. Judy is married to an Australian man who lives in China, but Australia is relatively new to her. She had expressed an interest in making new friends and exploring business opportunities. She's a self-proclaimed RMB (Chinese currency) billionaire and she spends her time between Australia and China. Prior to meeting Judy, I had declined many of her invitations and left her to be attended to by my English-speaking business associates, since she spoke fairly good English. Traditionally, my behaviour would have been considered impolite, in 'refusing face' to our host. And at Judy's insistence, we finally met over a long lunch. She enjoys talking and over several hours told me about her life and all her business successes. This conversation was very much a one-sided affair and whatever I had to say or add was simply dismissed or minimized. The embodied sense of my conversation with her was like being force fed. Eventually, it reached a point where it became intolerable. I cut her short and suggested she would be better off speaking with my business associates who would have more to offer her as I simply could not afford the time. I told her about my research study which brings me to the U.K. several times a year and my current role as a director of X Foundation which was already taking up more of my time than I had anticipated. I shared some of the stress I experienced in my business dealings and described the poor etiquette and often dishonourable behaviour of some of the mainland Chinese clients which left such a negative impression on me.

Judy caught on to what I was trying to convey and began to share similar sentiments. She thought some of her fellow countrymen, the nouveau riche, vulgar in taste. She described her background as one who was well brought up; both her parents were rocket scientists. The conversation took a slight turn. I shared with her my interest in mental health and my background and experience working with Not for Profits. She followed by saying that, at her stage in life, she too was not particularly interested in making more money, but rather in contributing back to society, particularly to Australia. It would be her future home. She expressed

interest in visiting X Foundation. I had no intention of following this up: I didn't expect any genuine interest on her part. But to my surprise she asked for a tour at X Foundation in the following week, prior to her return to China.

At the end of the tour, Ronald invited Judy to attend our upcoming gala event. She said she would be overseas but would come back especially for it. I sensed that I was being forced into another round of a relationship I did not ask for. She was already diarizing the date with Ronald at the end of the tour. From my previous experience as mentioned, I was suspicious of her enthusiasm: immediate and intense. I withdrew. I conveyed to her that invitations are extended to those who have made previous donations and/or pledged to donate a significant sum on the evening.

Following her visit to X Foundation, Judy and I met for the final time before her return to China. It was yet another lengthy discussion of ambitious ideas and was becoming repetitive. She also expressed interest in being involved with X Foundation: she asked about Board membership. I didn't want to risk opening doors and allowing outsiders to cause problems: I worried about another Chinese donor not keeping her word. It all became too much for me. I snapped. "Judy, make a gesture if you wish to continue this relationship and for me to extend an invitation to you. Nothing personal but many other Chinese investors I've experienced before you have all sounded the same. What is it that you actually want from me?" It was an earthquake-like moment. Judy replied, "You really are not very Chinese!"

I was angered, but I was pleased and surprised that I finally managed to say something that had impact. The scene became quite blurred: we were both recovering from the aftershock. But I recalled a more grounded conversation as we both shared more intimate details of our family history such as the illness of her mother and the death of her father-in-law who suffered from dementia. As the conversation came to an end, still feeling tender and awkward, I said that if she genuinely wished to contribute, she should donate to our newly arrived dementia team since it had significance for her family. I also mentioned that she would be the first, a welcome gesture that would be far more appreciated and taken notice of by X Foundation, rather than making it on the evening being in the company with many other donors. She asked how much I was expecting this gesture to be: I said \$10K

would be appropriate. Some weeks later, I was surprised to hear from her. She called from China. She and her husband had decided to contribute \$34,820, the amount corresponding with her late father-in-law's birthday. I was caught by surprise. It seemed easy, based as it was on my negative experiences with Chinese clients in recent years. I felt moved by her generous and thoughtful gesture.

### **Surprising outcome**

The funds came shortly after via a credit card payment. I was surprised and relieved by the positive outcome. I had reflected on the entire process of how I had been unusually difficult in my initial dealings with Judy by being somewhat elusive. I had played the scene completely opposite to what was perhaps culturally expected of me, as one of Chinese origin, to defer to clients/donors. I made known to her my needs. If she wished to have my time and availability, she would need to show some sign of sincerity. The best way to express this was through a financial contribution. In the end, both Judy and her husband Michael flew back for the dinner. I sat her on my right with Veronica on my left. All went well, but this chapter is yet to be continued.

### **Reflections on the narrative**

After declining numerous invitations from Judy, I went into a meeting with her expressing my distaste for some of the current Chinese business travellers who lack traditions of etiquette. It would have been offensive to hear: I was being arrogant. I then asked for money up front as a sign of mistrust. The way I acted, 'not giving her face', is considered as a form of shaming and of disregard. The English equivalent would be my refusal to recognize her. The lack of generosity and the inhospitality I had shown are not the way we treat our guests or clients. Upon further reflection, I was completely out of character. It was as though I took on the attitude of Ronald or Patrick and insulted Judy in the same way they had insulted Veronica. But I was fully aware of what I was doing: I was acting outside of my cultural role.

Goffman (1967) proposed that every member within a social circle would have some knowledge of face-work and some experience in its use. In an Anglo-American society, this kind of capacity is more commonly understood as tact, *savoir-faire*, diplomacy, or social skill (ibid). One must exercise perceptiveness and be prideful (valuing face) and considerate. Tacit cooperation as coined by Goffman, naturally

arises when each participant in an undertaking is concerned with saving his own face and the face of others. When a face has been threatened, face-work must be done, and everyone contributes so that the participants together can accomplish their shared but contrasting objectives. It seems that these very qualities to which Goffman refers were lacking in the men at X Foundation in the way they were with Veronica, and in fact, with me when I first joined (as mentioned in P2).

Looking back at the way Judy and I behaved in our first meeting, I don't think the lack of skills or understanding in face-work was our issue. After all, we are Chinese. Goffman identified another form of face-work using the analogy of two adversaries making points in a contest or fencing match. It is an aggressive use of face-work 'when the person treats face-work not as something he need be prepared to perform, but rather as something that others can be counted on to perform or to accept' (1967, p.24). The lack of mutual considerateness was definitely what was happening between us. The general method is for the person to introduce favourable facts about himself and unfavourable facts about the others in such a way that the only reply the others will be able to think up will be one which terminates the interchange. This was what I did.

Points made by allusion to social class status are sometimes called snubs; those made by allusions to moral respectability are sometimes called digs; in either case one deals with a capacity at what is sometimes called "bitchiness." (Goffman, 1967, p.25)

I cannot sum it up more succinctly than Goffman's microsocal view into what took place between Judy and me.

As I am writing and reflecting on this, I am thinking about the episode between Patrick and me in P2 and Hegel's theory of conflict. It is something I became familiar with in P2, and seems a good description of what transpired. I will illustrate the movement between us. It was where we reconciled and recognized our mutuality.

### **'Snubs/digs and bitchiness' reconciled**

In the moment when Judy questioned my Chineseness, I felt shamed and offended. It reflected on my history as a child of mixed parentage: some in the family looked Western and some looked Chinese.

For her part, Judy might have felt insulted. As the progeny of a long line of academics she may have considered herself of a higher class than me or, at the very least, offended to be placed in a similar light to the so-called elite of the Communist Party.

At the same time, Judy has not chosen to stay within her own class and has married a foreigner from Australia. As one of mixed ethnic background, I have not ever contemplated marrying any other nationality other than a full Chinese. It is this mutuality in our struggle for identity that I imagined as the movement towards reconciliation. Perhaps like me she enjoys the strange freedom of being an outsider, able to shape shift and transit through the realms that live within and without. Looking back on her comment to about my not being full Chinese, I feel we were both caught in that moment of surprise and my 'out of face' state because of my acting out.

### **Counter riposte by manipulation of time and affect**

The amount Judy donated was three times more than my suggestion. It felt like she was calling my bluff and that she was winning the game. But it was the way she played it which was significant: adding *renqing* (human feelings), the thoughtfulness of the gift in memory of her late father in law, which then increased the *ganqing* (sentiment) to our *guanxi*. That was what truly won me over.

Successful ripostes or comebacks in our society are sometimes called squelches or toppers; theoretically it would be possible for a squelch to be squelched, a topper to be topped, and a riposte to be parried with a counter riposte.... (Goffman, 1967, p.25)

It certainly feels like Judy holds the upper hand in this round. What is more intriguing is that it has been almost six months since we met face to face. It is considered that the unreciprocated gift still makes inferior the person who has accepted it. The courtesies must be returned (ibid, p.84). We have had verbal and written exchanges with warm, albeit brief, sentiment. It seems the tables have turned. I am now eager to repay, but she seems in no hurry to call in my debt.

Everything takes place as if the ritualization of interactions had the paradoxical effect of giving time its full social efficacy, which is never more active than when nothing is going on, except time. (Bourdieu, 1990, p.106)

The temporal aspect in the act of gift-giving remains a critical focus. As mentioned earlier, the choice of timing and occasion for the same act can have particular meanings. Manipulating the pace of action can also be considered as an instrument of power (Bourdieu, 1990, p.106). The intensity of feeling as I was hurried and hustled by Judy during the pursuit was strong. To be met now with silence was quite potent. 'To abolish interval is also to abolish strategy' (ibid., p.106). The art of delaying actions by maintaining suspense or expectancy is a form of strategy that keeps people in the dark as to the intent. Until she makes her intention known or calls in her debt, Judy is maintaining her situational advantage. During this time interval, I am prevented from any action other than to show positive regard for her or risk being accused of ingratitude (Bourdieu, 1990, p.106).

### Final reflections

In summing up, Veronica's action in this final act (just a month ago and 12 months from when this project 3 began) caught me by surprise. It forced me to see that I had become complacent. I had been using Chinese culture in a rationalising manner. Then, from iteration to iteration, the culture became untouchable, perhaps, to a degree, unchallenged. Who would challenge me, the only Chinese in my learning set, on my knowledge of my own culture? It seems I had instrumentalised culture as a tool, retrospectively fitting meaning to my narratives and trying to convince myself as well as my readers that, being Chinese, I knew what was right.

This project began as an intense exploration of how Chinese culture's emphasis on face and reciprocity reached a solution between Veronica and me in a traditional way. In my second narrative, I identified power and the theme of inclusion/exclusion as motivators in business relations. This path resulted in my being able to disrupt expectations and to defy the confines of Chinese social mores, or habitus. I was able to act out of character. But I failed to make use of what the two narratives were showing me, something which has become obvious only now: that culture can influence but not determine, that it is possible to find agency within a constraining social formation, and that in such an agency is how culture develops and changes. Instead, I became caught up with theorizing, perhaps reifying culture, as if it were a subject to be understood and mastered, by way of providing certainty to my readers and to myself. In my second narrative, I drifted even further away

from my inquiry: what was actually happening in my own practice with my colleagues in X Foundation.

I was moved by Gavin's recent bleak disclosure/ lament that work in the scientific research field is isolating, that it is 'every man for himself'. As I reflect on my three years as a Director of N, I see that it has been a struggle to find my place, to belong, and to find and enjoy camaraderie. The momentary sense of 'bonding and closeness' has been superficial and sporadic, a stop and start (hence, my early experience of being used and dismissed) without the continuity of growing into deeper relationships. It is a place of politeness, distance and detachment where it takes effort to make connections.

Gavin's sense of loneliness resonated deeply. Instead of trying to grapple with and make sense of this experience at X Foundation, I let my own familiar theme of vulnerability, of feeling lonely, become masked. My habitual pattern to improvise, as mentioned from P1, by becoming self-sufficient took over in wanting to repair the organisation and make it better. This manifested in the way I was trying to be in control of my writing. By being preoccupied with the concrete materials, I lost touch with my initial experience of being bewildered and curious. I had stopped paying attention to my experience of X Foundation. In doing so, I took an individualistic and rational approach to professional life, as if there were a right way of doing something, believing that, had they consulted me, the outcome might have been different. I have made the very mistake which I had accused my colleagues at X Foundation of making. I had become arrogant towards my colleagues. I had begun to exclude them by making the situation one of their lack of cultural understanding.

This surprising outcome, with Veronica exciting the scientists and X colleagues then reneging, triggered a sense of anger and disbelief. Feeling somewhat disrespected/ dismissed by Veronica, I went through in my mind all the possibilities, by which I/ we could have done differently. As disappointed as Gavin was, as we both were, he consoled me. But what remained was a sense of loneliness and isolation.

When one's survival is dependent upon the generosity of others, as in the case of NGOs, then the dynamics of struggle for power, status and identity come to the fore. At some point, one becomes desensitised and accustomed/ habituated to it all. Without the occasional acts of kindness that nourish the human spirits, rejection,

abandonment, alienation, the sense of helplessness become the norm. Perhaps like Patrick, a research scientist himself, the X Foundation players have been in the game for a long time and understand the game well. I imagine the experience of being at the mercy of donors is filled with uncertainty. The humanity of staff is crushed by having to endure the exertion of power and the experience of being subordinated. Furthermore, the only way of managing one's sense of feeling dismissed or rejected after prolonged exposure is to become detached, to numb oneself. From a psychoanalytic perspective, a certain aspect of pain is projected onto others by acting equally dismissively. We manage feelings by members of staff moving from one donor to the next, as Ronald did when he felt disrespected by Veronica. In the same way, donors exert their power and attitude towards the staff of NGOs. They make them feel disrespected and incompetent. We do all treat each other at times with disrespect, as if the other is incompetent, insignificant and at our disposal.

## Conclusion

This project attempts to be a thick and nuanced description of how processes around gift-giving become arenas for negotiation of power, status and identity. I am encouraged by having made some small progress in sharing a level of vulnerability between Gavin and me. I remain curious about the gesture/response processes within X Foundation and about my own contribution which continues to call out an experience of keeping 'face'. In writing this, I also accept it is the tendency amongst human beings to act in particular ways. As previously mentioned, Bourdieu and Elias refer to this as our 'habitus': our habitual ways of responding to each other which has the quality of a pattern. We form this pattern, and we are formed by it, both at the same time.

Perhaps I have had a tendency in this project to try to portray Chinese culture as being much subtler and more nuanced than the Anglo-culture, particularly in the domain of gift giving. In general, this might be the case: Chinese culture has developed a rich and subtle vocabulary for explaining relationships, some of which may be eroding in the West. However, experience has tripped me up in the sense that Veronica seems to have violated the traditions I so carefully explained, and I surprised myself with Judy by being 'un-Chinese' and she more than made up for my solecism by being generous. Both episodes have made me reflect much more carefully on the idea of culture and the degree to which it is deterministic, rather

than just influential and constantly evolving. Perhaps I have been over-judgemental in my assessment of X Foundation and what is possible to achieve there as a Director, particularly as one who brings more difference than many of the Directors. I still think that it would be helpful if board members and staff could pay much more attention to relationships. I believe that that this would improve the work as well as increase the money from donations.

In my next project, I wish to examine how I participate as a Director / trustee of this particular NGO. My time on the Board has shown me that public discussion is discouraged, but there is nothing inevitable about this. At the risk of being countercultural, I believe that it is within my role and responsibility to take a position in the public realm and perhaps start to say the unsayable to see what difference that might make.

## Project Four – Staying with what matters; staying in relation

### **Introduction**

In the previous project, I used my experience working with Chinese donors and X Foundation to introduce and explore the concept of reciprocity. This highlighted a need to know both our donors and the various motivations that underlie the charitable action. I drew attention to the importance of relationships and increased my own influence by bringing in major donations. Having earned credibility as a Director provided openings for me to become involved in specific tasks. It offered opportunities to work more closely with management and staff. As a result, I gained insight on what might be the experience of managing and being managed for employees in X Foundation.

In this project, I look at the way in which key figures in the organisation perceive conflict predominantly as a disturbance. Such disturbance may be caused by the individual, and may lead people to feel misrecognized. I also explore how gossip acts as a mechanism to manage uncertainty and alienation, and as a form of resistance to the dominant way of organizing. I have become particularly interested in Foucault and his thoughts on ‘madness’: they resonate with my experience of NGOs in the mental health sector. His thoughts on bio-power and governmentality, which I explain below, have also heightened my awareness of my responsibilities as a Director, and the importance I attached to my social responsibilities towards mental health as a domain of activity within the organisation and the wider community. I draw on Arendt’s distinction between work and action. Her understanding of the political space where ethical judgement overtakes the importance of work has helped me to reflect on the way I conduct myself more broadly within the organization.

In my review of the literature on the governance of NFPs, I find adopting a stakeholder and democratic approach in thinking to be an advantage. This will focus on broadening our board memberships which will move us towards thinking more politically and less instrumentally. This approach has guided me particularly in the newly established people and culture (P & C) committee. Additionally, I took on a recent project collaborating and mediating on politics between X Foundation and

another donor/NFP, which has opened opportunities of various sorts. Even a year ago I would not have thought this possible.

### Narrative 1 - A clash between Melissa and Gavin

Melissa replaced Ronald (P2) as a major gift manager. I was part of the interviewing panel as one of the Directors. I was persuaded by Melissa that she was the right person for the job: her understanding of reciprocity in donor relationships captured my interest. X Foundation needed to build relations and acknowledge donors without simply asking for donations, a concept that seemed foreign to my colleagues as discussed in P3. I took the lead in expressing my approval and the others seemed to agree. Melissa proceeded to a second round of interview with Patrick (CEO), where he gave his final approval.

Melissa's initial proactive and enthusiastic attitude soon gave way to frustration. In one phone conversation, she told me that Gavin had taken the responsibility for the gala dinner from her. She was to focus only on 'building the pipeline' of donors, an ambition she had pitched confidently in her interview for the job. She became increasingly angry and disturbed. She asked if I were available to talk<sup>11</sup>: she was seeking my guidance. The conversation would often lead to her criticising why she was not on the road soliciting donors and was instead caught up in the office. She described circumstances happening in the background which sounded like conspiracies. One in particular she told me I have heard previously from a long serving scientist. Gavin, her boss, and Patrick, CEO, were both very religious and attended the same church, one rumoured to have the character of a cult. I think the implied message is that Gavin is in alliance with Patrick, an alliance which is covert. Melissa became consumed by the apparent internal politics and the power dynamics between individuals within the organisation. She revealed to me an existing battle amongst the scientists as to who is favoured or side-lined by Patrick.

Melissa's inability to settle continued for about two months. I counselled her to work hard, to have some wins to prove to management that she was as good as she had

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<sup>11</sup> My role differs from that of my fellow directors on the Foundation. The staff work closely with me because of my connections to major donors. I would say the internal politics to which I am privy would not be as open to Directors otherwise.

claimed to be rather than at this point offer various reforming measures. But by that time, she felt she was being set up by Gavin for failure. I found it difficult to believe. Gavin was eager to keep this position filled. She felt unsupported and swamped with frustration: she had inherited a lack of data in the donor system from Ronald, the previous major gift manager whom she replaced (P2). For example, she could not find any information on Veronica, a donor from Project 3, or any history of her proposals. In addition, she disclosed there were other types of missing data and unregistered donations, but she was unspecific. What was she insinuating? Was she implying gross incompetence or was she suggesting purposeful wrongdoings? She was not able to substantiate her assumptions: she would often say 'and I heard on the grape vine'. I had to think cautiously about her intentions as well as about those who might be influencing her. I needed time and experience to discern what was going on.

Meanwhile, Gavin expressed concern to me that Melissa was too caught up in the office when she should be out of the office building relationships. I asked him what he thought might be the issue. It was perhaps, he said, a lack of confidence or a fear of failure. He also told me that Melissa was going above him on certain matters and had cut through the proper chain of command. At this point, it became a concern: I thought perhaps Melissa was trying to undermine Gavin. After all, she was in close contact with me, Neville (our new Chairman) and Patrick (CEO). I suggested to Gavin that we should all try to sit together with Melissa to work out some of the difficulties. Subsequently, Gavin set up a meeting with Patrick and me to discuss potential donors. I expected Melissa to participate in the meeting. Instead, Gavin arranged a separate meeting afterwards for us to meet with her. I recalled the meeting with Patrick went over time and Melissa was kept waiting for almost an hour. Gavin made no apologies when she arrived. I was aware that this was my opportunity to gauge their relationship. It was quite a formal meeting, and very different from the way Melissa engaged with me. It was obvious to me Gavin did not like her. During the earlier meeting with Patrick and me, Gavin gave us his view: Melissa had over-pitched herself. I suggested that we should give her more time to settle. I reminded them that we employed her simply because we found her interesting and engaging, someone I envisaged donors would enjoy meeting. I felt enthusiastic in introducing her to my business clients. I agreed that she needed to be out of the office, and I was happy to assist in arranging potential donors for her to

meet. Subsequently she made quite an impression: she drew encouraging praise from the few clients I sent her.

The following week, Melissa rang me. She told me that, during a recent discussion, Gavin told her that he did not like her tone of voice. She was upset. She found his comment intimidating and felt closed down immediately. She said that there was no place for rudeness and bullying in the workplace. Melissa then told me that she asked Gavin for a performance review. This is normally carried out just prior to the completion of the probation period which was still a month away. I pointed out to her that, by asking for a performance review, she was being provocative. A week later, Melissa rang and told me the performance review with Gavin did not go well. She added that she had asked him for a pay rise. I was astonished. We discussed this briefly and agreed that she was probably being provocative to escalate the tension. She said that, based on her request, Gavin had made the decision not to extend her probation. I said that I was disappointed to hear this. I told her that, as things stood, the matter was now out of my hands. This should be dealt with amongst themselves and with Patrick, the CEO.

In the meantime, Gavin forwarded the assessment review to me. He suggested to me that there was something lacking in Melissa's assessment of herself. My sense was that Gavin needed me to understand his perspective. I imagine he was hoping I could help settle any concern and explain to the Board the departure of yet another member of staff. I looked at the review. It was disturbing to see that Melissa had given herself all 5s on a scale of 1 to 5. On the other hand, Gavin seemed even-handed in his assessment. Melissa had since lodged a grievance claim against X Foundation and the matter has now been referred to the Finance Risk Audit and Compliance Committee.

### **Reflection on narrative**

Since writing this narrative, further events have unfolded. It now appears my meeting with Patrick and Gavin was not only to discuss major donors. Gavin's intention was to exclude Melissa, so he could discuss his dissatisfaction with her performance. It was also a form of discipline and to deny her access to Patrick and me. I was slow to understand what he was conveying. Perhaps there was merit in Melissa's suspicion of her being set up to fail. Soon after she was asked to leave,

Gavin had an immediate replacement available. Michelle apparently had been temping with us for about two months. I was asked once again to be part of the panel to interview her. I was also given the task of ringing her previous employer whom I knew. He was a neurosurgeon and Chairman of his own charitable foundation. He told me that Michelle was very loyal and hardworking, and that she was best suited in an administrative role. I conveyed this message to Gavin. I believe he had his mind set on employing someone showing loyalty rather than challenge. Michelle had not been particularly outstanding in bringing donations or building relationships with donors but according to Gavin, "She is a team player and fits in well with the staff." As I thought about Melissa, I found her provocative in her approach towards the management of this organisation. In many ways, she reminded me of Vikki, the past Chairman. Perhaps it was Melissa's inability to conform and/or her reluctance to be subordinated by Gavin that truly cost her her job.

As I think about the previous departures of staff, I see a generalised pattern of discontent towards leadership at all levels within this organisation: Vikki of Patrick; Ronald and Melissa of Gavin; Gavin gossiping about Patrick and also sharing confidence with me about Patrick's discontent with the Chairman of our parent company. My mind returns to the tension between Patrick and me in our first meeting (P2) where I began to explore the theme of recognition and disrespect. I believe that many of the issues at X Foundation relate to an inability to deal openly with anything at all. Conversations on the board not related to the agenda are often shut down abruptly; conflict and rivalry then have to take place in the shadows. Drawing from my own experience, I wonder if the absence of open conversations increases anxiety and feelings of isolation amongst staff. In my case, I found rumour and gossip further amplify mutual suspicion. I became emotionally detached and experienced a breakdown in my research. Only upon reflecting and by taking this experience seriously, was I able to think about my own disengagement as what others might also be experiencing in this organisation.

In a recent breakfast meeting Neville (our Chair) described to me, in the manner of gossip, how Patrick's leadership style was Machiavellian. At the time I didn't realise how fitting this depiction of him actually was. In brief, my understanding of this term is a type of political rationality that emerged during the Renaissance where

Machiavelli advised the Prince on how best to hold onto his state. There was no serious attention paid to goals beyond the increase and solidarity of the Prince's own power, promoting ends over means. This reminds me of Gavin's comment that in the field of scientific research it was every man for himself. Perhaps letting go of Melissa was Gavin's way of eliminating any challenge to his own leadership.

### **Generalization through experience and narrative exploration**

From my understanding of theories of recognition and reciprocity, which I have discussed in previous projects, it is clear that in X Foundation, as in all organisations, the staff desire to become visible and be recognised through the everyday processes of competition and cooperation. At the same time, there is a sense of resistance and mistrust at all levels including the CEO, Directors, scientists (and donors). In my role as board member with a roving brief, I have come across many instances where people feel misrecognised, subordinated or misrepresented as ineffectual. The incident with Melissa provided me with more insight into the particular struggles taking place in X Foundation. I believe that resistance, gossip and a lack of openness are all related: they come to the fore in an organization in which, implicitly, the ends are thought to justify the means. Donors matter, but little effort is made to develop the relationship as I explained in the last project: they are primarily the means to the end of having research funding. Relationships, therefore, can feel sterile and impotent. Even at the level of governance, Neville made comments about Patrick's leadership but was quick to move on instead of openly discussing how he truly feels, as though he were uncomfortable revealing his private thoughts. Such behaviour indicates that gossip is one of the few ways people can allow these thoughts to be expressed. The highly constrained manner in the way we relate to one another and the lack of coherence between means and ends seem like madness of its own kind. It makes me think about my role as a Director in all of this and the difference I can make.

I will explore in the next narrative this idea of a Machiavellian style of leadership where the ends justify the means; I will argue the impact of this as an alienating experience which permeates the organisation. Before doing so, I would like to draw on some literature to understand better the purpose of gossip in organisations.

## Gossip – social rules and group norms

In trying to grapple with the nature of gossip in this narrative, I draw on Elias & Scotson (1965/1994) in *The Established and the Outsiders*, and also the American political scientist and anthropologist, James C. Scott (1990).

The notion of gossip can be understood as a function that reinforces the normative social rules of group membership. On the other hand, it can be a form of disguised expression of publicly undisclosed resistance by those being dominated. Gossip is a form of the hidden transcript of anger. (Scott, 1990, p.142). In brief and according to Scott, the *public transcript* can be understood as the hegemonic discourse which comprises established ways of behaving and speaking that fit particular actors in particular social settings, whether dominant or oppressed which is the public performance of disagreement. The *hidden transcript* characterises discourse that takes place offstage, beyond direct observation by powerholders, (although power holders also have their own hidden-transcripts), which consists of those offstage speeches, gossip, gestures that confirm, contradict or inflect what appears in the public transcript (ibid., p.4).

If we view it in this light, gossip becomes the socialising / enculturating process of any group membership within and between groups. It is gossip used as a technique to reinforce a social norm. As I have described in P2 and with the benefit of hindsight, I believe that Vikki's (past Chairman) gossip about Patrick as an underperforming leader, and about the other Board members as seat warmers, was her way of setting a standard as to how I should behave. This is perhaps what Scott (1990) was referring to as the type of gossip that reinforces the normative standard of social rules by invoking and teaching through gossip precisely what degrees of deviation from accepted conduct are likely to be mocked and despised (ibid, p.163). Reflecting on Neville's comment, perhaps he too was educating me in the behaviours he values or as a way to get ahead in X Foundation and the scientific community. Perhaps he thought Patrick's Machiavellian behaviour and the power he seems to hold were to be admired or envied.

In the case of Melissa, gossip could be her way of setting alliances and recruiting me to share confidences to help her feel less insecure and alone. If open conversation is

unavailable and discouraged, building alliances through gossip seems to be a way of survival.

In *The Established and the Outsiders*, Elias & Scotson (1965/1994) make the distinction between the two working class neighbourhoods in Winston Parva, the village and the Estate. Although the two communities were of similar socio-economic background, the estate dwellers were new arrivals. The established working class community had monopolised the best pubs, the parish council, as well as the narrative about the 'way things are done around here'. They found that in the established close-knit community of the village, the gossip channels were provided by rich networks of families and associations (ibid., p.100). Gossip had an integrating function of support, and cemented relations between the established inhabitants. It reinforced an already existing cohesion. Praise gossip which necessitates the 'we-identity' often reinforced inclusion amongst the established residents: blame gossip was a means to exclude the outsiders. In the loose knit and less highly organised incomer neighbourhood of the Estate, gossip circuits were shorter and often not linked to each other. But this gossip shared similar qualities with that of the village. The members within the Estate often expressed derogatory observations about the 'notorious' families by ways of distinguishing themselves as the more respectable families of the Estate. But because those in the Estate were less integrated than the established villagers due to the absence of family networks, and the lack of connections and associations, there was less opportunity to establish any intimate bonds. As a result, it was observed that people tended to 'keep themselves to themselves', minimising gossip exchanges (ibid., p.99).

Drawing on Elias and Scotson to understand my experience at X Foundation, it feels as if the Foundation functions like an outsider community. It seems to operate without cohesion and is marked by an absence of praise gossip: lacking the heroic 'we-identity' to necessitate a sense of belonging and recognition which the established villagers were able to share. There is, however, ample blame gossip from all sides. For example, Ronald (P2) and Melissa blame the lack of leadership while Gavin blames the outgoing staff for incompetence or character failure. Even the new members, be it staff and/or directors, would distinguish themselves as more deserving of respect from other newbies, noted by Elias & Scotson as the less

'notorious'. In some ways, it is what I did (P2) in my meeting with Patrick when I made a point to set myself apart from Vikki when she resigned.

In *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*, Scott (1990) refers to gossip as the most familiar and elementary form of disguised popular aggression. He writes:

Gossip almost by definition, has no identifiable author, but scores of eager retailers who can claim they are just passing on the news. Should the gossip – and here I have in mind malicious gossip-be challenged, everyone can disavow responsibility for having originated it. (p.142)

This diffuse quality of responsibility is, according to Scott, what makes such aggression possible (ibid). It is a way to insinuate a critique of power while hiding behind anonymity (Scott, 1990 p.xiii). It represents a relatively safe social sanction. In X Foundation, the gossip channel seems the only way of managing conflict which is politically under the radar; there are, in addition, those who use gossip to urge others to act. In my own situation, Fiona, Patrick's EA, has been a source of gossip channel for me. She may not realise it or is too afraid to acknowledge it, but she is in a position to influence because she has access to information across the organisation, as many Executive PAs are. Although she has been conflicted because of her loyalty towards Patrick, Fiona has expressed to me on many occasions how disgruntled she feels at seeing herself subordinated and misrecognised.

I know that Melissa found her way to meet other unidentified purveyors of gossip, those individuals who shared her disgruntlement in the organisation. But like the situation of the Estate dwellers, perhaps there was no other social capital or common interest to deepen their relationships. In general, gossip or hidden transcripts in general were shared by those who were looking for others to share their sentiment. In organisational studies, research into the organisational politics of gossip and denial has suggested that gossip can also be regarded as beneficial in facilitating sense making and sometimes problem solving. This seems to apply to both power holders and those aspiring to power (Iterson and Clegg, 2015). It not only helps reveal and alter existing power inequalities (Meyer Spacks, 1985), but also helps to release emotional tensions (Waddington, 1985). Iterson & Clegg (2015) also suggest that, once it has acquired the status of official formulation, gossip which alleges

wrongful doings or failures to deliver may impel organisations to be more accountable and responsible. Senior executives do have a general duty of care with respect to rumour which may be harmful to the organisations and to their staff members. I certainly have become more cautious and paid more attention to internal politics. It does appear some of the gossip may imply Gavin had not been a good leader. The fact that Melissa made a formal complaint of unfair dismissal against X Foundation, I imagined, had increased tension amongst senior management. Reflecting on what I have been caught up in makes me realise the responsibility of directors like myself who cannot entirely avoid the gossip game. If gossip is endemic in organisational life, and also can have constructive consequences, such as using it as a way of releasing emotions, then my colleague directors and I need to pay close attention to what and how we are invited to participate in. This has consequences not only for what it tells us about the quality of organisational life but perhaps also for the quality of governance in regard to what we have or have no access to. It is another way of participating in politics and power relations, but like most political processes one cannot control the outcome of gossip.

### **Final reflection on narrative 1**

The gossip that circulated about Melissa after her departure was similar to that of Vikki and Lis, the most recent communications manager<sup>12</sup>. These women were described as a 'bit mad' or 'too emotional' by staff members; I too participated in this gossip. In Melissa's case, it was more severe and personal. Because she gave herself a self-appraisal of all 5/5s (5 being excellent) in her performance review, it was easy to blame her, myself included, for being out of touch with herself or delusional. It is pointed out by Scott (1990, p.xiii) that people in dominating positions also develop stories, that they can't say publicly, about how they dominate. When the circumstances suit them, the dominant may choose to ignore an issue and 'define the challenger as deranged, thus depriving her act of the significance which it would otherwise have' (p.205). With hindsight, Gavin's challenge to Melissa about not liking her tone of voice was ambiguous and a dominating act. Perhaps it was these types of provocations to intimidate which escalated these women's emotional perception of feeling misrecognised. Irrespective of this, these gossip episodes serve a purpose: they place constraints which maintain the existing dominating culture on

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<sup>12</sup> I picked up my gossip from Fiona, Patrick's EA.

how and how not to behave. One way of marginalising people who don't conform is to describe them as mad or difficult.

### Psychological labelling as a way of control

Over my 20 years involvement with NGOs in mental health and social welfare, I have become disheartened by the way clients of NGOs are being managed. People on social welfare, namely the homeless and the mentally ill are often provoked into acting out when they are coerced into conforming to protocols and to rules in an environment unfamiliar to them. They suffer the disciplining consequences which are difficult both to bear and to watch. It has dawned on me that high emotions and conflict displayed in public are still very much viewed as psychological disturbance or as maladaptation of the individual, particularly so in the mental health sector. The French philosopher Foucault helps shed light on the way that mental health patients are dealt with, and silenced, through processes of normalisation, containment and control.

This was the central thesis of his book *Madness and Civilisation* (1962/2006): how the professions began to take on the role of the legal authorities in defining what was normal or abnormal. The psychiatric professions divided up the population between 'the mad and the sane, the sick and the healthy, the criminals and the good boys' (Foucault, 1982, p.208). The tendencies of the professions to create the 'normal', Foucault would also say 'docile,' bodies have been noticed by other scholars too, most notably Foucault scholar Nikolas Rose (1990, 1997) who has written about the functioning of the psy-sciences (psychology, psychiatry), and Randall and Munro (2010) who have carried out some research with a psychiatric team offering services to abuse survivors. This latter paper is particularly relevant to my own feelings about mental health patients like Sam, whom I described in Project 1. The authors describe how psychiatric case workers expressed scepticism about the kinds of services they are able to offer their clients, which they felt were more about silencing and having them conform than about allowing them to articulate their needs and express their distress. Similarly, in Project 1 I felt Sam was trying to warn me and others of the politics and of her mistrust of the institution. But because she was very difficult to relate to, everyone saw her and what she was saying as too hard and dismissed her as 'crazy'. Equally in the research Randall and Munro carried out, psychiatry professionals observed that clients' behaviour 'should not be interpreted

as a symptom of an illness or abnormality, but rather as a tactic on the part of their clients to re-assert some kind of self-mastery over themselves' (Randall & Munro, 2010, p. 1497). So too in X Foundation what happened to Melissa is comparable to the situation with Sam. Melissa too was dismissed as difficult and crazy, which is not to claim that she performed particularly well.

Both Melissa (P4) and Sam (P1) were very different characters and were facing very different circumstances, but were somehow marginalised by the NGOs with whom they found themselves involved. In any society, a person's behaviour is more or less a deviation from the norm. In his work on the development of the psy-services, Foucault (1994, p.337) argues that those whose behaviour differs too much are moved from one area to the other, or the same person is excluded in every area. It is exactly through this abstract universal sense of order and the requirements of conformity that the physician became the authorising figure with the power to 'cure' madness (ibid.). Foucault's treatment of the history of madness may help us understand some of the dynamics in our work in mental health sectors. One way of disciplining employees who are not conforming is to describe them as mad, difficult and/or emotional. This is particularly the case with women in X Foundation. What is publicly valued is rationality, calm and agreement. I note the gender claims I make with this statement, but I do not wish to take it up here in depth. Because I have very little direct dealings with the scientific researchers, I cannot generalise from my experience across the organisation but only at the level of governance and management. Instead I will continue to explore how emotions and conflict are viewed as psychological disturbance or as the character failure of the individual.

### Productivity and biopower

Foucault's thesis is that the disciplinary effects of power have brought about our current highly developed societies, but they have come at a cost. In my position as a Director of an NGO in the mental health sector, there is a need to be reflective about what is being compromised if we are to learn from experience.

In *Madness and Civilisation*, Foucault (1962) stated the early treatment of the insane was paralleled by techniques used for the treatment of criminal behaviour. Inmates and patients were seen to be responsible for their crimes or their illnesses. The Christian origins of confessional practices became a general technology that spread

to other domains in the attempt to normalise individuals through increasingly rationalised means, by turning them into meaningful subjects and docile objects/ subjects (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982, p.xxviii). The emphasis was on prisoner/ patients taking personal responsibility for their predicament. Asylum became an instrument of moral uniformity and of social denunciation (Foucault, 1962, p.259).

Methodologically Foucault used a historical approach which he referred to as genealogy. He derived this from Nietzsche, in his attempt to provide a historical transformation of power and truth by various regimes. He argued from this perspective that a relationship between punishment and surveillance came into being (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982, p.9). It was here that he drew attention to a form of modern power which he calls bio-power, characterised by governments' taking greater interest of the welfare of the individual and the population. This enables governments to exert greater control over the population and organisations and so achieve greater productivity. The basic goal is to produce a human being who could be treated as a 'docile body' which is useful and productive towards group tasks (ibid., p.135). Foucault employed the analogy of pastoral power to reveal the pervasive organisation of our society. But he stated that it is no longer a question, as it was when religion was more predominant, of leading people to the salvation of the next world but of ensuring it in this one. A series of 'worldly' aims took the place of the 'religious' aims. 'In this context, salvation takes on particular meanings: health, well-being (i.e. sufficient wealth, standard of living), security, protection from accidents' (ibid, p.215). This implies that the kind of pastoral power, which had been for over centuries linked to a defined religious institution, suddenly spread out into a whole social body. The tricky combination in the same political structures of individualisation techniques, and of totalisation procedures found support in a multitude of institutions characterising a series of powers: those of the family, medicine, psychiatry, education and employers (ibid., P.215).

Following Foucault's lead in analysing the history of how we understand the division of the mad and non-mad allows us to see the effects of modernity in the way we identify our worth based on our 'usefulness' to contribute to societal values/economic progress. Our body becomes a useful force only if it is a productive body and a subjected body (Foucault, 1975, p.26). Furthermore, emotions and

conflict may become stigmatised as psychological disturbance or a character failure of the individual. Are we at X Foundation inadvertently perpetuating a culture of creating docile bodies in the staff? Seeing it from this wider perspective, I feel a growing unease in thinking about our mission statement at X Foundation to 'discover, conquer and cure'. It is exactly this notion of a conquering and curing culture that I find myself caught up in: an uncomfortable power dynamic between managers and staff, and managers and the board. The CEO himself is a research scientist so perhaps there is no surprise that the organisation is infused with a rational scientific culture characterised by techniques which conquer and divide. There is little tolerance for the insecurity, anxiety, doubt, deviance from accepted group norms.

### Dominant discourse as a phenomenon in X Foundation

I take up Foucault in my research is because I think he helps me better understand the day-to-day exercise of power in the X Foundation 'regime'. The practice of particular regimes of control involve the constant exercise of power, so to notice my own participation in organisational life is also to reflect upon how it might be experienced by others. Foucault claims that power and knowledge are not separable: he used the term "games of truth" to describe the way institutions evolved into being entrusted with producing what we hold to be true. These institutions such as hospitals and prisons come to dominate and articulate their own discourse of truth and to develop their particular practices of power and discipline. Reading Foucault has heightened my sense of responsibility in relation to what we are doing at X Foundation in terms of our governance practices, and our relationships with others, including the mentally ill, who are our key stakeholders. It is my view that our attitudes towards mental illness and the ways we deal with each other have serious implications for those we seek to serve. So far in this project I have pointed to how power is exercised in X Foundation which has turned on discriminating between normal and deviant behaviour. I worry that normal behaviour implies loyalty to and conformity with the regime, with little value given to emotions and to the difficulty of organising together for the good of our target group, the mentally ill. By definition, people with mental illness or disease are easy to marginalise and stigmatise. I am making a claim that an organisation dedicated to alleviating mental suffering should walk the talk in terms of its own relationships within the

organisation, and between the organisation with its stakeholders, particularly in relation to difficult encounters which might prompt distress.

Foucault contended that he was not trying to invalidate or to challenge the therapeutic effectiveness of psychiatry. He was, rather, problematising knowledge so as to analyse the practices of power relations. The language of psychiatry is a product which grew out of a quest for objectivity and from the scientific positivism of the eighteenth century (Foucault, 1962). At any given time, cultural practices determine what will count as an object for serious investigation (ibid., p.116). At X Foundation we are not exempt from being part of this dominant way of organising, which privileges rationality and professionalism, and keeps emotions out of discussion. As I discuss in P3, the demand for research is dependent on funding, donors, corporations. Educational institutions and government in particular have a degree of power in favouring one research over another. It seems that this very mission of hope to conquer and cure is at risk of keeping in place the social attitudes which value conformity. It discriminates against expression of differences which, by their very condition, people with mental illness or brain disease are likely to manifest.

### Interim summary

To review: I noticed how gossip serves to discipline people by exercising control. The way we participate together establishes norms of how to behave in particular groupings and punishes those who do not comply. At X Foundation, people disclose feelings or opinions mostly in the form of gossip. At Board level, both Vikki and Neville have complained to me privately about the difficulty they have with the CEO and about their dissatisfaction with underperforming board members. Gossip seems to be the preferred way at all levels within the organisation for these thoughts to be expressed

For a new staff member, gossip can be a way of working through power differentials and of making sense when no other obvious forum seems available. It is inevitably also a form of resistance (Collinson, 2005). In thinking about the beneficial aspect of gossip to which the organisational literature has pointed, it has struck me that gossip at X Foundation can be a gesture whose goal is an emotional connection. Gossip can be, after all, a humanising act in an alienating environment. When the individual

deviates too far from the norm, those in power may gossip to neutralise people who are not conforming or dismiss the individual as either mad or personally incompetent. Those with less power or the less established might seek solidarity with one another.

In thinking about the dynamics of X Foundation, I see a parallel process between the mission of the organisation, to discover, conquer, cure and the way I experience people are being managed. Emotions and conflict displayed in public are still very much viewed as psychological disturbance or as maladaptation of the individual. It is a highly rational environment, one where irrationality is stigmatised and which creates a separation between acceptable and unacceptable behaviours. As a director I have found myself caught up in these dynamics. I am concerned that an organisation so committed to the advance of knowledge about mental health questions could be so incurious about difference, deviance and abnormal behaviour.

In exploring this I have turned to Foucault to examine the historical framing and categorisation of madness and his attempt to provide an explanation of various regimes of power and truth. I also take an interest, after Foucault, in the kinds of knowledge which are valued in X Foundation: finance, results, abstract schemes of vision and value. Those which are not are such matters as plural points of view, emotion and distress. The following narrative describes a strategic planning day and the Board meeting which followed. It illustrates well both these dynamics, and where I find myself resisting the disciplining process at the risk of becoming excluded. The narrative examines how there exists, both among senior management and staff, and at board level, a dismissive manner in dealing with disagreement and conflict. I will explore what I am coming to think of as a more Machiavellian style of leadership where the ends justify the means. I argue the potential impact is of an alienating experience, one which I have encountered in the organisation before. I continue to explore what it is at X Foundation that makes it so difficult to share opinions with others and be open up to them. As Foucault, and Foucault scholar Barbara Townley (2008) describe, we find ourselves caught up in particular patterns of behaving because of the governing rationality of management.

## Narrative 2 - Strategic Planning day

X Foundation held a strategic planning day with the Board and senior staff (both operational staff and research scientists). This took place after Melissa's departure. An external facilitator was brought in. Prior to attending, Board and senior staff had to complete a pre-meeting survey to collate data of X Foundation's collective mission. The survey involves ranking the seven areas of focus in order of importance. The seven objectives were: Research; People & Culture; Building & Systems; Collaboration; Funding; Governance; Profile and Partnership. In addition, up to ten priority goals were to be selected across the seven strategic objectives. The aim of the day was to work on building alignment, prioritise strategic initiatives and develop preliminary plans for the next five years.

The facilitator commenced the day by sharing the collated and analysed data from the pre-meeting survey. There was strong agreement from all 81 survey respondents (inclusive of scientists, Board and staff members) in the selection of the top objectives and priority goals. It highlighted that the top three objectives were Research, People & Culture, and Funding. In addition, the priority goals, which were selected in order, were consistent with the three objectives identified. Research excellence and funding, as one would expect, are fundamental to any research institute's survival. What became a surprise was that People & Culture ranked higher in goals to achieve than did Research and Funding objectives. With hindsight, it was not a total surprise because of the large turnover of both staff and scientists of the last two years, and the kinds of episodes I have described above and in previous projects where staff, and even directors, have struggled to thrive.

For the rest of the morning meeting attendees worked in breakout groups and, by repeating the same process, reiterated the findings of the survey. We were asked to rank our goals using coloured sticky notes with a rating scale divided into quadrants: the 'must do' and 'quick wins' were one half; the other half were matters more difficult to implement, what can be deferred and what can be given up. It was an agitating process. Instead of being allowed to express and expand on the findings with our colleagues, we were restrained from a less organised, relational and perhaps creative process. We were reduced to using numbers and colour coding as a way of expressing ourselves. The quadrants were then collated and synthesised. The final result, yet another graph, became even more polarised. People and Culture

came in once again above the goals of Research and Funding in terms of priority. Four goals were listed as priority: attract and retain new research leaders; maintain a strong employee value proposition; attract and retain leading professionals to deliver quality support services, and to mentor & develop research staff & students.

In my opinion, the afternoon was far more useful. Groups were assigned to one of the three objectives identified. We were asked to discuss and to share ideas about implementing the selected goals and about the struggles we envisaged. Similar to the way our Board meetings are run, the strategic planning day was also highly structured with very little room for movement or deviation from the agenda. On the occasions where people were invited to comment from a subgroup's discussions, some comments were valuable, but were merely jotted down onto a white board by the facilitators. As the day drew to a close, the brief summary of issues raised was left on the white board. I wondered how unsafe and exposed those would feel who contributed to the risky remarks. We were told that the comments noted would be synthesised and returned to our CEO. I recalled feeling frustrated and thought it was a wasted opportunity not to allow an open discussion about these issues raised.

I am left wondering if the facilitator took on the role of our CEO as we enacted the group process and our struggles with him in a similar way. We were cooperative. We joined in with the activities asked of us. In small discussions, we gossiped and attempted to express our opinion amongst ourselves. Some offered feedback to the large group as asked but we were quick to retreat into silence when the group was shut down.

### **Board meeting the following morning**

Neville, the Chair, opened the meeting. He thanked those of us who were there to attend the previous day's strategic planning day. He thought the day went very smoothly and was very informative; the facilitator was doing an excellent job. A few others echoed similar sentiments. Just before the meeting began, as we were all getting our coffee from one corner of the room, Fiona (Patrick's EA) and I chatted briefly. She asked me how I thought the strategy day went. Without hesitation I replied, 'I think people have spoken. We have a major issue on our hands'. She replied, 'Let's see what gets done from here.'

I wondered what was going on. It felt as though there were a big gap between my own and the staff's experience, and that of the rest of the Board. I began to wonder if there were even some kind of public transcript which is unanimously adopted, where the Chairman initiates and the rest collude. Patrick was sitting directly across from me. He spoke after the rest and also expressed how productive he thought the day had been, "enabling the alignment of ourselves with a vision", which would keep us on track. Was this a pat on each other's backs? By this point I wanted to set the facts straight about how I thought the day had gone. I looked to Neville and said, "Actually I found the second half of day far more useful than the first half. The first half was spent rationalising in numbers and understanding what we were being asked to do." I followed by saying, "With hindsight, without the agitation of the first half, we wouldn't have got to the second half, where people openly expressed their frustrations." I then raised my real concern that it was crystal clear People and Culture was our major challenge. Patrick jumped in and cut me off. He mentioned that it was all part of the process: "Where there is progress, culture will change". He said that he has at times offered new development courses, but it would then be met in one of two ways: no one would be interested, or people would complain about the lack of time. I didn't quite catch all that he had to say. But words that stood out were *progress, process* and *bringing in the new*. At this point, I asked this: "Is it just about bringing in the new? Can we not also bring back some of the old practices which people have enjoyed in the past?"

I took this opportunity to remind them that I was a doctoral candidate currently researching organisational politics which involved thinking about public and hidden transcripts. I mentioned I had noticed many hidden transcripts the day before. One group for example, was discussing what philanthropy meant to them. One of the scientists answered, "it means sucking up to rich people". I emphasised that these were the conversations we need to have openly amongst ourselves. At the moment, our people are asking for a communal space where they can congregate and talk as they used to. I stressed how important it was to have shared conversations. Another example I gave was when one lead scientist mentioned to me how much he missed having a "drinking seminar" once a month where four of our scientists would volunteer to speak for ten minutes each over casual drinks about their research or struggles. At such a seminar, everyone was welcome. I told the Board that we should bring this back and that I, for one, as a Director, would love to be involved.

As I continued to speak, I became aware colleagues sitting beside me had turned towards me as they listened. Typically, each of us tends to look down at our laptop. I began to feel a little self-conscious if I had spoken too intensely and now wished to find my retreat. I blushed and said, "I realise we all contribute different expertise on the Board. My weakness, as you all might have noticed, is numbers. I tend to switch off when finance topics crop up, but, when it comes to people and culture, I get fired up." I thought it was my way of softening, a gesture of self-reflection rather than accusation. It was a welcome relief when Kylie, the COO, stepped in and said she would love to have my input on the new committee and would also like to read my work. It was about the same time Neville made a tongue-in-cheek remark that when he is at home, hidden transcripts were best kept hidden.

The meeting continued. When we came to Finance, Neville attempted once again to be humorous. He said, 'Sophie, you may switch off now'. I replied, "No Neville, I must step up to my weakness and listen with interest from now on." I heard laughter in the room. I realised as I reflected on both our comments that I was trying to make a further point about dialogue, culture and process. By owning up to my weakness, I was doing a number of things: being self-revealing and vulnerable; providing an exemplar for others; owning something so that it is no longer my hidden transcripts or private dialogue or an insight that I would just share with a trusted member of staff in the form of gossip. Speaking openly also exposes a source of anxiety and becomes public.

## **Reflections**

Neville opened the meeting by congratulating everyone on the success of the previous day. He left very little room for comment. It felt like a moment where we were literally invited to applaud. I acknowledge that all organisations need to have congratulatory conversations as well as critical reflection. I referred to these above as needing 'praise gossip' to necessitate a 'we-identity' amongst staff and scientists. I find it bizarre when this attempt to recognise each other at the governance level is not offered elsewhere within the organisation where it is most needed.

However, when I offered my comment, which was different from the positive sentiment echoed by other Board members, I felt that it was unwelcome. Patrick attempted to silence me. And on reflection, although she was complimentary, Kylie,

the COO, also closed down further conversation. Neville's tongue-in-cheek remark, that hidden transcripts are best kept hidden, was perhaps another hint to me about the behaviours he values or as to a way to get ahead in X Foundation. I felt shamed for being silenced, but I was determined to continue. But after revealing my emotions so publicly, I felt 'out of line' to borrow Goffman's term. My thoughts returned to my exploration of face in P3. Goffman (1956, p.56) explained that in circumstances where we are performing in our professional capacity, there is a code of professional etiquette to preserve the common front where we would not say anything which would embarrass the impression of competence that we and others are attempting to maintain. This kind of solidarity in the presence of subordinates also occurs when performers are in the presence of superordinate.

Goffman's view fits well with my experience of these meetings. It is as if there were an unspoken code of the etiquette of governance which I had broken by being too personal. When I used the survey results that people and culture should be prioritised as our major concern, it was my attempt to discuss these concerns openly. I felt that we were presenting ourselves as democratic by engaging in public surveys when there is little intention of changing our existing mode of relations with each other. I was asked by my learning set colleagues if reminding others in the board meeting that I was a doctoral candidate was a power play on my part. Reflecting on this, it didn't feel like it at the time; I was still in my early stages of research, but I might be wrong. It felt more my plea to be taken seriously for my concerns. If there were any exercise of power on my part, it was my courage to speak up. With the recent letting go of Melissa and her replacement praised as a loyal team player, and with all the episodes of the past three years, including the dramatic exit of the past chairman, I had in mind to state that agreement, obedience and conformity were valued in this organisation. Perhaps I was experimenting to establish new ways of interacting and was negotiating what is acceptable behaviour.

### [Danger of normalising practice](#)

One of the major criticisms of this leadership in the most recent staff survey was Patrick and his senior management team's lack of both consultation and the process of initiating change. Not consulting, even if only superficially, feels dismissive and prompts anxiety. The connection I am making here is the danger of allowing the Board meetings to act as another highly structured activity that discourages

conversations and acts as a rubber stamp. Our position as Directors/trustees is in a volunteer capacity. I imagine the common attitude towards this role as simply to do our bit and not to cause too much of a fuss. That was certainly how I thought about it when I joined. As I understand it, my role when I was recruited was to raise money for the greater good. It is easy to slip into the idea that we all contribute our area of expertise and that we are encouraged to see our responsibilities ending there. Neville had suggested jokingly that I could switch off when it came to finance reporting. Over time, we rely on others to take up responsibilities which lie outside our interest. Board meetings become a collective performance of unity based on self-interest and on not rocking the boat. We stop asking what it is that we are trying to achieve together and what we owe to other stake holders.

I think it is exactly that attitude which Foucault is warning us not to overlook. There is a long tradition of mobilising Foucault's thought in organisation studies. Raffnsøe et al. (2019) describe four waves of Foucault scholarship which have wrestled with concepts of power and discipline, discourse, governmentality and an ethic of care of the self. In my thesis I am interested to a greater or lesser extent in all of these manifestations. But this project is particularly interested in disciplinary power and in the ethic of care. Foucault scholar Barbara Townley draws on his work extensively to show how particular regimes of organisational life are achieved through the practice of management and governance. Townley follows Foucault and draws on the importance of history in analysing specific rationalities with reference to context and power relations. In *Reason's Neglect* (2008), she examines the different rationalities which are reflected in contemporary organisational practice. She argues that management as a discipline employs techniques which are both 'disembedded and disembodied' (2008, p.25), which bring about particular effects and inhibit others, which value particular categories of knowledge and not others. This detached approach to management practices, which claims an objective view of the world, is what I have been subjected to at X Foundation.

My concern as a director focuses on ways of managing, on how to allow various comments to be said and not said. I am concerned that the current way of managing in X Foundation, which I have experienced, is authoritarian, prescriptive and narrow. It doesn't allow for opening matters up and for the possible creation of novelty through difference. The implications of complexity theory as Stacey &

Mowles (2016) posited herein: that novelty emerges from the exploration of difference and not from seeking 'alignment' with others to the exclusion of noticing what we are ignoring. I find Foucault's concepts of the 'docile body' and 'muted solidarity' quite fitting to describe the image which I hold of our highly structured board meetings (Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982, p.143). However, unlike the passivity which these terms suggest, I feel a growing resistance in an embodied sense towards the way the group has come to accept this way of meeting following on from my reflections on the background above.

To explore further what is covered over in this way of managing, I will draw on Hannah Arendt, a Jewish-German born political theorist; I will continue to explore the danger in maintaining our relations with each other characterised by conformity rather than plurality. When we accept things as they are in the position of governance of NGOs, we may unthinkingly condone and engage in practices which alienate one from another in the guise of improving welfare of the individual or of the community.

### Substituting making for action

In *The Human Condition*, Arendt (1958) offers an account of how society came into being. She moves from the ancient world through to economic modernisation. In Arendt's terms, to become visible in the 'world of appearances' is our second birth (ibid, p.176). It is about inserting ourselves into the world. It is neither forced upon us by necessity like labour, nor prompted by utility like work. Our actions are influenced but not conditioned by others. She writes: "It may be stimulated by the presence of whose company we may wish to join, but it is never conditioned by them; its impulse springs from the beginning which came into the world when we were born and to which we respond by beginning something new on our own initiative" (ibid, p.177). We are impelled, she implies, to see something done in the world, a process which requires cooperation with others. The action becomes relevant only through the spoken word in which we identify ourselves to others, what we are doing, what we have done and what we intend to do. She argues that action, the highest form of human undertaking, greater than labour and work, is not possible in isolation (ibid, p.179).

While Arendt clarifies that all three, labour, work and action, are essential activities in the process of a human life, it is through the disclosure of our speech and action that we set in motion the possibility of a new beginning. Arendt refers to this new beginning as 'natality' and is what makes us uniquely human. However, whatever we begin anew always falls into an already existing web of relations whose immediate consequences are felt by everyone involved. It is by the very nature of the existing web of human intentions and conflicts, that action always almost fails to achieve its purpose.

By the same token, Arendt (1951, p.190) states that actions are "boundless", that their consequences are unpredictable and irreversible. An actor is, therefore, responsible for both the action she is about to undertake and the actions which she has already set in motion. But it is the community which mitigates and permits the full expression of humanity. This is Arendt's idea of bringing to light the diversity in perspectives which makes for human plurality.

The real concern is when these activities collapse into one another: when work becomes colonised by the repetitive nature of labour or action being substituted in the image of work. As I mentioned in my previous projects, Patrick and the others in the major gift team are far more energised and flexible when they see a new opportunity where their immediate needs can be met. As I have experienced in the past three years, the unfortunate reality is that once a gift has been solicited, the donors are mostly forgotten. Relationship building is not valued, nor is the ability to explore together what it is that we are doing and why. Understandably, for a CEO, a central responsibility is about finding funds and keeping people employed. From a governance position, it is about sustaining the impact of NFPs. But without the opportunity to engage collectively in conversations so as to question our values, I find my work at X Foundation has been consumed by the constant and repetitive need to find new donors. I feel responsible for donors and beneficiaries, and I also have concern for the culture in the workplace to which I have been exposed.

Arendt's purpose in writing about action was to advocate the experience of freedom: the right to be a participant in governing affairs. The complete fulfilment of the state of being free is rarely achieved, she claimed, with the danger and frustrations in action. We tend to default to the preoccupation with work to manage our anxiety

about action. Instead of politics being about governing, we substitute making for acting with the preferred model: there is one man in the position as the maker and the rest relegated to the passivity of material for his operations (Arendt, 1958, p.220-30). This is a close description of my experience being on the board collaborating with passive colleagues in support of Patrick, the CEO, as the maker.

The research we carry out at X Foundation is often described in terms of its excellence. We seem to provide only positive feedback. In the early years as a new board member, I lacked the confidence and the knowledge to raise any concerns. Over time, I found myself contradicting my own sense of what is right. But by not speaking up, I am perpetuating the existing relations of domination. This further reinforces the effects of dependency of board members if the Chairman himself will only follow the agenda and speak positively. Vince and Mazen (2014) have introduced the notion of 'violent innocence' as a concept to explore the effects of masking violence in organizations. They claim that most literature in organizational studies on leadership is less forthcoming about discussing the 'dark side' of behaviour and power dynamics that take place in organizational life. What I think Vince and Mazen meant by violent innocence is that when, from the leader down, there is an emphasis only on the positive, the unwanted negative part of working together has to be dealt with by everyone else. Similarly, Collinson (2012) argues that 'Being positive can have disciplining effects – delegitimizing doubts, silencing dissent, stifling debate and creating an environment where the courage to resist 'can be redefining as betrayal''. Under such conditions, it is possible, as Arendt (1951) had claimed, even for well-intentioned people to go along condoning the work with an instrumental attitude which sanctions a form of innocent violence being carried out in the process of making. I find these ideas help articulate my experience at X Foundation.

### Vision without discussion of values

I have been reflecting on how Patrick appeared displeased with the results of the survey and with me for reopening it during the board meeting. He was perplexed about why people were not keeping up with him or aligning themselves with 'X Foundation's' values, whatever they may be. I think positivity and the idea of being forward thinking as leader in order to generate conformity is a common organisational phenomenon, and to a degree is required of the leader. However,

Mowles (2007, p. 137.) stated that in the public and not for profit sectors in particular, leaders and managers make claims that projects are going to achieve more than just the positive. They will be transformational. Transformation is portrayed as an organisational and moral necessity.

Visioning is about moving ourselves towards a new reality to which we all aspire, whilst having nothing to say about how we might get there. This makes visioning exercises and the excitement that they generate very hard to gainsay or to express doubts, reservations and alternatives. (ibid.).

It is difficult to dispute a vision of instilling hope in human services, in particular to that most vulnerable and marginalised group, the mentally ill. Reading Arendt has increased my awareness of the risk of further disadvantaging a subset of the population in the name of welfare if we don't recognise their difference: in Arendt's terms, their plurality.

The task of our Foundation Board is predominantly to manage finance which includes raising funds and approving spending. I find this task onerous when we are without opportunities to explore our values. We need to keep asking why we are raising funds and how are we raising them; what is at stake and what is being compromised. We need to hold each other accountable in keeping separable our means, ends and purposes (Simmel, 1978). As Directors, I see that the way we conduct ourselves and the way we engage with management will have a ripple effect and will necessarily contribute to the organizational environment. This leads me to a discussion of the role of boards and to the question of whether I have any justification in thinking that, as board members, we could be doing more.

### Directorial duties of Not for Profit (NFP) literature review

A number of scholars have argued that, in contrast to the private sector, the literature exploring the multiple governance responsibilities of NFPs is underdeveloped (Cornforth, 2004; Coule, 2015; Morrison and Sallipante, 2007). Coule (2015) sets out four broad categories of governance theory: principal agent, stewardship, stakeholder and democratic perspectives, which are discussed in the literature on corporates, and are used to explore the multiple governance responsibilities of NFPs. Increasingly, according to Coule, one of the principal

theories of governance taken up in NFPs borrows from the private sector. It assumes that the CEO is there to act as principal agent of the company's shareholders. According to principal agent theory in private companies, the main task of company directors is to keep the CEO's feet to the fire, to ensure that s/he maximises shareholder value. This is achieved through oversight of their performance and compliance with organisational procedures. Principal-agent theories, therefore, cast accountability as "the means by which individuals and organisations report to a recognised authority and are held responsible for their actions" (Edwards & Hulme, 1996, p. 967). Fama and Jensen (1983) assert that Board of Directors assumes the role of monitoring and of ratifying decisions separate from the initiating and implementation of decisions made by the CEO. Such boards have the power to hire, or fire. They are to be regarded as a form of corporate control, charged with the responsibility to monitor and reward CEOs while assuring corporate activity reflects stakeholders' interests (Miller-Millesen, 2003). In NFPs a board understanding itself in these terms would find a variety of ways of holding the CEO to account for targets that they themselves may have set in their interpretation of the NFPs objectives.

By contrast, stewardship theory argues that governance is exercised in a partnership between the board and the CEO, where board members are thought to bring expertise to the table (Cornforth, 2004) in a collaborative relationship. Stewardship theory assumes a unity of interest between the CEO and the directors where activity mostly revolves around compliance with laws, aims and objectives and monitoring of finance. Australia has an institution which oversees the practice of NFPs, the Australian Charities and Not for Profit Commission. Its document on good practice in board governance, entitled *Governance for good: the ACNC's guide for charity board members* is a largely anodyne account which seem to fit broadly with the stewardship idea of the role of boards. My own experience of X Foundation so far is that it complies broadly with this understanding of the relationship between the CEO and the board.

Stakeholder and democratic approaches to NFP governance, when translated to NFPs, assume a much more active role for the communities served by the NFPs, or for the communities in which they live, and do not necessarily assume unity of interests. Stakeholder perspectives may even result in the beneficiaries of the NFP

being represented on the board. Instead they assume that there is likely to be disagreement and possibly conflict between competing interests. Drawing on Cornforth (2004), Toule (2015) argues that stakeholder and democratic theories of governance assume that there are different interests to be mediated, and so the role of the board is essentially political. The board exists in order to mediate between potentially competing moral goods, which include questions of power, politics and values. This will involve being 'held responsible' as well as 'taking responsibility' for the implications of their actions, what Knutsen and Brower (2010) refer to as both expressive and instrumental accountability. What I think is meant by this is that the board may develop its own standards of what it should be doing, rather than just be held accountable to the law of the land, the rules of finance, or the broad purpose of the organisation.

I take from particularly these last two theories of governance that what is valued is plurality, that the board is taking responsibility for reflecting on its own operation, irrespective of whether any outside authority is asking it to do so. It goes beyond thinking purely instrumentally. Accountability is both self-generated and imposed from the outside; it involves staff in the organisation as well as stakeholders whom it is set up to serve or with whom it is to develop relationships. Interestingly stakeholders/donors in the past have expressed their wish to have a seat on our board, but our board/CEO have dismissed this idea as provoking a conflict of interest. In taking up these discussions more seriously, I think it might be just what we need as a group to share our deliberations in a wider circle of concern. Of course, if the task of the board is understood to be also political then relationships are much more difficult to manage. But such an approach may be more apposite for NFPs, particularly if they have complex social missions. The kinds of political activities in which I found myself caught up in X Foundation and which were difficult to discuss openly, resonate very much with plural, political and critical conceptions of the board moving beyond 'aligning with the vision' or following through on what Patrick wants as CEO.

### Keeping means-ends in view

There remains, therefore, a question: what in the meantime is being compromised or put aside if we cannot talk about what we are doing and what it means? Just as we were asked by the facilitator to split into groups to rank our goals with colour

crayons and sticky notes - the 'must dos' and 'quick wins', or what can be deferred to execute and what to give up - I too am asking if we could honour this process by giving it in shared dialogues the time and attention it deserves. Mowles (2012) explores 'keeping means-ends in view' in the work with international non-government organisations (INGOs). He argues that the intent on doing good is often idealised and abstract. The targets cannot be ends in themselves: they must be accompanied by discussion about the means of achieving the ends. He adds that, no matter how idealised and abstract, targets must be functionalised within the contexts and actors involved. This is consonant with Mead's approach to ethics as explored in P2: we are required to consider as many values as are possible of the people involved in the problem:

...the only rule that an ethics can present is that an individual should deal with all the values that are found in a specific problem. That does not mean that one has to spread before him all the social values when he approaches a problem. The problem itself defines the values. It is a specific problem and there are certain interests that are definitely involved; the individual should take into account all of those interests and then make out a plan of action which will rationally deal with these interests. That is the only method that ethics can bring to the individual. (Mead, 1934, p.388)

For Mead the ethical task in our attempt to go on together is to proceed through having reflected on a given problem. This involves a search for the appropriate means to attain ends and a reflection on the suitability of the ends themselves in practical situations (p.129).

It is the stakeholder and the democratic forms of mutual engagement which are lacking in X Foundation. Since writing this project, I have been enthused with an increased sense of courage to apply myself in my work at X Foundation. This has resulted in setting up the People and Culture Committee which has drawn on a wide range of staff from across the hierarchy in the organisation. I have been trying with a few other committee members to create more of a sense of a joint undertaking as a group and to reflect on how we are working together. Entering into conversations with others is integral: it will not only help me understand what others are thinking but will also provide the opportunity to test out the soundness of my own views. This is the kind of action Arendt recommends we put into practice in order to experience freedom. Her ideas echo pragmatic thinking about the testing of ideas in

practice. Dewey (1918, cited in Hickman & Alexander, p.72-73) wrote: "All deliberate action of mind is in a way an experiment with the world to see what it will stand for, what it will promote and what frustrate." The practice of freedom is both for our benefit and for that of the people we are set up to serve. The Committee has its difficulties, but we are as a group learning to express ourselves better and to draw conflict and disagreement more into the open. Even CEO Patrick participates, and this has not prevented people more openly saying what they think. As a point of interest, I also noticed there are those who would jump in to defend things on his behalf. I look forward to exploring this further in due course. This is one way in which the existing order perpetuates itself.

Additionally, my ability to influence thinking in the organisation seems to have grown. I am now more recognised for the difference I bring as a Board member trying to encourage varied ways of working. I recently collaborated on an initiative for Mental Health week between X Foundation and another donor/NFP in the aged care sector whom I mentioned in P2: paying a visit with Ronald and Jane was my first mission when they expressed not feeling valued by X Foundation. This time I have the ear of both CEOs from the organisations as I try to draw them into discussion with each other. I began this project with excitement, but I was also cautiously aware of the fragility of face between two sides. This project recognized aged care front line workers, and the hardship and sacrifices they make in their private lives in order to keep their residence safe during this pandemic. They are rarely recognized. They are deemed invisible until something goes wrong where they become the headline news. But on this occasion, broadcasted live for mental health week, twenty-two aged care locations lit up. Staff and residents participated by colouring their hair. It was a remarkable week of celebration. They were the centre of attention; there were well-wishers from the community including dignitaries. My hope was to rekindle the goodwill between two organizations recognizing each other in our interdependencies in caring for the community as our common goal. While it was a marked success raising the profile of both organizations and funds raised for X Foundation, it was not without its difficulties having to convince Patrick and executive management to work relationally to support another NFP.

In thinking about our roles and responsibilities as board directors/trustees of NFP in human services to mental health and social welfare, I have experienced a natural resistance to processes of domination (which is written about extensively by Collinson, 2005) and misrecognition. Mead has helped me to understand the role I am trying to fulfil. In his essay *Philanthropy from the point of view of ethics* (1930, p.133, p.9), Mead suggests that organising to do good requires more than an obligation out of sympathy for others. It also requires us to conduct ourselves according to the behaviour we are encouraging: to walk the talk. This very attitude brings with it not only the stimulus which has aroused our impulse to assist but also a judgement upon that situation in which we find ourselves (ibid, p.140). There is no separation of means and ends: the means we have chosen determine the ends we achieve. This obliges us as a Board to think constantly about what we are doing and why we are doing it.

In concluding: How can this be achieved? It relies on judgement and differences of opinions, which in turn presupposes a plurality of individual perspectives (Arendt, cited in Bernstein, 2016, p.117). In practice, it means including into our conversations the people we have excluded. This will require a willingness to be hospitable to languages other than our own. Taking a position and being an active member in this creative and self-reflexive process change how we recognise each other. This modifies existing power relations.

## Summary

The political situation of Hong Kong and the current pandemic have affected me personally: completing this project has taken longer than I anticipated. My decision to keep on exploring these two narratives was difficult to justify: there were plenty of new materials which seemed far richer. Yet I found myself emotionally drawn to these two events. My supervisor pointed out to me on many occasions that the two narratives I have chosen were matters which happen all of the time in organizational life. I struggled to articulate and make visible why I felt so attached to them. But I was determined to continue, partly because it is in keeping with the research method I have been using throughout this thesis with my emphasis on the particularity of relational dynamics in context, on the “little things of socially constructed normalcy” (Clegg et. al., 2006, p. 228) that reveal power relations. Partly too because in staying with what troubled me and in examining the function of gossip, I realised the

constructive consequences it can provide as a way of survival or a way of releasing emotions. It became apparent to me that the subjection to being silenced and the non-responsiveness in the way we relate in this organization were what I struggled to make visible: the dismissiveness, the way we are moved along in Board meetings, the time limit we place on discussion regardless of what is important. It is this silencing, the inability to recognize each other as individuals, which I find most violent. It struck me at my core, even though no one in the organisation deliberately sets out to be violent (as in the notion of violent *innocence*). The two narratives are generalizable occurrences. They also provide a fair representation of my working experience in mental health and social welfare where people are often silenced and unable to recognize themselves in this clinical sterile environment.

As such, I have developed a heightened awareness of my moral responsibilities. First are those of Director, but more important are my social responsibilities towards mental health within the organisation and the wider community. The type of work we do at X Foundation certainly has benefits to improve the quality of life for mental health sufferers and the way we carry out such tasks: dismissing the relational aspect of human interactions; valuing conformity rather than exploring differences; stigmatising irrationality; creating a separation between acceptable and unacceptable behaviours. In emphasising just the positive, we are not only dismissing our own mental well-being but also risking further disadvantaging those already marginalised. In extreme form, we can inadvertently condone a violent innocence by carrying out our tasks unthinkingly. When board meetings are occupied with a repeated focus on finance matters, all that matters are the survival and longevity of the organisation. This made me realise how critical it is in our day to day public life to move beyond this and to widen our circle of concern. Arendt contended that it is only by participation in speaking and in listening in public that we are able to establish beyond doubt our own thinking through the exploration of many points of view.

From the literature of governance theory, X Foundation broadly complies with the understanding of stewardship between the CEO with its directors. I am more encouraged by the stakeholder and democratic approaches where the board exists in order to mediate between competing moral goods. It will help us to become more

plural in our perspectives in the governance of NFPs, where we can engage more politically to safeguard those we try to benefit.

It seems that since P2, the theme of recognition and misrecognition has re-emerged for me. I am thinking about what it takes in order to thrive as individuals and as collectives, particularly groups who organise themselves to benefit those other groups in society who are less privileged. Both Mead and Honneth (1995, p.79) refer to the 'dignity' one is granted as soon as one is recognised (as I mentioned in Project 2). This takes place through the granting of rights, as one becomes a member of such a community. I am still faced with issues similar to those when I began, but I feel more equipped now to speak out, particularly in the newly established People & Culture committee. My motivation has been to move the organisation of which I am part to a more open and reflective consideration of what it is we are doing and why. As Mowles (2012) proposed, there should always be room for negotiation and for the potential for emergence of greater mutual recognition between those engaged in the task of the organisation, particularly if the organisation has a social mission.

## Synopsis of research

The projects that make up this thesis have been written over the course of my three and a half years on the DMan programme. This problem-based research involves paying attention to events at work, and then documenting how, through a series of four projects, my thinking and my participation with others change over the course of the thesis. The purpose of this synopsis is to review all I have been doing to date, to make a summary of the material and to provide further reflection. I will summarise my key arguments by drawing out some generalisations which I think will be relevant to other Directors of NGOs/NFPs to do with board culture. I will explain my chosen method of research, describe its limitations and conclude by claiming my contribution to theory and practice. I will also describe what I would like to do by way of further research.

I begin with the context which led me to my research. If I sum up my thesis in just a few words, its focus is on not losing sight of what matters. Personally, and professionally, as a mental health survivor myself, it is about ethics of care for one another. It was my own struggle with mental health which brought me to my research in the first place.

### *The context*

I began on the DMan with an interest in my work as a volunteer counsellor. I was working in NGOs with the homeless and with people suffering from mental illness. At the time of joining the DMan, I was invited to join the Board of a university-based research Institute, X Foundation, with a particular interest in brain disorders and mental illness.

Up until joining X Foundation and the DMan, I had been involved over a span of twenty years with NGOs in mental health and social welfare. I became disheartened from watching how some of the homeless and the mentally ill are being managed: how they are provoked into acting out various roles when they are coerced into conforming to protocols and to rules in an environment unfamiliar to them. I also have great concern for our frontline workers and for their mental health. As a volunteer counsellor at NGO W, I used to criticize the Board of Directors for enjoying a philanthropic identity without having much insight into the despair which goes on at ground level on a daily basis. My effort to work closely with

people within this organisation and my being involved with other stake holders has provided various perspectives so that I did not become complacent. I felt it was my turn to live up to the high standards I had of others.

As I have developed my thesis my research theme has emerged as: playing the game of NGO board governance in Australia - linking politics, ethics and mutual recognition to widen our circle of concern.

### Project One – an autobiography

The intention of this project is central to the reflexive method. The task was to think critically about my own patterns of thinking and of interpretation: I described how I have come to think as I do. I began laying out some of the formative events and experiences of my life which had influenced my way of thinking and which had brought me to where I was at the time of writing Project 1. I came away with more detachment about my own formation and about the experiences which helped shape me.

The following is a brief recount to some of the formative events and experiences of my life:

I was born in Hong Kong and, as a result of my parents' marriage breakdown, I was placed into an institution as an infant. My earliest memory of home life was a sense of detachment as an outsider. I migrated to Australia at the age of 13. I navigated a new set of difficulties as a new immigrant living with my older stepsiblings for the first time. An opportunity to leave my dysfunctional family came when I won a scholarship to Japan as an exchange student. This opportunity helped me gain both financial independence and my first job as a Japanese translator in Sydney. This also became a stepping stone to my working in the hospitality industry in Hong Kong. I was able to develop close bonds with people where the hotels which I managed became my home. The staff became my family.

When I returned to Australia, my husband and I set up a corporate advisory business which brought together companies and investors. Soon after the birth of my second child, I was diagnosed with postnatal depression. In trying to understand my own predicament and disposition, I returned to university and completed a Master's

degree in neuroscience and psychotherapy. I took a particular interest in the extreme spectrum of mental illness and in the intersubjective experience between patient and therapist.

I take from this overview the themes which preoccupy me: homelessness, displacement, mental illness, quality of relationships, duty of care or the lack thereof and my anxiety about inclusion/exclusion which I experienced from my family of origin.

This project alerted me, for the first time, to the centrality of the group in understanding what had been going on around me. Drawing on George Herbert Mead and German sociologist Norbert Elias allowed me to reinterpret my previous experience with a social understanding of the self. Formerly I viewed myself as a separate individual who was immune to the social process. To take Mead's idea: human consciousness arises in the social act, in communicative interaction, so that there cannot be one without the other. I began to understand Mead's (1934) theory of gesture and response. He explains: 'the structure of meaning can be found in a threefold relationship, from gesture to adjustive response and to the resultant of the given social act'. This means that we cannot simply locate meaning in the gesture or the response of a single act but in the circular interaction between the two in the living present (Stacey & Mowles, 2016). This placed interdependence, power and conflict more at the heart of my new interpretation of my own history.

Through the reflexive process of Project 1, I also came to realize that I have always been capable of reflexive engagement with my experience but that I lacked the vocabulary to describe it. Mowles (2015, p.61) writes: 'Reflexivity is where we 'bend back' our thinking on itself and on ourselves in order to call into question our own role in understanding what it is we are trying to understand'. Observing my own processes has been the most valuable development in my learning and has proven to be most useful in my work as a therapist. At times my heightened sensitivity and my ability to process multiple perspectives at once can become overwhelming. I become reactive and emotional. It is often in these moments that I find myself suddenly experiencing recurring themes of my past. This is the point where I return to reflecting. I explore my own role in the way that I'm thinking.

## *Reflexive turn*

Over the course of four years, it has become clearer to me why I am drawn to an environment like X Foundation and what are the type of issues which provoke me. I now realise that this first project is very important for the recurring themes which reverberate through my work. I have a heightened sensitivity towards groups of people who are oppressed. I am most reactive in a culture which inhibits conflicts and emotions; my reading as a doctoral student has enabled me to become more reflective and reflexive about this. It was not until Project 2 that I came to understand Mead's view from the standpoint of a social behaviourist. He suggests that:

...an individual organism determines or seeks out in some sense its own environment by its sensitivity. The only environment to which the organism can react is one that its sensitivity reveals. (1934, p.245).

The salient point here for me is to pay attention to the environments we find ourselves drawn to and to notice how we co-create what it is that provokes in us.

I had become somewhat critical of NGOs in the way the homeless and the mentally unwell were being managed. It seemed to me that clients of the NGOs were often provoked into acting out, or reacting against behaviour determined by others. This evokes a similar emotional reaction in me from my own history of being forced to conform. In one of his famous articles (1896, cited in Brinkmann, 2004), John Dewey takes the example of noise to illustrate the importance of context. A particular noise is experienced differently if you are in a quiet room reading a book, from when you are out hunting (1896, p.361). John Dewey saw psychology as a moral science which should, therefore, look at habits in their context, instead of towards inner, mental processes. What Dewey is referring to is that we are creature of habits which are socially acquired because the self is social (1922/130, p.25). Drawing on Dewey, Brinkmann (2004) urges us to place our attention 'upon the objective conditions in which habits are formed and operate' (1922, p.86). In other words, a question for all of us involved in mental health organisations is what we might be doing that could encourage clients to act out, rather than simply concluding it is located with the individual. Skills and relationships cannot be abstracted from lived life (ibid). In itself life has meaning only within a context where our everyday, habitual function rests on how we have been socialized to manage the world (Brinkmann, 2004). I

have continued my interest in organizations concerned with mental health. However, I am not only interested in mental health in the abstract but also in the particular circumstances of particular people we are trying to support if we are to make a difference to them.

As I reflect on my exclusion from complex family groups, I see that I am adept at assimilating into other cultures. The Chinese notion of *face*, instilled in me from a young age, played a pivotal role in my survival. The importance of *face* appeared several times in my first project, but it was not until Project 3 that I was able to realise its significance, and draw on scholars' work, in particular Chinese scholar and the work of Goffman which I will treat in more depth below. Although it didn't feature in this thesis, through Goffman's (1961) work in *Asylums* I also came to understand that putting on a face is the opposite tactic to acting out which I noticed in mental health patients as mentioned above.

By the end of Project 1, I had identified amongst my reflections key themes of power, recognition and the ethic of care. The project led me to realise how my upbringing has conditioned my relationship to authority and to those in positions of power. In my pattern of relating to others, my focus on their needs has kept me from paying attention to myself. In the next project I began to negotiate my inclusion: I sought to be recognized by the CEO, my new leader. I thought about how the values of the individuals may be set against the common values of the organization; how one can discern if and how one can express, negotiate or adjust to the standards of one's community or organization. As I highlighted in P1, this was a recurring theme for me. It wasn't obvious to me at the time, but it is here that I made better sense of the meaning of personal and social responsibility in the position of governance.

### Project Two – Negotiating power, recognition and ethics

This project begins as I negotiate my way as a new member on the board of X Foundation. I was predominantly recruited on the Foundation Board with an understanding that my contribution was to raise money. By the time I completed Project 1, six months into joining this research institute, I had become aware of further problematic themes within this organization.

In my view, the staff and the CEO had a very instrumental, perhaps transactional way of understanding and working with people, particularly their key donors. One of our long-term donors, an NFP in the aged care sector, said to our fund-raising team that they needed to feel more valued before they would commit more funds to us. This became my first task as a Director as I accompanied Ronald, the gift manager, to visit this donor/NFP three years ago.

My own experience of working in X Foundation, as I described to my learning set, was feeling used and dismissed, an experience of which I had a particular experience from my history. This resulted from repeated experiences of being asked by X Foundation staff to assist them often at short notice, but nothing I provided appeared to deepen the relationship. The *thank you* became code: *Kindly leave your goods by the door and we will take over from here.*

The first narrative gave a recount of my first meeting with Patrick, the CEO. This was shortly after the departure of the Chairman who was responsible for recruiting me. She didn't leave happy. I found myself engaged in power negotiations with Patrick. We were off to a rocky start. With hindsight, it was clear that during my first meeting with him he was exercising his authority and a kind of disciplining to ensure that I acknowledged him as my new leader.

### *Feeling unrecognized as a generalised experience*

In trying to make sense of my first meeting with Patrick and why I felt so provoked by him, I drew on Mead's theories of communication (1934) through gesture and response which I have discussed earlier, to understand how we co-created the meaning of our interaction. I explored Mead's social and emergent view of ethics in trying to resolve our respective value perspectives. Mead (1934, p.388) describes a moral problem as one which involves bringing into view conflicting interests. His suggestion to resolve a moral dilemma is to lay out as many value positions as is possible which relate to the specific problem, and to put aside our own *immediate* interests when they come into conflict with those of others that, until that point, we had not recognized. This is easier said than done, and clearly that did not take place between Patrick and me the first time we met. This then led me to Honneth's (1995) idea of struggle and our respective need to feel recognized. Honneth states that only in recognising other self-conscious individuals can one recognize oneself, and

reconcile with each other person's shared abilities and qualities. Through each individual may also learn more about his or her own distinctive identity. In this exploration, I was able to gain a new perspective in understanding that perhaps staff and management were feeling equally unrecognized. I discovered that my struggle with Patrick was a more generalisable difficulty experienced in the organisation, that there was little patience with exploration, reflection and with making sense together. Later in P2, I noticed even at a board level, my fellow directors were much more interested in speaking in abstractions about vision and mission than in concrete terms of what was going on between us. The kinds of conversations which were permissible were rational, abstract, and sometimes idealised. I wondered if the clinical approach employed in scientific research - abstracting human experiences as mere functions of the brain - was being taken up unconsciously in the way people related to one another at X Foundation. This new insight into my colleagues enabled me to see that the inability to recognize each other was widespread as I widened my concern beyond my dyadic focus on the ex-Chair or the CEO; I thought about group relations, which I took up further in Projects 3 and 4.

### *Being submissive – my reflections*

My early life, my cultural heritage and my status as a naturalized immigrant have made me hypervigilant about my inclusion in and exclusion from groups. As I recognized this in my own history, it was clear that I was at the same time negotiating my way into the DMan and X Foundation. I seem innately aware of power dynamics – I needed to be in order to survive – but until now I had been without an explicit understanding of what was going on, of how politics sits at the heart of what goes on between people. This is the case if we accept Elias's (1970) idea that we are interdependent: power and politics are inevitable aspects of social life. His concept of power and the notion of interdependence mean that power is not a quality that one can possess, but a structural characteristic of human interactions. Consonant with my experience as an immigrant, of learning and accepting the habitus of the group I had joined, I was conscious that I needed to submit to Patrick's power: I needed to indicate to him that I was not going to rock the boat, that I was going to be a good citizen. I had specific responsibilities for fund-raising: in all senses of the word, I was earning my social *capital* (Bourdieu, 1986).

My approach to the DMan shared qualities with X Foundation and with my experience as an immigrant. In the DMan community I recount in Project 1 an episode in a community meeting where I felt disciplined by a more experienced student. I noticed the shame that I felt. This was a form of social control, the very processes to which I was paying attention joining X Foundation. From the literature that underpins the DMan, pragmatic philosophy and process sociology, I had become familiar with the idea of the self as radically social: the individual is simultaneously forming and being formed through interaction with others (Mead, 1934). One way of being formed is through our sense of guilt and shame in conforming with social norms. We are both enabled and constrained by the social process as we enable and constrain others (Elias, 1987) in a complex responsive process of relating (Stacey, et. al, 2000). These are the same disciplinary processes which constantly shape organizations, and which I too experienced in X Foundation.

### *Reflexive turn*

In the process of reviewing my Project 2 for the purpose of writing this synopsis, I noticed that I had drawn on too many theories. My supervisor employed a striking figurative image to describe my Project 2: I had been bulking up muscles on top but my legs were unexercised. What this meant - as he explained at the time - was that narrative is the material I need before I can deploy theories to make sense. The number of theories at one stage was disproportionate to my narratives. One of the reasons was my eagerness to impress, to accumulate capital in this new academic community. This insight into myself and my approach led me in Project 3 to a deeper insight into what might be going on.

I wrote in Project 1 that seeing and being seen had been the way I had survived in my family groups. So too on the board: being recognized as someone who can contribute to group functioning precedes how one can effect influences over the group. The established group needs to maintain its dominant position to influence. A new member needs to see the group as effectual/as meaningful: allowing herself to be influenced and submitting to the discipline. Just as the group needs members who bring something valuable, so the person joining needs to consider the group to be worth joining. We are caught up in and by the game because it matters to us and

'being part of the game constitutes our sense of self, our identity' (Mowles, 2015, p.166)

By the end of Project 2, I came away with sharper clarity in regard to my ambivalence towards authority figures, to the potential for feeling excluded, and to how feeling shamed provokes a strong response, some of which I described in Project 1. Previously I would have taken a relatively individualistic view of what was going on and perhaps privileged my own experience of feeling used and dismissed. But by drawing on Mead's theories of communication through gesture and response, on Honneth's ideas of the struggle for recognition, and with a social view of ethics, I was able to find new potentialities for staying in relation. I was able to take a relational view of what is going on which has afforded more possibilities in the next project.

I went into Project 3 thinking about X Foundation and their neglect of relationships. I was initially led to research inclusion and reciprocity, particularly in the fund-raising context. It is more obvious to me now that, because I was feeling unrecognized by my new leader and his team, I went into Project 3 needing to build capital to earn my inclusion in the board. It has also struck me now that feeling unrecognized is the organizing experience of this organization.

### Project Three – Reciprocity and Face

Twelve months after completing Project 2, my experience with the Board still indicated to me that there was an avoidance or lack of interest in building relationships. Other than exchanging pleasantries, conversation was scarce outside of meetings. Prior to Covid, our highly structured board meetings took place at Price Waterhouse Coopers' Sydney Headquarters. I saw that as symbolic of status. During Board meetings, we were all performing a role in our supposed respective fields of expertise. We were proficient in saying how well we were doing at running the place efficiently. Our main task was to approve the budget and spending. All we talked about was finance.

Our Directors rarely set foot into X Foundation which is a state-of-the-art building. It is filled with laboratories and high technology but there is no common area for shared conversations. Most units have their own coffee machines. Patrick, the CEO,

who is a genetic scientist himself, does not like to speak to anyone, particularly not to his senior researchers if he doesn't have to.

At that particular point the fundraising team had offended a major gift donor whom I had introduced. The team sought my assistance to rectify the situation. They had pressured her to pledge a donation on the night of the gala event and offered to announce her gift publicly by way of a thank you. Their eagerness to acknowledge her publicly at the dinner had inadvertently offended her. This became my first narrative.

### *Gift theory*

To understand this, I drew on the work of Marcel Mauss, and his anthropological examination of the universal nature of gift-giving and the obligation which necessarily ensues. His most influential work on reciprocity, *The Gift* (1922/1990) begins by describing the native North American potlatch (in essence: to feed and to consume) as an extreme form of a total system of giving that is found in every region of the world. He describes the rendering of 'total services', how gift exchanges are not merely material obligations but carry an emotional component added to the motives of reciprocity. Mauss' exposition identified the time interval as an important element in the art of gift-giving where immediate reciprocity can be interpreted as a rejection of the gift-giver. In this instance, X Foundation's attempt at 'immediate reciprocity', the making explicit of instrumental goals, crudely violates the art and etiquette of gift-giving where eagerness to discharge one's obligation is considered a form of ingratitude (Bourdieu, 1977, p.6). In his work *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, (1977), and in response to Mauss, Bourdieu's treatment of the gift theory also emphasized the separation in time of successive gift-giving, so that each individual gift appears to be an isolated act of generosity. As Bourdieu (1990) points out, the choice of timing and occasion is key: the same act can have a particular meaning and unfolding in a particular context. I am wondering if my colleagues' eagerness to repay preserves an illusion of independence and an avoidance of power struggle with donors. It was brought to my attention recently by my supervisor that perhaps my interest in gift giving relates to a cultural phenomenon with which I have already been acquainted, though I knew it by a different name – *guanxi*.

### *Guanxi – power*

In the field of philanthropy among high net worth individuals (HNWI), the potential and willingness to donate can buy power/status and recognition through social networking. Locating what I knew culturally in a discourse of anthropology and power relations led me to a new appreciation of the subtleties involved in relation to reciprocity, gift-giving and power/status relationships. In my mind, the Chinese concept of *guanxi* is very close approximation of Bourdieu's notion of accumulating capital. It is one way of understanding this particular aspect of HNWI's. It marks a further opportunity to impose a hierarchy of capital and/or strategies for conversion of one form of capital to another. In addition, the emotional aspect to which Mauss draws attention captures the many facets of gift-giving in Chinese cultural practices: the cultural etiquette of belonging to a particular group. It is very much imbued in children as a part of a Chinese cultural upbringing. The positive emotions induced by reciprocity through *renqing* (human feelings) are one way of cultivating sentiment or feelings of emotional attachment. *Renqing* emphasizes the sense of obligation owed to each other; it is built up through the exchange of gifts for events such as marriages, birthdays, and funerals (Chen & Chen, 2014). It denotes a complicated social relationship in Chinese culture and further emphasise the points I am making about donor relations and their negotiation of power and recognition.

### *Face work*

Through inquiring into Mauss' working, I also discovered *face* as fundamentally important not only in Chinese culture but in North America and other regions of the world. I began examining my own cultural practice of *face* drawing on the work of Goffman. In 'On Face-Work' (1967), his consideration of 'micro-sociology' proposed that every member within a social circle would have some knowledge of face-work and some experience in its use. In an Anglo-American society, this kind of capacity is more commonly understood as tact, *savoir-faire*, diplomacy, or social skill. One must exercise perceptiveness, and be prideful (valuing face) and considerate. Tacit cooperation, as coined by Goffman, arises naturally when each participant in an undertaking is concerned with saving his own face and the face of others. I was convinced that my colleagues at X Foundation would have had very little understanding of this complex game of *face* in which my Chinese donors and I were engaged.

### *Claiming expertise*

I thought in my role as a director how I might better inform my colleagues in the fundraising department at X Foundation of the various approaches towards donors which are culturally sensitive. I examined the large body of literature researching from many perspectives the determinants of charitable giving. I also drew on Mead (1930) and his paper "Philanthropy from the point of view of ethics": he writes there that 'charity implies both an attitude and a type of conduct which may not be demanded of him who exercises it'. He goes on to say that an 'inner obligation exists' between his other commitments (1930, p.1). My understanding of this is that our attitude towards a given situation and our obligation to act are situational and context dependent. This perhaps explains where the difficulty lies in trying to capture the philanthropic act in a singular fashion, as we find perhaps in social exchange theory. There are always competing objectives for donors: in effect, every donor is unique and although there are general patterns in gift-giving, timing, context and the donors' particular circumstances will always need to be taken into account.

It was in the writing of my summary I could reflect again on my own actions: alongside my fellow directors, I too took on the role of the expert. My expertise was how to raise money and how to recognise donors' needs to prevent my colleagues from further mishaps. I tried to portray Chinese culture as much subtler and more nuanced than Anglo-culture, particularly in the domain of gift giving. But experience has tripped me up in the sense of the final outcome: Veronica, the first donor, reneged on her commitment and seemed to have violated the traditions I so carefully explained. I reflected on the entire process of how I had been unusually difficult in my initial dealings with Judy, the second donor of my narrative. The fact of not being able to afford the time and attention which she wanted from me, the complete opposite of what was perhaps culturally expected of me, had made her even more eager to pursue me. As I concluded at the end of P2, it was as though she went out of her way to seek my recognition or to be let in by the community I belong to: the process of joining implies a mutual appreciation of the worth of the group to the established and to those coming new. I came to reflect on the organizational implications of this for an organization which is dependent on such donors to survive, but also, in the case of NGOs, on those who equally rely on the homeless and mentally unwell as beneficiaries in order to operate. It illustrates the

interdependency and social aspects of power/identity as an everyday phenomenon amongst people or groups. We depend on each other to perform particular functions.

### *Reflexive turn*

With a degree of distance and detachment, I now understand my bringing in major funds as my own attempt to secure my inclusion in the group as the newest board member. I was competing in my co-operation with the other board members. Those who held executive positions in corporate funds management seemed to have louder voices. Those in public health were taken less seriously. I also noticed that even the more senior board members compete amongst themselves to remain significant. Bourdieu (1979) describes the notion of social reproduction as constituted by one's engagement with the game: the more involved you are in the game, the less you are able to notice what is going on. Using the analogy of the game, I saw that I too was being caught up in and by the game. This gave rise to *illusio*: believing the game was worth the effort (Bourdieu, 1998, p.76). In my social networking arena of HNWI potential donors, I was facilitating and reproducing existing power relationships, including my own. Through my contribution and my compliance, I was also accumulating my own capital: I was increasing my own power to influence, a lesson which I had learnt from my experience of being an immigrant in a predominantly male dominated white society, which X Foundation represents.

My experience of the DMan community has been different. As mentioned earlier in P1, the early phase of the disciplining process did raise difficult emotions and a degree of insecurity. But because reflexive practice was central to the method of inquiry in this community, I was encouraged to bring conflict and emotions into the open for discussion.

My exploration of Project 3 described how processes around gift-giving become arenas for negotiation of power, status and identity. The episodes from the two donors have made me reflect much more carefully on the notion of culture and the degree to which it is deterministic, rather than just influential and constantly evolving. I went into Project 4 paying more attention to power relationships, and widening my concerns. I took on more seriously my role and responsibility of

governance. At the risk of being countercultural, I challenged myself to take a position in the public realm to see what difference that might make.

### Project four – staying with what matters: staying in relation and widening the circle of concern

From Project 3, and after passing my doctoral registration assessment, I took greater risks in speaking up and in experimenting with participating differently within the DMan community and in my role as a Director at X Foundation. I took greater risks in the former in comparison to work, something I wish to take up again the method section, partly because it felt safer: there were always opportunities to reflect collectively and to learn from experience. This is something less available in the workplace. Within and outside of the organization, I began to think more politically: I expanded my connections and thereby increased my social capital (Bourdieu, 1986). I widened my circle of concern (Nussbaum, 2001): I was thinking about my obligations not just to the Board and the organisation but to the community.

This now is the summary of my final project:

#### *The Role of Gossip*

The first narrative is an account of how I was caught up in the disciplining of a fundraising colleague; the second is how I spoke up in a strategy meeting. Although they may seem minor, these incidents allowed me to experiment with new ways of acting in the organisation and with pushing against what I had previously experienced as oppressive constraints to speaking out. The first incident, with the dismissal of Melissa, made me notice how important gossip is in dealing with questions of inclusion/exclusion and with the politics of belonging. I recognized how difficult it is to bring issues out into the open. Previously I had noticed how little attention was paid to group process; I had noticed the role of gossip, and I was trying now to notice how this role was sustained. It is interesting that I have experimented with those with whom I gossip in X Foundation to discuss what people thought of the gossip we were conducting. Fiona, Patrick's EA, was horrified: she felt immediately shamed when I pointed out that we were gossiping. She felt better only in being reassured she wasn't being disciplined. I was merely making it visible for us. It was fascinating that no one seemed to recognize this as something in which we all

participate in in our everyday relations, both in our private and professional lives. In the project I came to understand gossip as an enculturating process reinforcing the normative social rules of any group membership within and between groups.

I noted in the project how organisational studies have pointed to the constructive and destructive consequences of gossip. For a new staff member, gossip can be a way of working through power differentials (Meyer Spacks, 1985) and of making sense when no other obvious forum seems available (Iterson and Clegg, 2015). It is inevitably also a form of resistance (Scott, 1990, Collinson, 2005). Waddington (1985) suggests that gossip helps to release emotions. My reflections on some of the attitudes from management and the Board also indicated to me that certain behaviours are valued more than others as a way to progress in a scientific community like X Foundation. I looked at the way in which conflict is perceived as a disturbance, and how such disturbance is located in the individual. I brought Foucault (1962) to bear on this project. His thoughts on bio-power and governmentality helped me to understand better the day-to-day exercise of power in institutions like ours which are entrusted with producing what we hold to be true and which develop particular practices of power and discipline. Foucault's thoughts on madness, how the professions began to take on the role of the legal authorities in defining what was normal or abnormal, in particular apply to the mental health sector along with everywhere else. This heightened my sense of responsibility in relation to what we are doing at X Foundation in terms of our governance practices, and of our relationships with others, including the mentally ill, who are our key stakeholders.

### *Leadership and culture - a major challenge*

The second narrative episode describes how I intervened in a board meeting when I tried to raise a concern about a recent staff survey. The result of the survey indicated that leadership and culture within the organization constituted our major challenges. This feedback was, understandably, uncomfortable to everyone present. The conversation was immediately closed down by the CEO. This highlighted a difference from our usual response as board members: positive sentiments are echoed unanimously. My concern as a director is to pay attention to various ways of allowing a range of opinions to be said and not said. This current way of managing

which I experience in X Foundation is authoritarian, prescriptive and narrow; it relies on what Barbara Townley (2008, p.25) has referred to as 'disembodied and disembedded' ways of knowing. She argues that the detached approach to management practices employs techniques which bring about particular effects and inhibit others, which value particular categories of knowledge and not others. This led to my reflecting on the role of boards in NFPs and where X Foundation sits in various understandings of what boards are there to do. Reading Arendt (1958) helped me to recognize that our highly structured activities, where we are encouraged only to speak positively, mark a way to manage our anxiety. As Arendt claimed, with the danger and frustrations in action, we tend to default to the preoccupation with work. Instead of politics being about governing, we substitute making for acting with the preferred model where there is one person in the position as the maker and the rest relegated to the passivity of being material for his operations (Arendt, 1958, p.220-30). This is a close description of my experience being on the board collaborating with passive colleagues in support of Patrick, the CEO, as the maker. I noticed a narrowing of perspectives on this board where we rely on the CEO to selectively draw our attention on matters he values. I began to explore some of the literature on governance for a better understanding on how we can broaden our concerns: firstly, in trying to make a difference to the people we are set up to serve; secondly, to influence the board to take more seriously our role and responsibility of governance and the danger in continuing the way we are in a prescriptive and narrow way of operating.

### *Stakeholder and democratic perspectives on governance*

In exploring the literature on the governance responsibilities of NFPs, Coule (2015) sets out four broad categories of governance theory: principal agent; stewardship; stakeholder and democratic perspectives, which are discussed in the literature on corporates, and which explore the multiple governance responsibilities of NFPs. Stewardship theory argues that governance is exercised in a partnership between the board and the CEO: board members are thought to bring expertise to the table (Cornforth, 2004) in a collaborative relationship. Stewardship theory assumes a unity of interest between the CEO and the directors where activity revolves mostly around compliance with laws, aims and objectives and monitoring of finance. My own experience of X Foundation fits broadly with the stewardship model of the role of the boards as I have discussed at length in P4. The focus is on maintaining stability,

rather than on encouraging wider debate and discussion about why we do what we do. The stakeholder and democratic approaches to NFP governance assume a more active role for the communities served by the NFPs. Stakeholder perspectives may even result in the beneficiaries of the NFP being represented on the board. This has helped me to reflect on our existing board activities: how can we engage with more accountability and more politically in mediating competing moral goods. But I am not denying the importance of running the organization properly, of bringing the money in and of approving budgets. I am also concerned to include being open, to reflect collectively with the research scientists on why we are doing what we are doing. How can we be sure if we are doing well: is money raised from donors being used wisely? Is it for the good of the community we seek to serve? I believe discussions about broadening our memberships - whom we include and exclude - will be useful in prompting us to think more politically (plural views) and relationally. I believe this is a necessary ethical measure to protect against perpetuating existing power relations and further marginalising those we seek to serve and protect: our various stake holders but also the staff in this organization. This approach has guided me particularly in the newly established people and culture (P & C) committee. There is, in addition, the other recent project where I collaborated and mediated on politics between X Foundation and another donor/NFP. I will mention it briefly below and in the section of my contribution to practice. This has also opened up opportunities for having new kinds of discussions about what we are doing and why. Even a year ago, I would not have thought this possible.

### *Reflexive turn*

I am in my fourth year as a director of governance in this research institute. The institution's remit is to improve the quality of life for people suffering from mental illness. What are my concerns?

I was concerned about the dismissal of Melissa and how conflict had escalated between her and her superior so rapidly. It was an example which I used to illustrate a pattern I am experiencing in the mental health sector particularly: high emotions and conflict displayed in public are still very much viewed as psychological disturbance or as maladaptation of the individual.

The lack of accountability and inability openly to discuss and manage conflict by her superior had meant that the issues had been located with her. On her performance review she gave herself a perfect score. I saw it as her protest to feeling subordinated and silenced. When individuals are experiencing a threat to their identity or values, Mead argue that it is an embodied experience: a crisis of our 'entire personality' (Mead,1934, p.139; quoted in Joas, 1997, p.133). This incident resonates with me personally. Similarly, in the treatment of the homeless and the mentally ill: feeling displaced, misrecognized or unrecognized provoked a similar crisis in me. My heart extends to the young students of Hong Kong. I would imagine that this is a culture shock for the younger generation who had until now been spared an upbringing of disciplining power and punishment. What began as peaceful protest by students in their frustration of not being heard in the plea for pro-democracy turned into social sanction at its extreme. This is a human tragedy, a total breakdown of two opposing norms, which has resulted in violence. I hope that revealing my sensitivity towards power domination and normalized practices helps to clarify why open dialogues and the widening of perspectives matter to me. It clarifies too the resonance I see in the situation I am dealing with in X Foundation and Hong Kong, although the experience in the former is much less extreme. One way of marginalising people who don't conform is to write them off as mad or difficult, in Foucault's (1994, p.337) term the 'isomorphic system of exclusion.' It is a reminder to me and to those in positions of authority to question all of the time what we are conforming to, or trying to make the norm in the production of a particular good or ideology / discourse. Unless we do so, we keep in place or even exacerbate existing processes of marginalisation and exclusion and may participate in a form of violence.

My wish to draw attention to these events is not just about the rights and wrongs of concrete events, but to emphasize the need to keep discussion open. In the case of the incidents and patterns I have noticed at X Foundation, the opportunities to discuss and reflect with the actors exiting the organization may not be available, but it is a duty of care for management to reflect on and to acknowledge what we could do better, to learn from experience. We all make mistakes. How do we go on together safely in an organization where we bear witness to events but are silenced, and collude with the silencing, and lack a forum to debrief or be counselled?

What is publicly valued in X Foundation is rationality, calm and agreement. This is not uncommon at all in organizations. There is little tolerance for insecurity, anxiety, doubt, deviance from accepted group norms which are characteristics of the very community we are set up to serve. Are we in the role of governance not at risk of committing a form of “innocent violence” in the process of doing good? A term I borrowed from Vince and Mazer (2014) as a concept to explore the effects of masking violence in organizations to be further discussed below. If executive management cannot be challenged and if staff continue to feel undermined of their abilities to question, and to risk exclusion when they do, they suffer a process which is traumatizing (ibid). We are the experts, as Foucault would say, entrusted with the truth and knowledge. It is for us to think about our role in governance and public service, to ask what are the wider implications of what we are doing and not doing. Are we at risk of further marginalising and excluding the very people whom we are supposed to help?

I am making a claim that an organisation dedicated to alleviating mental suffering should walk the talk in terms of its own relationships within the organisation, and between the organisation with its stakeholders. This is particularly so in relation to difficult encounters which might provoke distress.

My attempt to participate differently as a board member from before led to the creation of an entirely new committee in X Foundation, although I didn't write extensively about it in Project 4 as a narrative, I will say a few words about it now. This committee was tasked with dealing much more directly with questions of relationship and culture. I was a prime mover in setting up the new committee in X Foundation and we have had much more extensive discussions about what's going on in the organisation and what people feel about it. Even the CEO has participated and seems changed by the experience. During this time, I also undertook a major initiative between X Foundation and one of its major donors, the very donor I mentioned in Project 2 that has become disaffected with X Foundation and wanted to be shown more love. The initiative was a series of fun events recognizing aged care frontline workers at a time when the Royal Commission was investigating bad practice within the aged care industries. I believe that aged care workers needed to be recognized and to become more visible for reasons other than being shamed and blamed for making mistakes, which is what sometimes happens with care workers.

This project recognized aged-care front-line workers and the hardship and sacrifices they make in their private lives in order to keep their residential settings safe during the pandemic. They were encouraged to have their hair coloured to celebrate mental health awareness week. There was live streaming where celebrity performers and I organised for a series of dignitaries to acknowledge their good work and to cheer them on. The joint project between X Foundation and their major donor has been an exercise in celebrating workers for their own sake, rather than doing so in order to raise funds. These are the workers at the bottom of the hierarchy in terms of status and recognition. It became a much more human way of making the work of X Foundation and their major donor prominent without instrumentally pursuing donors, or with any other end in view apart from recognising those who are usually ignored.

### *Deriving my arguments from my empirical material*

In the review of my projects, I have been reflecting on the kinds of issues I have found myself dealing with. This constitutes my empirical material from which I will synthesise my arguments. Broadly my argument is about culture: the power and politics in joining a culture, more specifically in the negotiation of values, meanings and ethics in a domain which is not immediately one's own. It has also focused on how board members collaborate and collude in perpetuating a particular organisational culture, what I have termed, drawing on Stacey and Mowles (2016) the organising experience of being together. In X Foundation it is hard to be anything other than rational, calm, convergent and positive, despite the politics, power games and potential violence which might be going on under the surface. As a new member of the board, an outsider, I have focused on what it means to become an accepted member of this new community, to fit in but also to be recognised as a unique individual. This is an experience familiar to me as a Hong Kong born Chinese female immigrant who has tried to integrate into Australia and Japan. Because of my unique family experience, I am sensitively attuned to the culture of the group I am trying to participate in, if not belong to. In being a student on the DMan, I have been encouraged to take my experience seriously, and I have had an opportunity to pay attention to how I was being acculturated in that particular community as well. I will explore this further in the methodology section below.

Through this inquiry, I wish to draw out some generalisations which I think will be relevant to other Directors of NGOs/NFPs to do with board culture. I realise this is an enormous and complex topic; I will narrow my focus to think in particular about the culture, or *habitus*, of NGOs, as it relates to governance. I will make the case that this aspect of problem-based research on governance is relevant and important given that the practice of being a board member is not only under-theorised (Cornforth, 2012) but difficult to research particularly in all its ambiguity. In focusing on my lived experience, I hope to be able to say something resonant for others in my position.

Here is a summing up of my three arguments from the perspective of a new member joining the board of a not-for-profit scientific research institute.

**Argument 1** - To join a new group at board level involves engaging with power, politics, and questions of status (capital) in the struggle for mutual recognition.

**Argument 2** – Paying attention to the everyday ways of working together, in particular the quality of relationships, reflecting on them and becoming reflexive, is a key factor in playing the game of board governance differently. It involves noticing how one is being influenced as way of trying to influence.

**Argument 3** - The politics of governing involves trying to reconcile means and ends and widening our circle of concern. It entails ethical as well as practical considerations, and involves taking risks.

The first argument is a focus on my own experience as a new board member trying to join an NGO as a board member with the helpful parallel experience of joining a reflective research community at the same time. The second tries to broaden my experience and to reflect upon the consequences in our existing ways of operating as a broader group at X Foundation: it is reflection on method. And the third argument tries to treat the theme of ethics and the responsibilities of those in positions of governance more widely.

The way I do this is to bring in some of the theories that I have found useful while writing my projects, but also to introduce some new ideas where I think my reading of the literature has enabled me to think further about my experience.

## Argument 1

*To join a new group at board level involves engaging with power, politics, and questions of status (capital) in the struggle for mutual recognition.*

A key insight from my research is that governance involves the politics of recognition. The term recognition was explored from projects two to four in a variety of ways. Both Mead (1934) and Honneth's (1995) ideas of recognition are taken from the Hegelian idea that identity is constructed dialogically, that there is a self because there are other selves. This mutuality is conditioned by power relationships (Elias, 1987, Bourdieu, 1998), not just in the relationships on the board, and between the board and staff members and stakeholders, but also between the board and stakeholders that the organisation was originally set up to serve. It is the last of these, the stake holders, that I think is most neglected in governance terms, which I will explore more fully in argument 3 below. They are the most marginalised communities and, therefore, the most difficult to have representation or be heard. In X Foundation, I am referring to people suffering from mental illness. But I have also noticed how staff are marginalised in broader organizational processes and have to earn their respect by behaving in the accepted ways of the X Foundation culture, or what Bourdieu (1977) referred to as *habitus*. In its simplest term, *habitus* is the tendency of large numbers of people to act in similar ways.

### *Habitus or culture*

So far in this thesis I have drawn on the notion of *habitus* used by both Bourdieu and Elias. Although their underpinning ideas about how *habitus* arises are different, what I understand they mean by the term is the pattern of relating that emerges in particular societies because of history and figurations of power relationships. Both have the paradoxical quality of being experienced in particular bodies but produce global social patterns of relating at the same time. Stacey and Mowles (2016) refer to this as the themes which organise the experience of being together.

For this thesis, I am broadly staying with the idea of *habitus*, but because I am using *habitus* and culture interchangeably, I would like to examine the various understanding of culture in organizational context before putting forward my arguments.

### *Culture in an organizational context*

Culture is a particularly difficult subject of research since it cannot be easily isolated as a theme in itself but rather as something 'to be observed in relation to ongoing events and processes' (Lewis, 2003). Organisational culture in the simplest term is the way of life in an organization (Hatch, 1997, p.204). It generally refers to the way we do or think about things around here or the commonly held values and beliefs within an organization (Hudson, 1995). Morgan (1997, p.138) defines it in more complex terms as 'a process of reality construction that allows people to see and understand particular events, actions, objects, utterances, or situations in distinctive ways.

Management theory often views culture as another variable to be managed in the pursuit of excellence and efficiency. Patricks and Waterman (1982) suggested that businesses would tend to operate more successfully if they built a strong unifying culture based on 'shared vision'. A contrast to seeing organizations as rational 'engineered' structures, Handy (1988) saw culture as an interactive group of people with its own taste and flavour, its own habits and jargon. He points to the existence of a dominating 'defining' culture based on values and practices of a particular organization. He identified four basic cultural styles which he termed: person culture; task culture; role culture and club culture. At the more psychosocial end of the definitional spectrum, the work of Edgar Schein (1983), influenced by social psychology, focuses on the construction and negotiation of values and meanings as expressed through organizational artefacts, motivations and behaviours which help to shape and sustain an organization's internal integration and external adaptation.

Other schools of thoughts place ambiguity and flux at the centre of analysis of organizational culture (Alvesson, 1994, 2011). Only with culture can we account for the values, beliefs, or practices that distinguish organizations (Schein, 1983, 1990; Weeks & Galunic, 2003).

In the context of NGOs, the interdependencies involve donors/other non-governmental organizations, government agencies etc. It is a multifaceted analysis contingent upon context, practice and power within and between actors and stake holders. Organizations are also a part of a broader societal structures and set of meanings (Lewis, 2002). Although NGOs are often conceived as a unitary group of organizations with similar characteristics, in practice, there may be important differences in ideology, scale, approach, and culture (Lewis, 2003). In contrast to the private sector, the pursuit of profit is not the primary purpose of organization. Culture, and more specifically values, become the key organizing principles.

My experience of culture at X Foundation is consonant with Alvesson's writings (1994, 2002) who places ambiguity and flux at the centre of analysis: power and politics, are understood as a continuous 'process of organizing' which creates meaning and structures in everyday organizational life. In Project 3, I took on the role of the expert and found myself caught up with theorizing, reifying culture as if it were a subject to be understood and mastered. At the end of that exploring in my two narratives, I was able to see that culture can influence but not determine: that it is possible to find agency within a constraining social formation, and that it is with such an agency that culture develops and changes.

### *Identifying the game we are playing – Not to disturb the order of things*

My general experience of X Foundation is of a culture with a general prohibition against disturbing the existing order. As identified in Project 4, the research we carry out at X Foundation is often described in terms of its excellence. We seem to provide only positive feedback. In the early years as a new board member, I lacked the confidence and knowledge to raise any concerns. But by not speaking up, I am perpetuating the existing relations of domination. In Project 4 I drew on both Elias and the social anthropologist James C Scott (1990) to explore how gossip, public and hidden transcripts sustain the power dynamics and police ways of speaking and acting.

The image of Board meetings is like a theatrical performance, a metaphor Goffman (1967) used in Project 3 to depict the Chinese concept of *face*. One of the earliest English scholars on this subject, Smith (1894), wrote: 'face is a mask one wears to contrast reality and fact'. Although he was referring to the Chinese love of

theatricality, I believe this is universal in the way we perform and interact in our day to day with others to hide our vulnerabilities. “Fake it ‘til you make it” is a phrase my daughter often uses to reassure me she knows how to play the game. She was recently promoted in her job!

Coincidentally I joined two established communities at the same time, both X Foundation and the DMan. This gave me a good opportunity to reflect on the terms set for new joiners to belong. To a degree, acceptance rests on being assessed as to the capital (Bourdieu, 1984) we bring to contribute to group functioning, what the group recognizes as capital, and the extent to which we accept the norms of the dominant group. Joining a new group can challenge both the ‘I’ and ‘we’ (Elias, 1994) identities of the new member, just as the new member can challenge the identity of the group. I noted in Project 2 my signalling loyalty to the CEO, and in my dealings with the second Chinese donor in Project 3, how the group needs to appreciate the value of the new potential member, just as the new member needs to consider the group worth joining. In the case of Chinese donor 2, the more I played hard to get the more she struggled to belong.

### *The established and the outsiders*

X Foundation values rational ways of speaking and acting, and conformity with abstractions and idealised ways of speaking which are familiar in managerialism. Presented in the study of Elias and Scotson (1994), were the two groups of Winston Parva: the established village and the incomers in the Estate. The two communities were identical in terms of socio-economic background, differing only in the fact that members of the established group and their families had lived in the community for several generations, while the outsiders and their families were relative newcomers. The established group is in a more powerful position to monopolise resources and influence ways of speaking. They did this principally through gossip, creating a heroic ‘we identity’ and denigrating the outsiders. They found that those who had already settled in the area, under unfavourable condition, had had time to evolve. The earlier settlers felt a sense of seniority of entitlement for respect (p.148). Newcomers were felt as a threat to this order.

In my fourth year as a board member, our Board has only recently had our first end-of-year dinner. There is a marked lack of social connectedness. Using the analogy of

the two groups in Winston Parva, Patrick, the CEO, and his fellow founders of this organization are like the established community. In the process of writing my synopsis, it has struck me that Foundation Board members are like the loose-knit and less highly organised incomer neighbourhood of the Estate where people tend to 'keep themselves to themselves' (Elias & Scotson, 1990). Although the Board collectively has the power to challenge executive management, we lack the opportunities or motivation to develop relationships and understanding amongst ourselves. From the time I had joined, board members have been gossiped about as being mere seat warmers. This focus on the board's incapacity shifts the focus away from executive management, their capabilities and responsibilities. In Project 4, Neville expressed a sense of envy towards Patrick's Machiavellian behaviour and the power he holds. Neville is much like an old resident of the Estate: he is still considered an outsider. In many ways, Neville is trying to distinguish himself as the more respectable member of the Estate by contributing to the gossip that our Board members are seat warmers.

### *Assimilate & Accumulate*

From my early family experience to my experience as an immigrant, which I explored in Project 1, I have learnt to cooperate and contribute to group functions in return for acceptance and inclusion by the group to which I am trying to belong. My struggle to be a member of the board began with my need to be recognised as a full member. This was, first, as an obedient member accepting the norms of the group. But increasingly on my own terms, I was able to bring what I have uniquely. Perhaps ironically, I established my status, my capital, by bringing in capital – the donations from HNWIs. During this struggle of entry, I was revisited by my early experience of inclusion/exclusion of belonging into family groups. Equally, in terms of my 'we' identity, I have never felt so Chinese as when joining a predominantly Anglo organisation and trying to encourage Chinese donors to donate thereby earning my social capital and symbolic power as explored in Project 3 (Bourdieu, 1986; Waquant, 2017).

But I have discovered that neither my Chinese identity, nor the identity of the groups I have joined, is deterministic. In one of my narratives, I identified power and the theme of inclusion/exclusion as motivators in business relations. This path resulted in my being able to disrupt expectations and to defy the confines of Chinese

social mores, or *habitus*, and to act out of character. I have been surprised by the way Chinese donors behaved, and I surprised myself by the way I behaved: my conclusion from reflecting on these incidents again is that culture, both ethnic and organisational, is not deterministic. The Board, too, has proved itself open to more discursive ways of working. Culture strongly influences how we act and speak but does not determine it. Culture is another way of thinking about power relationships, but it is possible to find agency within a constraining social formation. That is how culture develops and changes. The constant reconfiguration of power relations between people is an ongoing process depending on who needs the other more at any given moment: we enable and constrain each other in the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion (Elias, 2000). This gives a different understanding of politics which can be understood as the everyday negotiations of these interdependencies of power. Elias gives this summary to explain that, although there are people such as Patrick who seem impermeable in organisations, even they are not in control of the back and forth negotiation over influence:

It is simple enough: plans and actions, the emotional and rational impulses of individual people, constantly interweave in a friendly or hostile way. This basic tissue, resulting from many single plans and actions, can give rise to changes and patterns that no individual has planned or created. This interdependence of people prompts an order *sui generis*, an order more compelling and stronger than the will and reason of the individual people composing it. (Elias, 2000, p. 366)

This interdependency of movement or 'how we respond to each other's gestures' (Mead, 1934), in turn affects and creates unpredictable outcomes which are not of one person's own intention and plan.

Having established my capital, in Bourdieu's terms, and literally by bringing in money, I was more able to address the themes which bothered me more, such as beginning to draw attention to the way we were working. This is what I mean by challenging the status quo, which is broadly conformist and conflict avoidant. As another example of how a dominant culture influences, but doesn't determine, I have been instrumental in influencing group memberships in the setup of the People and Culture Committee. My aim is to encourage a non-hierarchical and more democratic forum - (at least open to reflect) where people have different tasks but

have equal say. This is something I have learnt since joining the DMan research community.

Introducing difference as a new board member will rely on our capacity to reflect adequately on each situation as it presents. It does require a negotiation of power, capital and recognition: being recognized as someone who can contribute to group functioning precedes one can have influences over the group. There is no prescription other than being reminded by Stivers' (2008) words in the *Governance of dark times* (P4): 'to celebrate small wins'.

### *Argument 2*

*Paying attention to the everyday ways of working together, in particular the quality of relationships, reflecting on them and becoming reflexive, is a key factor in playing the game of board governance differently. It involves noticing how one is being influenced as way of trying to influence.*

In my experience of X Foundation, I have found that, as it is an organisation filled with expert researchers, even on the board it is easier to take the attitude of being the expert. I drew attention at the end of Project 3 how it is easy to be caught up in the *illusio* (Bourdieu, 1998, p.78) of the organisational game. I noted my parallel experience of drawing on a lot of theory in my research work to demonstrate my expertise to the DMan community in which I longed to be accepted. I have also tried to demonstrate my expertise in fundraising to X Foundation by bringing in HNWI's.

The organization's mission is to carry out and support the important scientific research to cure mental illness. The rational scientific attitude informs both the day to day practice of the board, and the fund-raising initiatives I have become involved in. I have argued that these miss the importance of reciprocity. But drawing from my own experience, I have become concerned that X Foundation takes an instrumental approach to managing people, their stakeholders and their donors, and in their practice as a board. Our task as Foundation Board members is predominantly to help raise funds and approve spending. Relationship building is not valued, nor is the ability to explore together what it is that we are doing and why. I see the way in which we, as Directors, conduct ourselves and the way we engage with management will have ripple effect and necessarily contribute to the organizational culture. I see

very little attention paid to addressing how to relate within and outside of the organization. In particular, relationships with donors are often neglected. It is as if we have been disciplined into functional roles which are understood transactionally. One of the key roles of a new board member is to make sense of, and perhaps help others make sense of, the themes which organize the experience of working together at X Foundation (Stacey & Mowles, 2016). This means paying attention to how we speak and act, what is permissible to say, and what is not. I have noticed in my projects the way that executive management at X Foundation is resistant to exploring questions of how we work together, and, ironically for an institution dedicated to researching mental health. Management is quick to pathologize expressions of emotion and disagreement as being mad or dangerous. In my projects I note how this arises from their treatment of me. In project 2 I brought something to the CEO which he was quick to reject; I have seen it too in the treatment of Melissa, who was dismissed as disturbed. Additionally, in my ongoing relations at X Foundation, I have had a number of supportive background conversations, particularly with young women employees, who are struggling to be heard and be taken seriously on their own terms, and with those recognised by the organisation.

*Challenging the institutional pattern of cultural value – X Foundation is both instrumental and competitive*

In my first argument I claimed that in order to be accepted on the board I had to demonstrate capital. I would like to explore further the link between recognition and status/ capital by drawing on the work of Nancy Fraser (2000), whom I haven't introduced in my projects. Fraser is a critical theorist who engaged with Honneth's work and with his idea of identity struggle for recognition. She proposed a "status model" of recognition. This model explains how the state of being recognized by the dominant members of the group relies on the institutionalized pattern of cultural value, just as I have experienced at X Foundation and as explained in argument 1. From this perspective, interaction is regulated by stereotypical value that constitutes some categories of group members as normative and others as deficient or inferior. However, much like Schein's understanding of culture, these phenomena mostly operate invisibly in an unspoken manner. Values attributed by the dominant culture may not always be obvious. Differences in status or ranking within a group are often demonstrated as facts but rarely explained such as why some voices count more than others. Misrecognition, Fraser argues, is essentially status subordination. From

this perspective, Fraser's focus is not about identity of the individual or of the group, but about the status of individual group members interacting as full partners in their social groups.

As an illustration of how at X Foundation institutional cultural values emerge and become habituated, scientists compete for funding in X Foundation, but grants are determined by government policies, donors and executive committees. Success in receiving funding between various areas of research reinforces hierarchies and the statuses of researchers. In addition, junior researchers compete amongst their peers who, for their own survival, rely on inclusion and journal publications. Between board members, board and management, relationships with donors mark a further opportunity to impose a hierarchy. At X Foundation we are not exempt from being part of this dominant way of organising, which privileges rationality and professionalism, and keeps emotions out of discussion. What I am drawing attention to is how these practices of cultural values masked by power relations emerge as the accepted order of things.

It is only recently, since I have been approached by one of our donors, an NFP in the aged care sector which I mentioned in P2 as feeling unloved by X Foundation, that both Patrick and Neville seem to see me very differently. I think they were astonished that this conservative and patriarchal institution should have chosen me, a Chinese woman, to assist them in their endeavour. To my surprise, both Neville and another board member have asked me for an introduction to meet the principals. When I do things considered valuable by the established community in X Foundation, I am much more likely to be recognised by them.

My experience of X Foundation is that it neglects relationships out of a fear of difference. The dominant discourse in which the Foundation defines itself sees vulnerabilities as something to be cured or something to be rid of. One way of changing the status quo is to show more heart and to increase our social capital: by allowing more opportunities to struggle together where we can reveal our vulnerabilities. In *The Struggle for Recognition*, Honneth (1995, p.xvii) claims that a good society is one where individuals have an opportunity to flourish and where it is possible for a variety of people to establish areas of commonality through mutual recognition. This is also Arendt's (1958) idea of bringing to light the diversity in perspectives which makes for human plurality which I discussed in P4 and also

below. Enabling opportunities to discuss our own struggles together is one way of finding solidarity. Esteem rests on the basis of a shared project: cases where there are shared concerns, interests, or value. Honneth does not imply that this is easily achieved. In the case with X Foundation where open discussions are discouraged, the struggle in the day to day is about surviving invisibility or feeling misrecognized.

In her status model, Fraser's idea of alleviating status subordination is by questioning the values that regulate interaction. As she explains: "To view recognition as a matter of status means examining institutionalized patterns of cultural value for their effects on their relative standing of social actors". This is something I have started to do in a small way on the board, and in a more deliberate way on the People and Culture Committee which I referred to above. I have encouraged a non-hierarchical and more democratic forum to express our various viewpoints openly.

I take from this that each of us plays a part in the effort which the institution maintains to value conformity. Each of us contributes in organizing and in perpetuating the order of things. For example, in Project 3 I note how difficult it was for me to question the theme of the fundraising campaign beyond simply a repeat of the previous year. It would take a collective effort to reflect openly on some of these culturally imposed patterns of values. Having some hard discussions would be one way of making conscious both what is being valued and what this implies in the broader context.

### *Consequences of potentially committing violence in the name of doing good*

In contrast to what is valued in X Foundation, I have experienced little tolerance for insecurity, anxiety, doubt, deviance from accepted group norms, which are characteristics of the very community the Foundation is set up to serve. What is publicly valued is rationality, calm and agreement. In being as it is, X Foundation is not so different from other organisations I have been involved in where rational ways of managing are valued. But there is a cost. I followed Foucault's (1962) lead in analysing the history of how we understand the division of the mad and non-mad allows us to see the effects of modernity in the way we identify our worth based on

our usefulness to contribute to societal values/economic progress. Our body becomes a useful force only if it is a productive body and a subjected body (Foucault, 1975, p.26). Furthermore, emotions and conflict may become stigmatised as psychological disturbance or a character failure of the individual. Are we at X Foundation inadvertently perpetuating a 'disembedded and disembodied' existence (Townley, 2008) in our staff where conflicts, vulnerabilities and differences are considered unhealthy and/or unproductive?

As I remarked in Project 4, Vince and Mazen (2014) introduced the notion of 'violent innocence' as a concept to explore the effects of masking violence in organizations by stressing the positive. They claim that most literature in organizational studies on leadership is less forthcoming about discussing the 'dark side' of behaviour and power dynamics that take place in organizational life. What Vince and Mazen meant by violent innocence is that when, from the leader down, there is an emphasis only on the positive, we project the unwanted negative part of working together to be dealt with by everyone else. Similarly, Collinson (2012) argues that 'Being positive can have disciplining effects – delegitimizing doubts, silencing dissent, stifling debate and creating an environment where the courage to resist 'can be redefining as betrayal'.

### *Happily and unhappily oppressed*

I argued earlier that emotions and conflict become stigmatised as psychological disturbance or character failure of the individual. At X Foundation we are at risk of perpetuating the kind of 'disembedded and disembodied' existence (Townley,2008, p.25) in our staff where conflicts, vulnerabilities and differences are considered unhealthy and/or unproductive.

In P4, I drew on the work of Arendt to note how a focus on work can come at the expense of prioritising action. She was concerned that we become preoccupied with routine tasks (work) rather than negotiate meaning together (action). It is in action that we reveal ourselves to one another, and that there is a possibility of renewal. Theodor W. Adorno, too, was worried about the distorting effects of instrumentalising capitalism. What is at stake and becomes compromised is the freedom to be different *without fear* (MM, A66 cited in van den Brink, 2007, p.97). Adorno's reflections on a damaged life in his concerns with regard to contemporary

power relations. He makes the distinction into two groups: happily oppressed and unhappily oppressed –

Either latently or manifestly, people suffer from the distorted images of human worth they have internalized with the help of consumer society, the culture industry, false gurus, charismatic politicians, and psychotherapists. (cited in van den Brink, 2007: p.90)

His description of false normality and his distinction between the happily and unhappily oppressed marks one way of thinking about the culture in X Foundation. The oppressed dynamic between the disadvantaged / marginalised versus the wealthy donors / scientific experts; healthy and the mentally ill; productive and unproductive and so on.

Adorno also helps illuminate my own cultural experience of oppression. As I explored in P1, my personal history has made me particularly vigilant to an oppressive style of leadership. I find myself triggered by this in X Foundation which values conformity and which instils fear in those who speak up or act out. My mind returns to the moment when Hong Kong was returned to China in 1997: Hong Kong citizens became an example of a disembodied existence. People became frantically preoccupied with making money: those who could afford to found satisfaction through consumption of goods; the unhappily oppressed were exploited to deliver surplus labour in a sedated state. For Adorno, in their lives the happily oppressed have internalized a conception of rationality that ignores emotions. His vivid description: 'the very people who burst with proofs of exuberant vitality could easily be taken for prepared corpses' (Adorno cited in van den Brink, 2007). People suffer from the distorted images of human worth which they have internalised. X Foundation is missing the opportunity to use the experience of the people, whom they are set up to serve, as a resource to bring the community closer together. They further marginalise and make deviant those within the organization who don't conform.

I realise that Adorno had a particular critique of capitalism refracted through his experiences of the early 20<sup>th</sup> C, but I recognise some of the instrumentalising tendencies of economic modernisation to which Adorno points. X Foundation is not

unique in encouraging a technocratic, rational approach to its work. What concerns me as a director, with a particular affinity for the stakeholder group we claim to operate on behalf of, is that this culture of working might militate against the very social mission which it is set up to alleviate, an argument I explore further below. His depiction of the happily oppressed has caused me great concern: it wakes me up from complacency. I am concerned that we are generating a culture of reflexive resistance and learned helplessness towards dominant ways of understanding and treating mental illness.

Most of us in X Foundation are drawn to the mental health sector because we have a personal connection with mental illness. It is a sensitive subject. It is like the current pandemic where people are highly sensitive to public coughs or sneezes. I am noticing a pattern of people becoming highly sensitive and self-conscious about showing emotions until there comes a tipping point, which may lead to being excluded from the organisation. The inability to recognize each other as individuals with all our differences may amplify emotional reactions and result in a sense of oppression. Melissa (in P4), who gave herself the self-evaluation of a perfect score by way of protest, was an example of how things can escalate as she resisted feeling subordinated and silenced. The lack of accountability and inability by superiors to manage conflict had meant that the issues had been located with her.

I made a claim in P4 that an organisation dedicated to alleviating mental suffering should walk the talk in terms of its own relationships within the organisation, and between the organisation with its stakeholders, particularly in relation to difficult encounters which might provoke distress. I explore what this might mean in argument 3 about ethics. The broad point to make here about boards of NGOs is the tendency to make deviant what is different from habit and tradition and the importance of being open to difference.

### Argument 3

*The politics of governing involves trying to reconcile means and ends and widening our circle of concern. It entails ethical as well as practical considerations, and involves taking risks.*

#### ***Recognizing otherness as an ethical obligation***

At the heart of my inquiry sit my anxiety and concern about ethics. This refers to ethical relations as a shared responsibility drawing on Mead (1934) as mentioned in Project 2. This will always mean widening our circle of concern beyond simply running ourselves efficiently as an organisation. I also brought in literature on board governance in Project 4 which explored various models of operating, one of which concerned itself directly with stakeholders and beneficiaries of NGO work. But the involvement of stakeholders makes governance much more political and perhaps more uncertain. My experience of X Foundation is that in general managers and the board are very averse to dealing with politics and uncertainty: the kind of uncertainty which involves staying in relation and being open to difference. Our need to agree and to be positive prevents us from recognizing each other and all of our differences, our individuality.

Drawing on Bernstein (2016, p.88), I think we are ethically obliged to recognise what the moral philosopher Levinas once called 'the otherness of the other' and at the same time, an 'enlargement of our horizons' (Bernstein's appropriation to Gadamer's idea of 'fusion of horizon'). Here Levinas is referring to a radically asymmetrical relation between self and the other, the type of ethical relations which is an interpretation of the Hegelian sense of reciprocal narrative of overcoming contradiction and reconciliation. Levinas speaks of the other as the absolute other: his ethic is based on and motivated by the infinity of the other. From a less radical perspective, Bernstein is calling for a pragmatic pluralism. He used the term *engaged fallibilistic pluralism* to describe the pragmatic attitude of being involved in a joint task to which we are committed, but where we still remain open to the idea that we might be mistaken. It means taking our fallibility and finitude seriously. For Bernstein this involves developing an attitude where, 'however much we are committed to our own styles of thinking, we are willing to listen to others without

denying or suppressing the otherness of the other'. Such an engaged pluralism is hard work. He writes:

It means being vigilant against the dual temptations of simply dismissing what others say or falling back on one of those defensive ploys where we think we can simply translate what is alien into our own familiar vocabularies. (2016, p.34)

The recognition of otherness involves the ability to translate, to hold a position but to be radically open to other positions, a condition which has preoccupied me as insider/outsider in Australia, Japan and a new member of X Foundation board of governance.

### *Realizing oneself through action*

Although there is often great emphasis placed on co-operation and convergence between people, in X Foundation, and in many other organizations, a sense of superiority over others in times of conflict and integration is one way we manage our vulnerabilities. It provides continuity to our existence which we need in order to keep on (Mead, 1934, p.307). In Project 3, I learnt that my initial arrogant attitude towards donor 2 may also be part of the process of self-respect. These are aspects of personal relations which are of great importance in the organization of the community one wishes to join: one's favourable view of oneself in relation to others (Mead, 1934, p.314). Mead argues that when one identifies herself with a particular group, one feels a sense of superiority over other groups: the group has to be worth joining. This sense of superiority of one community over another is also responsible for the rise of hatred and warfare in that society (ibid). But at the same time, self-superiority and social independence are common attitudes found in all individuals. I have argued in this thesis (in P3), that this sense of superiority over others has a function analogous to the practice of *face*. Its values are predominantly attached to the self and it is ultimately about protecting one's face. I also introduced the concept of *guanxi* which shares a similar function: we are dependent upon immediate personal relations to be included in a group. We are able to realize ourselves only in a relation of superiority and inferiority, a similar concern Fraser had raised earlier in her critique of Honneth's identity model: value attached to the identity of the self or of the group.

I return to Arendt's (1958) notion of action: it is our actions which define us. In a position of governance and in noticing the limited way we have been exercising it at X Foundation, I have found myself speaking up even when I have felt most uncomfortable or reluctant to speak. It has required a courage to judge when to reveal myself at the risk of being countercultural, looking foolish or losing *face*. Engaging with each other politically means being open to plural views and having conversations that are not always pleasant or positive. It is this aspect of exploring differences which 'makes this way of judging so important for politics' (Arendt cited in Stivers, 2008, p.60).

Since my time on the DMan, being able to work as a member of a community of inquirers, I have gained new perspectives of understanding and of practice. It is my responsibility to share what I have learnt as it is with each of us who belongs to various communities. This is how culture evolves. By challenging and being challenged I try to bring difference without fear of exclusion in the way we work together, and try to leave myself open to vulnerabilities and uncertainties in the belief that this will benefit not only ourselves but also those we seek to help and represent.

### *Reconciling means and ends*

I had a concern about the dismissal of a staff member and how conflict had escalated between her and her superior (I mention yet another example of this in the Introduction). It was an example I used to illustrate a pattern which I am experiencing particularly in the mental health sector: high emotions and conflict displayed in public are still very much viewed as psychological disturbance or as maladaptation of the individual. As a board of an organization dedicated to researching mental health, we need to walk the talk: we must focus on our ethic of care for the mental well-being of our staff and for the stakeholders we are set up to serve. Our voice is supposed to be that of advocates for mental health, so the way we act as a board count. We need to hold each other accountable in keeping inseparable our means, ends and purposes (Simmel, 1978).

In Dewey's terms, action is guided by our imagined or conceived end. This suggests our end-in-view becomes the *present means* for directing action (cited in Bernstein, 2016, p.55). The relation of means and ends is not only interdependent, it is also in

flux. It demands our attention to what we anticipate as the objective consequences of our actions. But when there is a disparity between anticipated and actual consequences, we are required to alter our ends-in view by applying the thinking that prepares us for our next action. This will involve difficult and robust conversations where we might agree to disagree. But we are morally obliged to respond and not remain silent when someone is in distress because of our non-action. In Arendt's terms, non-action is also a form of action. It takes place in the public realm through the spoken word in which we identify ourselves to others, what we are doing, what we've done and what we intend to do. I would add to this list: we reveal ourselves too in what we are not doing. Taking Arendt seriously has involved making myself visible, speaking up and speaking out in X Foundation. However, my increasing courage to speak has meant that I have breached particular protocols which has prompted the discomfort of potential intimacy: the dominant organising principle of the Board has been to be comfortable with abstractions and idealisations, which to a degree they hide behind and mostly dealt with in silence. This raises the question about how we as members of the Board manage closeness. My conclusion for now is that this revolves around remaining in relation as the only hope: trying to keep the conversation going as Bernstein (2016) recommends, and to return to it, no matter how great the potential rupture in negotiating our respective values.

### *Recognizing each other as equal but different*

My outspokenness in board meetings and the People & Culture committees feels liberating. There has also been a shift of power and spaciousness to explore new ways of relating to one another. Arendt (1963, p.120) makes a distinction between liberty and freedom. Liberty is always a liberty *from* something, whether it is liberation *from* oppressive leadership, or liberation *from* poverty or need (cited in Bernstein, 2016, p.104). Liberty is a necessary but not a sufficient condition for freedom. Freedom is a positive achievement of individuals acting together. It exists only when we recognize each other as equals. It requires the cultivation of those habits and practices where individuals debate, deliberate, compromise and act together (ibid).

### *Practice makes it possible*

In concluding my arguments: what do my reflections on my participation in X Foundation mean for me and others, particularly as it relates to practice? It requires our ability to improvise, to translate, be tactical or even subversive. I mentioned just now that it is only possible through remaining in relation and trying to keep the conversation going, but this is not the end of the process. It also means being open to change myself, as the Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor observes:

The end of the operation is not control, or else I am engaging in a sham designed to manipulate my partner while pretending to negotiate. The end is being able in some way to function together with a partner, and this means listening as well as talking, and hence may require that I redefine what I am aiming at. (Taylor, 2014, p.25)

I demonstrated in my negotiation with Patrick in P2 where we both tried to listen. It meant both of us had to give some ground in our objectives. I described it as a dance. I now see this as a dance of recognition which requires continual effort of renegotiation as the power ratio is always shifting.

My recent project of mediating between X Foundation and the donor/NFP of aged-care is one example. It meant that I had to explain things in instrumental terms by using the dominant discourse. On the one hand, I explained to X Foundation that we needed the aged-care sector to help expand the X Foundation footprint and that we would benefit from the media exposure. At the same time, I was having to convince the other side that a collaboration with us as the experts in mental health would appeal to the community and distinguish them from their peers. I believe we need to undertake this kind of mediation work with the stakeholders we are set up to serve, as a way of widening our circle of concern as directors. This is an example of translation: being considerate and perceptive in holding various perspectives and desires in place. I recalled, as mentioned briefly in P4, when this project was taking place, my intention was to keep the negotiation open. I was cautiously aware of the fragility of face between two sides.

In Project 2, I showed that values lie in the discovery of how difference between people is apparent in conflict. I would add to it that ethics involves an attitude of humility, graciousness and attentiveness by taking the other person's perspective

and their experiences seriously. If, as a board, we are able to be more curious and open to differences, then, as an organization, we might become more adept in managing our relations with stakeholders whom we are set up to serve. This involves a process of staying in conversation, making sense of each situation as it appears and trying out various interpretations with each other. What is needed is some tolerance towards ambiguity and also in celebrating small wins (Stivers, 2018, p.130). There is no guarantee of outcome but suspending judgement of the moment and separating ourselves from our vulnerabilities (habitus and emotional wounds) are critical. My sense is that I have contributed to my Board: I have become more reflective and more detached from their habitual practice.

One of the key roles I found myself in as a new board member, once I had been recognised for the capital I bring, was to make sense of the themes and values which organize the experience of working together. Another key role is to help the organization recognize other forms of capital such as relationship building. It requires translation to introduce the difference I bring: helping management recognize otherness not only as capital/valuable resources but as an ethical obligation. As an organization seeking to cure mental illness, we need to walk the talk in the way we relate to one another within the organization and with our stakeholders: ethical relation is a shared responsibility. It may also mean accepting that mental illness cannot always be cured but is part of the difference that makes human experience diverse and plural. This will always mean widening our circle of concern beyond simply running ourselves efficiently as an organisation.

## **Research methodology**

A central feature of the DMan, which draws on theories of complexity and emergence, is its interest in paying attention to the pattern of our everyday interaction and conversations. Emergence is taken to mean the interweaving of intention of everyone in their local interaction (Stacey, 2012, p.12). As students on the programme, we are asked to take our experience seriously and to think reflexively about our own involvement. As we become more familiar with what is emerging in our local interactions, we also become more skilful in articulating these patterns. We draw on theorists, often from critical tradition, to help us through this task of understanding our own practice.

### *Intellectual underpinning*

The DMan programme sits within a broader tradition of critical management studies (CMS) which tries to 'denaturalize' what might be taken for granted in more traditional approaches. Within the tradition of CMS research, it takes an interest in the 'social and structural issues of power, control and inequality' (Grey, 2004, p.182). The important point that the DMan shares with the CMS is the concern about the instrumentalising tendencies of much orthodox management and leadership theory. Within that, this programme draws on the pragmatic philosophy, more specifically pragmatic theories of communication of Mead (1934), those of experience and values from Dewey (1934, 1958), and, from the complexity sciences perspective, the complex understanding of time and action (Joas, 1996, and Mead, 1932, 1934) and the idea of paradox (Mowles, 2015). The focus is on how global patterns arise from everyday micro-interactions, and how micro-interactions are at the same time constrained by global patterns. A researcher on the DMan programme assumes, first, that individuals are social through and through (Foulkes, 1948) from the very development of self-consciousness (Mead, 1934). There is no god's eye view of human experience: that is to say, we can't stand outside the relationships we have with others from some privileged point of view. We can increase our understanding of ourselves only through being with others as we combine our knowledge about the world with our own experience as an active participant in it. (Dewey, 1925, 1958).

I explore this at length in my arguments 2 and 3 above.

### *The Group Analytic tradition and the research community*

This programme borrows from the Group Analytic tradition as set out by SH Foulkes (1948), particularly with regard to the working methods adopted by the DMan research community. This way of working is very different from many other more conventional doctorates, which was what drew me to the programme in the first place. At the extreme, a conventional PhD, outside of initial course work on research methods and regular supervision, is very much an independent activity. The DMan is unusual in the sense that it is a much more structured and more collaborative doctorate than other professional doctorates available in Australia and Asia. In the DMan, the individual's task is conceived of as also a group activity. It involves an iterative process as we are a part of our learning set of up to four

students and two supervisors, a smaller group within the wider research community, all of whom read and comment on each other's work, followed by face to face discussion (on Skype).

The central activity of the DMan is to engage in reflexive enquiry. The residential meetings held four times a year provide a forum within which to experience these social, and reflexive processes directly. At the residential weekend, each morning begins with a community meeting comprised of faculty and students. It runs for exactly an hour and a half. Everyone sits in a circle. There is no particular agenda except for the classic analytic injunction: people are encouraged to say what is on their minds. Some of the discussions prompt at times an immense anxiety. We discuss, for example, these topics: the comings and goings of students because of personal circumstances; impending graduations; the wish to withdraw for not being good enough. This way of working encourages students to experience their unconscious processes and the embodied sense of emotions which can take over from the rational or primarily social side of the self (Mead, 1934, p.108). Unlike groups run in the psychoanalytic tradition, this is a 'conductorless' group where every participant has to find a way of participating with others. The fact of there being no conductor helps to mitigate the processes of transference as faculty members are just as likely to make personal disclosures. It also alleviates the notion of the dualism between leaders and followers in organizational life.

In Project 1, I wrote about an incident I experienced at a community meeting where I felt disciplined by a senior colleague. The sense of being shamed publicly took over me instantly (further discussion below). These opportunities provide insight to self-understanding. They also shed light on the vulnerability and uncertainty that are a necessary part of group life. The learning emphasis is on thinking about these group processes in organizations (Mowles, 2017). We pay attention to the patterning processes of local interactions; we notice in response to these processes - based on an increased reflective awareness - something which might often be overlooked or dismissed because of the way we habitually cope in organizational life. My experience of community meetings has been precious. I have trusted the process of speaking and listening, of sharing and expressing our thoughts. I have known our joy, our pain and our conflict with each other; I have seen us take ourselves seriously as we take others' experience seriously, more or less respectfully. I have seen how

language can be treasured. This has changed both my work practice and my attitude towards relationships in general.

### *The influence of Norbert Elias*

Foulkes' recommendation was that the role of the conductor was to participate in the group along with the other members and to make tentative interpretations. When the group works in a mature way the conductor is needed less and less. This is very different way of working with authority than we usually experience in the organizational context (Spero, 2003, p.324, cited in Mowles, 2017). The research programme also turns to Elias' colleague and friend of Foulkes, and his processual sociology, for a greater understanding of how power is played out in organizational life. Drawing on Elias, Stacey & Mowles (2016) maintain that power is a structural characteristic of all human relationships: power reflects the fact that we are enabled and constrained by the social process as we enable and constrain others (Elias, 1970) in a complex responsive process of relating (Stacey, Griffin and Shaw, 2000). In this way of thinking, taking an interest in how power relations are negotiated in our everyday interactions in the dynamics of inclusion and exclusion is an important aspect in our method of inquiry, and plays out routinely in the community meetings which are part of the residential weekends.

### *Auto-ethnographical narrative approach*

The intention of this programme is students become more critical and reflexive in their thinking. The methodological consequence of this body of ideas is that research is carried out by taking experience seriously and by writing reflexive narratives. Giving specific examples in our narrative writing makes concrete what it is we are trying to reach when we refer theoretically to human experience. The materials from which we select are current events at work (with the exception of Project 1), often a particularly troubling episode in our practice or what Brinkmann (2014) would refer to as breakdown or a situation where we find ourselves surprised or bewildered (ibid., p.724). Drawing on the pragmatists' notion of a situation, Brinkmann explains the object of inquiry as a breakdown in understanding, where a person (or collective) is unable to proceed (ibid). This 'breakdown driven' (Alvesson & Karreman, 2011) research which initiates an abductive process, a form of reasoning used in situations of uncertainty, is concerned with the relationship between a *situation* and an *inquiry* (Brinkmann, 2014, p.722). I discuss what I take abduction to mean further below.

When we identify such instances or stumble upon them (Brinkmann, 2014), we bring them to our learning set with our thoughts and reflections for discussion that form a starting point for the writing process. On the DMan programme, one way of helping readers make sense of the researcher's experience, or of a phenomenon one is drawing attention to, is to provide a thick description (Geertz, 1973) in narrative form. 'It is meant not only to convey the idea of the 'empirical' but also to arouse the bafflement, the intense curiosity and interest that necessitates the interpretation of culture' (Greenblatt, 1997). Thick description entails an account of context and intent that gives actions their meaning, allowing the contextual documents to have their own imaginative life and argumentative power (ibid). There is now a great deal of literature justifying narrative as a research method because it allows for multiple perspectives, because it can contain a complex time frame, and because it can cope with the nuance and ambiguity of human relationships (Tsoukas and Hatch, 2001; Czarniawska, 2004; Cunliffe and Coupland, 2011). Additionally, my narratives are autobiographical and are informed by an ethnographic interest in how cultures are formed by actors. My narratives are close to auto-ethnography (Ellis, et al. 2011; Lapadat, 2017) without being exactly the same since they are studies of my relationship with colleagues at work which others in my learning set have contributed to and enhanced. As mentioned above, the research task is very much both an individual and a group activity.

We then reflect and look for relevant literature to develop theoretical understanding of particular patterns or broader social phenomena that might be at play. The theoretical reflections are an important component in pointing to any wider social phenomena that resonate with our experience. The reflections also provide an opportunity for us to think differently about our experience. '...(T)he intention of recognizing theory and practice as two phases of the same activity, is that all action implies a theory, and theory leads to patterns of activity' (Mowles, 2017). "As well, knowing is intimately connected to doing, of which 'seeing' is just a tiny phase" (Dewey, 1960 cited by Brinkmann, 2014, p.722). This is a pragmatist's perspective. His critique of philosophy in what Dewey called 'the spectator theory of knowledge'. Instead, Dewey advocated that knowledge is more than just contemplation. There is no separation between theory and practice: it involves the agent's direct engagement with an experimental spirit in problem solving (Bernstein,

2016, p.34). Noticing something, being bewildered or surprised are the first steps of the process which leads to understanding.

### *Abductive reasoning*

A distinction is often made between three ways of reasoning in research:

1/induction is data-driven analysis which builds on the idea that collecting data will lead to a theory; 2/deduction is a theory-driven analysis whose concern is the testing of hypothesis; 3/abduction is driven by breakdowns in our understanding where we feel unable to proceed as mentioned above (Brinkmann, 2014). Both induction and deduction are methods I am familiar with as a student of psychology and neuroscience and so this way of reasoning appeared in the earlier processes of my writing. Project 2 began in a way which was very theory-driven: the image of bulking up muscles on top with my legs unexercised. As I mentioned above, the number of theories was disproportionate to my narratives (data). My colleagues in my learning set, as well as my supervisor in feedback, all tried to dissuade me from the trajectory of retrofitting these concepts and theories to my narratives.

Consequently, I deleted much of the excess theory in this frustrating, but very valuable, iterative process. I was once again encouraged to return to work and pay more attention to what was happening. Unlike induction and deduction, both of which address the relationship between data and theory, abductive reasoning is concerned with the relationship between a situation and inquiry (Brinkmann, 2014). It is breakdown- driven and involves an imaginative interpretation of the data as a good enough and revisable hypothesis for now until more is discovered by further research (Alvesson & Karreman, 2011).

To be a valid source of data, a narrative has to resonate with the experience of others. My learning set and my two supervisors play important roles here. These discussions and questionings of my narratives are invaluable. They point me to aspects and perspectives I might have left unexplored. Theoretical reflections in making sense of the narrative material are central. They account for the generalisability of the issues that other researchers/theorists have encountered. The thesis is emergent so what I found myself writing about and the themes which guided my reading were not predictable in advance, and this is why I have not conducted a comprehensive literature review. The iterative process (sometimes up to 6-9 iterations) of reflection on our narratives with others in the learning set, and with

the help of the second supervisor is a very important aspect of the research process in surfacing and making visible my taken for granted assumptions. We also present our work to the wider research community for further critique to widen the possibilities of significance as well as to deepen the quality of resonance with and through our colleagues.

Receiving feedback at times can be uncomfortable as our learning set challenges our work, both as readers and writers. Through the process of feedback, we, of course, find out what people think about our work, but we also seek to uncover each other's assumptions by looking at the way that each person would tend to interpret others' work. Many in the community, including myself, have English as their second or third language. That, too, is another way of discovering difference and assumptions between cultures: it lies in the way second language learners express themselves in their verbal and written presentations.

### *Interpretation*

Gadamer, a German moral philosopher writes at length about the importance of interpretation in *Truth and Method* (1975). 'The principle of hermeneutics simply means that we should try to understand everything that can be understood' (Gadamer, 1975, p.31). Hermeneutics seeks to make conscious the prejudices, in the sense of pre-judgements, inherent in the way we interpret experiences through language and critical dialogue. In part, it is the process of consciously experiencing the meaning of linguistic concepts which are normally taken for granted or typically assumed. An important aspect of Gadamer's idea of prejudice is that it rests on preconceived ideas of understanding according to one's history of disposition and relation to the world. In that sense, they make engagement with the world possible. He refers to skilful interpretation as developing 'historically effected consciousness' (ibid.), inquiring into how things have become the way they are, and how we have become how we are. In keeping with this tradition, Project 1 is an exercise in reflecting on how we have become the people we are. This can be achieved by adopting an attitude which seeks to remain aware of its own prejudiced nature and to take a 'reflective posture toward both itself and the tradition in which it is situated' (Gadamer, 1975, p.263). Here the term *tradition* can best be taken to mean

that its validity is not necessarily grounded in reasons but, instead, conditions us without our questioning the fact (Gadamer, 1975, p.317).

As mentioned above, in Project 1 I wrote about an incident I experienced at a community meeting where the word *discipline* was used towards me by a senior colleague. I felt immediately shamed. It was only when I reverted to Chinese that I was able to make sense of my emotional reaction. This word in Chinese implies *lacking family teaching*. I have since learnt that learning a foreign language does not mean we negate or leave our own world; it provides an opportunity to overcome the prejudices and limitations of our previous experience of the world. "Like travellers we return with new experiences". (Gadamer, 1975/2013, p.464). The idea of hermeneutic circle is an iterative process from which new understanding emerges. It is a circular movement because this method of understanding is constantly expanding, since the concept of the whole is relative, and is integrated in ever larger contexts (Ibid, p.189). The reflexive and interpretative perspective I have taken in my research is consistent with what Gadamer is pointing to: it is a process of discussion, of reflection and review, of rewriting and of further reflection.

Noticing the effect of the moment where our pasts and presents collide, if illuminated through iteration and reflection, can be empowering. As I became more familiar and trusting of the iterative process, I grew to appreciate the uncovering of prejudices, or the prejudgements, (Gadamer, 1975) that necessarily appear in our writing and our conversations.

The research community is very much about encouraging reflective consciousness, or reflexivity of a self that is capable of being both a subject and an object to itself. It requires us to 'bend back our thinking on itself and on ourselves in order to call into question our own role in understanding what it is we are trying to understand' (Mowles, 2015, p. 61). Similarly, when we apply reflexive questioning to our learning set and within the wider research community collectively, this process increases our interpretative power.

The exploration and potentially generative attempt of the reflective process to discover difference is not about landing on some firm known. Rather, it is a steppingstone that presages the next reflective moment, a good enough position to

take the next step forward. “(E)xperience is valid, so long as it is not contradicted by new experience” (Gadamer, 1975, p. 380).

### *Limitations of the research method*

I acknowledge the limitations to this form of research and that it is based on the researcher’s own perspective. My appeal to the reader is for resonance by offering rich, context-based descriptions of what I have done in practice. The aim of abduction and narrative research is not to arrive at some universal truth, but rather to arrive at what Dewey refers to as *warranted assertions* (1941, p.11), which are ‘outcomes of inquiry that are so settled that we are ready to act upon them, yet remain always open to be changed in the future’ (Dewey, 1938, quoted in Martela, 2015, p.540). My interpretation of events and arguments are provisional in nature but are enough to provide sufficient grounds for thinking about what might be going on in organisational life.

Two other critiques of this research method are that it is ‘just subjective’ and tells us nothing about objective conditions, and that for that reason it is not generalisable. Throughout this thesis I have explored the idea of the thoroughly social self so I defend the method as paying attention to how subjects become subjects: in other words our subjective experience derives from the ‘objective’ conditions we act within. Secondly, I appeal to a different kind of generalisability: if the reader of my work finds it interesting, plausible, resonant, then I have achieved a different kind of generalisability.

### **Ethics**

Taking an auto-ethnographic approach in writing about my own experience necessarily involves writing about the people with whom I am working. The ethical implications appear in an ongoing process from project to project as themes and characters change. We take the perspective of others into consideration of what content should/can be included or excluded; we negotiate continuously in our own reflective process; we speak regularly to our colleagues, to our learning set/supervisors, and to the wider research community. I also take opportunities to remind my colleagues at X Foundation that I am researching what we are doing together. At the beginning of the programme, I sought ethics approval in order to

begin my research. I am fully aware of ethical implications and the importance of taking measures to protect the organisations and the people I work with by rendering the characters anonymous. I must say I was far more nervous at the beginning of my research journey not knowing what to envisage. The tendency to be emotionally attached to my own perspective meant that the initial drafts were hard to let go. It became easier to do this as time progressed with the practice from Project 1 and feedback from my learning set. Project 2 has evolved over its many iterations into something far less personal (\* with one exception to be discussed below). A widening of perspectives made it a theoretical illustration of the many ways of understanding experience. Similarly, Project 3 began as an exploration of two distinctly different donor relationships. It considered the assumptions and misunderstandings that lie between varying cultural perspectives. It evolved into revealing my own instrumentalising of culture as a way of gaining some power over my colleagues. This was a surprising turn, a significant change in my practice where I have widened my circle of concern about ethics. It involves not only the organization but stakeholders and broader implications. I see the value of sharing my findings with those mentioned in my narratives. I am also realistic that my findings may not be appreciated by all.

Throughout the process of writing this synopsis, I have agonised about omitting a particular narrative in Project 2 regarding the past Chairman. She asked me to record an interview with her son as to how this material would be used but without disclosure to him. In the end, I decided to leave it untouched. My reason for this decision was firstly as mentioned in my introduction to remain true to my research: to illustrate how easy it is to get caught up in the *illusio* (Bourdieu, 1998, p.78) of the organisational game. I like to provide a final reflexive turn. If I take my own experience seriously, Vikki was also caught up by the game to compete and to impress her organization in the same way I did. It was her attempt to accumulate both social and symbolic capital to seek her inclusion in the new alliance board. This came as a result of an earlier event: a son of another Director shared his journey of living with mental illness very eloquently. It was a moving and powerful moment. I imagine Vikki also longed for this moment where she could feel proud rather than shame about her son's struggle, and also about her own struggle. I understand her pain and I seek her forgiveness. I hope that she will understand this episode has also been painful for me. I hope we can one day discuss this.

## Contribution to practice

I stated in my introduction that my thesis is about ethics of care and not losing sight of what matters. I have been involved with NGOs in mental health and social welfare for some years. Being a student on the DMan has provided an insight as to why I am drawn to and provoked by the themes in such an environment. I have gained a social and historical understanding of how I have become who I have become. Project 2 marked my new attention to a social view of ethics. Prior to this, I had an individualistic view of responsibilities: I now see that ethics is a shared responsibility. I have a growing sense of group mindedness: a need of not just seeking to be recognized as an individual but seeking recognition of the difference which I bring as a member of different groups. I have paralleled this need for recognition of the self with encouraging the board more generally to recognize what's going on between us, and to think more consistently about the communities which we serve. It has involved me in encouraging my organization to think more widely about their processes of recognition, particularly in relation to our principal stakeholders, donors, other organizations and I hope ultimately, the mentally unwell. This has led me to collaborating on a project between X Foundation with an aged care provider /NFP, which has been enthusiastically welcomed by both parties.

I took on this project in a similar understanding and to widen our circle of concern. The project was not about aged-care and their residents as such: it was about lending support to staff and encouraging the community to respect frontline workers with no other end in view, and certainly not to raise money. Initially, management and staff of my organization had great difficulty in seeing the purpose of this project. They could not see the link if it wasn't about raising money. It was about providing recognition to staff and addressing the duty of care to our community. It was not until I explained in more instrumental terms, playing the role of translator, the importance of media exposure and the potential of expanding the X Foundation footprint and network opportunities with the aged-care industry that they began to appreciate my effort in this collaboration. I came to realise the concept of relationships and interdependency is foreign to X Foundation.

In many ways, I am now much more able to play the game of organisational life. I have become much more aware of power and politics as necessary themes which organise the experience of being on a board and of trying to act both for the longevity of the organisation and for the good of the stakeholders. I am also more confident in bringing a more independent sense of self which is unique. I have become much less totalising in my judgements of others and much more capable of what I might call *both/and* thinking.

I have become aware of the enabling constraints of culture; how much I have been formed by my family background and my Chinese ethnicity. At the same time, I have become much more aware of the creative possibilities of this awareness which shapes me but does not contain me. The quality of our individuality is shaped by and dependent upon the type of community in which we live. The quality of community life is itself dependent upon the quality of our individual contributions. It is a relation of creative circularity: individuality is an achievement. (Bernstein, 2016, p.33).

Similarly, I have expanded the need for recognition with other NGOs who are stakeholders with X Foundation. I encouraged my organization to look beyond our own immediate interests by working with another NGO in bringing about social change. I have tried to talk about the importance of recognizing potentially conflicting values in relationships and addressing our duty of care and our personal and social responsibility.

It is also my hope I have begun to shine a light on the dark side of behaviour and power dynamics that take place in organizational life, whether they are intended or not. Such practices are those of oppressive culture particularly in the mental health sector which discriminates between normal and deviant behaviour. Normal behaviour can sometimes imply conformity, with little value given to emotions and difference apparent in conflict. Such practices are, too, the difficulty of organising together for the good of our target group, the mentally ill.

Another reflection which may be of help to other directors in my position is gossip. What I have been caught up in makes me realise the responsibility of directors like myself who cannot entirely avoid the gossip game. Gossip is endemic in

organisational life, and can also have constructive consequences. It can be a way of releasing emotions. My colleague directors and I, therefore, need to pay close attention to what we are invited to participate in and to how the invitation is made. This has consequences for what it tells us not only about the quality of organisational life but also about the quality of governance which we have or to which we have no access.

### **Contribution to theory**

This thesis constitutes a professional doctorate which rests on my practice as a not-for-profit director. The question arises as to what kind of theory a practice-based doctorate can produce. According to Thomas (2010, 2012), an educationalist, this is knowledge from practice, for practice. In other words, I agree with the pragmatists when they claim that there is no separating theory and practice, and the theoretical insights in this thesis are largely of practical nature. As I explained in my methods section, my appeal to the reader is for resonance. I offer rich, context-based descriptions of what I have done in practice. This is the appeal to generalisability, or my theoretical contribution.

Having said that, I agree with Cornforth (2012) that there is a need for innovative perspectives and approaches to the governance of NGOs. Ostrower et al. (2006, 2010) and Stone et al. (2007) who are leading figures in this area of research have proposed ways to move governance research forward using a contingency based framework. As Cornforth (2014) argued, the literature on the governance of NFPs is still underdeveloped particularly as it pertains to the functioning of boards in the day to day. Cornforth's review on NFP governance research noted the limitations on the focus of boards. The majority of research consists of variance studies looking at the antecedents and consequences of board characteristics and behaviour (Van De Ven, 2007). Cornforth (2012) concurred with Van De Ven (2007) that there has been a relative neglect in process studies that have attempted to explain how structure of governance and practices have evolved and developed overtime.

To add to the literature on governance, I have provided a micro-social account of the practice of gaining admission to a board and of learning to function there. I have given a detailed description of the types of experience new board members might face, whatever their ethnic background, which involve power, politics and theories

of recognition. It is likely to call out strong feelings of transference from their early family experience as well as their previous experience of inclusion in/exclusion from other groups.

My research calls into question orthodox theories of management and governance based on managing conflict and privileging harmony and positivity. I have argued instead that NFPs in particular, because of their social mission often aimed at supporting the more marginalised, should be more open to exploring difference, even if the exploration is uncomfortable. I have brought a complexity perspective to bear on thinking about the paradox of the individual and the group in the functioning of NGO boards, where on the one hand as individuals we want to stand out, and yet at the same time we want to belong and be included. We want to have our uniqueness recognised, and at the same time we need to acknowledge the status of the 'host' community. I have highlighted much more explicitly the importance of power, politics and status (or capital) in the functioning of boards. I have focused on the way that board functioning both shapes, and is shaped by the culture, understood principally as *habitus*, of organizational life.

I have compared and contrasted Chinese concepts of reciprocity and *face* with Western sociological terms, to show similarities and differences. To do so I have drawn largely on Bourdieu, Mauss and Goffman. This also demonstrates that all cultures are struggling with similar, universal human processes of trying to stay in relation with each other through rituals and improvising on the rituals, even though the emphasis on what is important will vary from culture to culture.

### **Future research- cultivating ethical consciousness**

I hope to have made a small contribution to the board members of X Foundation to think beyond the current instrumental ethos to a more social and relational approach to working with people. Through my four years of research into my own practice, I have developed close relationships with many scientists, stakeholders, donors and staff members. I have been able to find new ways for staying in relation with those with whom I will seek to co-operate. I wish to continue understanding how we can manage closeness amongst board members, staff and with our stakeholders. I also wish to explore creative ways to cultivate ethical consciousness in our work. What is

needed is the collective effort of an ongoing reflection on what is happening in the day to day of what we are doing together.

I have dared disturb the universe.

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