

29th S. H. Foulkes Annual Lecture

Organisational Identity: The paradox of continuity and potential transformation at the same time

By
Ralph Stacey

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We come together this evening, necessarily in relation to an organisation called the Group-Analytic Society. So, what is the Group-Analytic society and, more generally, what do we mean by an organisation? These are the questions I want to address in this lecture.

First, the Group-Analytic Society is a legal person. It is legitimised, under the laws of the land, by a legally recognised and binding constitution specifying purpose, procedures to be followed, hierarchical offices to be taken up, authority to be granted, and membership criteria and categories. As soon as we say this, we can see that we are talking about processes of *inclusion and exclusion*; processes which are essential to what I will be talking about later. Now this is not simply a legal matter. You may not be a member of the Society but you will be here by some process of inclusion, some form of association, attraction or opposition, to what this organisation is about. You will be here through some relationship you have, cooperative or competitive, with those who are members and / or the concepts and values which those members stand for. Others who do not have such relationships, or who are completely antagonistic to what the Society stands for, are excluded. I will be returning later to this matter of relationship but here I simply want to note that it is in these relational processes of inclusion and exclusion that organisational identity is constituted.

We can already see, then, that in thinking about organisational identity it is by no means necessary, and certainly not sufficient, to posit an organisation as a *legal* person. Some organisations are not legal persons at all. Indeed they are illegal, as is the case, for example, of a terrorist organisation or a drug smuggling ring. Furthermore, the *person* part of the definition is highly problematic, although very useful because without it we would have extremely ambiguous, cumbersome and muddled laws of contract and this would obstruct our joint activities. It is, therefore, a convenient *fiction* to think of an organisation as a person for legal purposes but it does not really get us to what an organisation is in our experience. If we listen to how people talk about an organisation and read how the word organisation is used in the now vast literature on the subject, it is striking how frequently the word 'it' is used in referring to an organisation. There is a powerful tendency to reify an organisation as an 'it' that somehow has a separate existence from the individuals who comprise it. We tend to talk about an organisation as actually existing as a thing, as a system. However, when we come to look for this 'thing' I think we are hard put to find it. People go even further than this and talk about an organisation as an organism, as a living system. They anthropomorphise it, treat it as actually being a person in ascribing purposes and direction to it. But when we come to look for this organisational organism or person, we are hard put to find a body which qualifies as living. I want to claim that, in my

experience, in my ordinary, everyday life, I do not encounter organisation as a thing, let alone a living thing with purposes of its own

So what, then, is an organisation, as organisation, if it can be legal, illegal, both, or neither as in the case of some movements, and if it does not actually exist as a thing, organism or person?

In asking this question I am not at all implying that an organisation, such as the Group-Analytic Society, does not exist at all. I am simply saying that it does not exist as a thing, living or otherwise. But it does exist as an imaginative construct emerging in the relationships between the people who form and are formed by organisation at the same time. Patterns of relationships and imaginative constructs are as 'real' as anything to be found in our lives, indeed, they are essential to the meaning of our lives. It is for this reason that I am using the term *imaginative construct* to distinguish what I am talking about from a mere 'fiction', however useful that may be, and from the notion of 'fantasy' with its connotations of some individual experience that stands in contradiction to 'reality'.

What might be the nature of such an imaginative construct and how is it constituted?

I want to argue that it is we who together construct the imaginative, not in some individual process of introspection or fantasising, but in our continually iterated relationships with each other. This immediately brings us to the fundamentally social nature of imagination and so of organisation. I understand the social to be the patterning processes of interaction between organisms and when I say that organisms interact, I mean that they communicate with each other. As they interact with each other, moment by moment, they form patterns of activity. They iterate, in a sense repeat, these patterns of communicative interaction in each present time period and it is these patterns of communicative interaction, this activity of communication that I take to be the experience of organisation. For me, then, organisations are temporal processes, the ongoing action of communication which is both cooperative and competitive at the same time, the patterns of relating between bodies. Most, if not all, organisms in nature are social creatures but humans are so in a number of distinctive ways. Humans are conscious and self-conscious, reflexive and reflective agents, so having the capacity to choose their next actions in evaluative ways. Humans are capable of acts of imaginations and considerable spontaneity. Furthermore, human bodily interaction takes place, not only in the direct bodily communication common to other organisms, but also in the medium of language. We accomplish highly sophisticated forms of joint action because we are capable of highly sophisticated forms of communication in language, particularly in our ordinary, everyday conversations with each other. Organisations, I would argue, are the ongoing patterning of conversations so that changes in conversations are changes in organisations. Usually, when talking about organisations, people refer to procedures, roles, tasks, and the activities of monitoring, planning and budgeting. They talk about organisations in terms of technologies, bundles of resource and positions in markets and dismiss ordinary conversation as 'just talk'. I think that in doing this they are focusing attention on what are, after all, only the tools we use in our ongoing interactions with each other. I find it more fruitful to avoid mistaking the tools for the organisation and see them for what they are, namely, the tools we use in the activities of organising.

To regard organisations as patterns of communication is, it seems to me, to take a group-analytic view of organisations. Foulkes (1948; 1964; 1990) laid great stress on communication as the group activity, arguing for the widening and deepening of communication as the road to health. Groups and organisations stuck in meagre, repetitive patterns of conversation provide us with

experiences that are deadening, oppressive and neurotic. But richer, more wide ranging, more challenging, more explorative conversations leave us feeling enlivened, often tense and anxious, and capable of far more spontaneous, creative action. In saying this, however, I want to follow Morris Nitsun's (Nitsun, 1996) advice and avoid idealising the group by stressing the point that conversations are not necessarily 'good'. From the perspective I take there is nothing *a priori* 'good' about human relationships, about human conversations. What is 'good' and what is 'bad' is what we are continually negotiating with each other and what these terms mean differs from group to group and changes over time. Intense relationships of a particular kind may connote the label 'terrorist' from some and the label 'freedom fighter' from others.

What emerges in our ordinary, everyday conversations as we go about doing whatever we do, are themes which organise our experience of being together into, largely, narrative patterns. Our lives together are narratives which we co-create in our conversations with each other, reflecting, largely unconsciously, the long histories of the families, groups and communities we live in. And as we reflect on these narratives we may find them inspiring, or we may find them absolutely appalling, and sometimes even quite boring. Organisations are such ongoing, dynamic narratives emerging and re-emerging in temporal processes of interaction. I am arguing, then, for a concept of organisation as processes of human bodily interaction which pattern themselves, through our interaction, as narratives. There is nothing abstract about this formulation because it is in these ordinary experiences that our very selves, our *identities* are iterated, and potentially transformed, from one present time period to another. So, we do not create organisations as things or organisms separate from, and outside of, ourselves as individuals, existing as some kind of supra-system above us that then affect us. It follows that an organisation cannot *have* an identity. Instead, organising is the thematic, narrative patterning of our communicative interaction which actually constitutes the identities of each one of us, while at the same time we are constituting that communicative interaction. Although identity is not a thing to be found in nature, there is nothing more real, in our experience, than our identities. Norbert Elias (Elias 200/1939; Elias 1989; Elias & Scotson, 1994/1965), a founder member of the Group-Analytic Society, argued that each of us derives our "we" identities from the groups to which we belong and that such "we" identities are inseparable from what we might call our "I" identities. Whenever, I am asked who I am, I always reply by pointing to the groups I belong to. I might say that I am a group analyst, a teacher at Hertfordshire University, a male, a European and so on. And if the enquirer is not satisfied and presses me to say who I 'really' am, I find I cannot provide a satisfactory answer and I think that this is because 'who I am' is always inseparable from 'who we are'. Again I want to stress that in saying this I am not talking about the ideal and the noble because 'who we are' can be, and often is, truly horrific.

I want to try now to unpack some of the assertions I have been making by focusing on the following key themes (Stacey 2001; 2003):

- First, I want to say something about how we might understand the nature and consequences of processes of human communicative interaction, particularly how they form the self or identity.
- Second, I want to point to how relations of power are inevitably constituted in this communicative interaction as patterns of inclusion and exclusion which form identity.
- Third, I want to make a connection between power and ideology, which encompasses norms, values and imaginative acts, and how these are also all aspects of identity.

- Fourth, I want to suggest that we can understand the continual iteration of identity as both continuity and potential transformation at the same time.

Processes of communicative interaction

I think that the American pragmatist, George Herbert Mead (1923; 1932; 1934; 1938), provides us with a very powerful way of understanding processes of human communicative interaction. For him, communication takes the form of a *gesture* made by one body which calls forth, or evokes, a *response* from another body. Furthermore, the meaning of the gesture can only be known in the response. If I smile at you and you respond with a smile, the meaning could be reassuring friendship but if you respond with a cold stare, the meaning could be contempt. Mead held that the gesture and the response cannot be separated but constitute one social act in which meaning arises in interaction between people. Meaning is not simply in the word alone but in the responding word too so that neither party can choose and control the meaning that emerges. Now this may sound obvious but this view has some very important consequences. First, it means that we are talking about communication as the activity of bodies in which the action of one actually evokes the reaction of the other. That other does not autonomously select the response because the other is evoking it at the same time as it is being selected. The distinctiveness of this notion of communication becomes clearer when we compare it to the sender-receiver model of communication. There, a thought or representation arising within one autonomous mind is translated into language which is then transmitted to another autonomous mind where the language is translated into the same thought or representation in that other mind if the formulation and the transmission are good enough. Then the other autonomously selects a response. Here the meaning is in the word alone and gesture and response are separated, giving us a completely different idea of what communication means.

The second consequence becomes evident as we continue with Mead's argument. What is distinctive about human communication is that humans have central nervous systems which enable one body to evoke in itself a similar response to that being evoked in the other body. So as I smile at you, I am able to experience similar bodily responses to those you might, reassuring friendship and contempt, for example. This enables me to know what the consequences of my gesture might be and it enables me to indicate to you how my gestures might unfold and you to signal to me how you might respond to these. Knowing, that is, consciousness, then becomes processes of private role play of a body with itself. Furthermore, the gesture which most easily enables one body to call forth similar gestures in itself as in others is the vocal gesture because one can hear oneself as others hear one. The use of vocal gestures, that is, language, enables much more sophisticated forms of communication. It also enables more sophisticated forms of mind because I can silently talk to myself in anticipation of the responses you make to what I do. Mead's theory of communication is therefore a social theory of mind. Indeed mind and society are essentially the same processes of bodily communication, the only difference being that in the case of mind the communicative interaction is the private, silent interaction of a body with itself and in the case of the social it is the public, vocal interaction of bodies with each other.

Humans have not only the capacity to evoke in themselves responses which are similar to those evoked in others, they also have the capacity to generalise. As conscious individuals experience a history of interaction with others, in a community which itself reflects a long history of interaction, they come to evoke in themselves similar responses to those they evoke in people in general. Mead referred to this as the 'generalised other'. We care what others in our community

in general will think of what we do. Mead argued that in interacting with specific others we are always at the same time taking the attitude, the tendency to act, of others in general, of the group or of what he called the game. He sometimes used the term 'social object' to describe such generalising processes. A social object, unlike a physical object which is to be found as a thing in nature, can only be found in our experience of interacting with others. A social object is then the generalised patterning of actions, the tendency on the part of large numbers of people to act in similar situations in similar ways. For example, a lecture such as the one we are now experiencing is a social object. All of us here know how to act in this lecture situation because we all know what it is to act as a lecturer and how to act as the audience. We can accomplish what we are here doing because we are all capable of taking the attitude, the tendency to act of all of the parties in this particular game. Imagine someone arriving here tonight, having been cut off in some remote jungle since birth. I imagine such a person would be completely bewildered by what we are doing and would not know how to act, and in the presence of that person neither would we. Perhaps you do not have to have been cut off in a jungle to experience what we are doing tonight as bewildering, perhaps most of those walking past this building now would have a similar experience!

Mead pointed to another important aspect of our activities of interaction with each other. Humans display strong tendencies to idealise their generalisations. People have a tendency to individualise and idealise a collective and treat it 'as if' it had overriding motives or values, amounting to a process in which the collective constitutes a 'cult'. Members of 'cults' forget the 'as if' nature of their joint construct and act in a manner driven by the cult's values. Cults are maintained when leaders present to peoples' imagination a future free from obstacles that could prevent them from being what they all want to be, providing a feeling of enlarged personality in which individuals participate and from which they derive their value as persons and often use to justify the terrible actions they take. A 'cult' directly applies cult values as universal norms abstracted from daily life and individuals must conform unless they are to be judged as selfish or sinful and excluded from the group. *Cult values* emerge in the historical evolution of any group or institution, to which they are ascribed. For example, one cult value could be 'love thy neighbour' and another could be 'destroy unclean races' so that what for one group is idealisation is denigration for another. However, instead of being directly applied in a way that enforces the conformity of a cult, cult values can become *functional values* in the everyday interactions between people in a group. For example, the cult value of a hospital might be to 'provide each patient with the best possible care'. However, such a cult value has to be repeatedly functionalised in many unique specific situations throughout the day. As soon as cult values become functional values in real daily interaction, conflict arises and it is this conflict that must be negotiated by people in their practical interaction with each other.

Mead sought to explain not only the phenomenon of consciousness, which I have so far been talking about, but also that of self consciousness. To be self conscious means to interact with myself by taking myself as subject, or 'I', to be an object, or 'me'. As soon as I try to reflect upon myself I engage in this activity of an 'I' which is responding to 'me'. This is what reflexivity, turning back on myself, means. Mead argued that the 'me' is the gesture of the society to the 'I'. The 'me' is the tendency of people in general to act in similar ways in similar situations to 'I' and this 'I' is the responses, often characterised by spontaneity, which such gestures evoke. It is essential, if we are to understand the important point Mead makes, not to split the 'I' and the 'me'. They are inseparable phases of one act. The self then is understood as an ongoing activity, an ongoing temporal process of 'I' responding to 'me'. It is not that there is a true self called 'I' which is seen in the mirror of the social 'me'. In Mead's formulation there is no given, true self.

Instead a self is continually iterated, continually emerges in interaction with others and oneself. This self is truly social through and through, to use Foulkes' phrase. However, this social self is not socially determined, cannot be reduced to some kind of social determinism because the response of the 'I' always has the potential for spontaneity – we can surprise ourselves. Mead is not denying unique individuality but explaining how such uniqueness emerges in social processes of interaction. What he is clearly denying is any notion of an autonomous self. From this perspective there is no metaphysics of mind consisting of, for example, agencies such as id, ego and superego. Instead we have a notion of self which is inseparable from the social. Elias said much the same when he claimed that the individual was the singular of interdependent people while the social was the plural.

From this perspective, we can see that organisations are real, not as things like the physical objects to be found in nature, but as moment by moment iterations of patterns of interaction in which each of us is taking up in our actions the generalisations, idealisations and denigrations which we can refer to as social objects and cult values and this involves also the reality of imaginatively constructed 'wholes'. Indeed organisations are social objects and cult values, involving the real activities of imagination, which we are always making particular in our ordinary, everyday activities. And very importantly, it is in these activities that we are continually iterating and potentially transforming our very selves. We are not simply the human dimension of an organisation, nor are we its human resources. Rather, we are perpetually constructing the future of the organisation in the present, in the ordinary, everyday activities of interacting with each other. And we are not creating patterns that are somehow separate from us because these patterns are also, at the same time, our very identities. If this is the case, then how we understand and talk about organisations becomes a very important matter of ethics. I suggest that it becomes unethical to think and talk about organisations as entities outside of us which use us as resources.

In saying what I have just been saying I am often accused of being very abstract so to try to avoid this accusation I want to invite you to reflect on your experience in the light of what I have been saying. Many of us here work in, or in relation to, organisations in the health and education sectors. So take, say, a National Health Service Trust. As an organisation, I would say that it is the iterated patterning of communicative interaction between large numbers of interdependent individuals. Some are employees and belonging to it is an aspect of their identities, the "we" aspect of each of them. Furthermore, they are not simply members of the Trust because each of them also belongs to groupings of doctors, nurses, porters, managers and so on. Even in these grouping there are sub groupings, for example, surgeons and even within that there are groupings, say, heart surgeons. All of these groupings give rise to the "we" identities of their members, providing them with a powerful sense of identity or self. Others are receiving attention as patients and so belong to the group of the 'sick'. Yet others are relatives of the 'sick' and so belong to yet another group, perhaps, 'carers'. And of course each of these groups consists of sub groups, such as the diabetics, the mentally ill, the Aids patients and so on. They too take aspects of their identities, albeit often more temporarily, from belonging to these groups. For all of those I have mentioned so far, such identities constitute how they are recognised by others in the wider society. Now all these people continually interact with each other in a coherent manner, moment by moment, every day because each has the largely unconscious capacity to take the attitude, the tendency to act, of all the others in the hospital game. We have some expectation of what will happen when we enter a hospital as patients. We have some expectation of how doctors, nurse, administrators and porters will act. And so do all of them of us and each other. What we are all doing is taking up the attitude of the 'game'. We are all taking up in our interactions, the social

object which is the hospital organisation. As organisation, the hospital does not exist as a thing. Rather, it is only to be found as patterns of interaction in our experience. This must be so if we are to interact coherently. Try to imagine what it might be like to be rushed to a modern hospital in London from a remote jungle village somewhere.

Now, all of this is not a perfect process because it is not the actualisation of something given and the expectations of all involved will not therefore fit in easily with each other. As generalisation, the social object will have to be made particular in each particular, contingent situation and this will inevitably lead to some kind of conflict. Nurses and physicians, for example, might well take up the social object in their actions in different ways so that they will conflict and there will be complaints. Nowhere will the conflict be more acute than around the hospital organisation's cult values. For example, how will the cult value 'do no harm' be taken up in Ward A at the Royal Free hospital at 15.25 on Saturday 14 May 2005 in relation to patients X and Y by doctor L and nurse M? And it is more complicated than this because there will be more than one cult value and they may well conflict with each other. As we are all very aware, many of us painfully so, hospitals take up cult values to do with performance, quality assurance, risk management and evidence-based treatment. These frequently clash with other cult values such as vocation, collegiality, causing no harm, professional freedom and personal responsibility. We then have to negotiate our way through inevitable, sometimes unbearable, conflicts in ways that inevitably transform our identities. This becomes especially pressing when the scope for functionalising and thus negating the cult values is more and more severely restricted by shifts in power relations as in the concentration of policy making, monitoring and control in the hands of central government. We must comply, or at least be seen to comply, to avoid public humiliation, shame and even annihilation of identity. Identities, which can only be sustained in the recognition of important others, may come to be characterised more by appearance and spin than substance. Compliance means submerging values that may feel more important leading to feelings of alienation and inauthenticity because to survive we have to deceive. The cults of performance and quality assurance take the form of cultures of deceit, not just at the very evident level of national politics but in the lives of most of us who once felt that vocation is central to who we are.

Power relations

This brings me to another key point I want to make about processes of sustaining and transforming identity, namely, power. The work of Elias is, I think, of central importance here. Elias held that power is not a thing that some have and others do not, that some can give to others. Instead, he argued that all relations between humans are power relations. In relating to each other we are always constraining each other. I cannot sustain a relationship with anyone if I do exactly as I please. At the same time, however, in relating to each other we are enabling each other. This is what power is, namely, relational processes of enabling and constraining at the same time. Such processes form patterns, or to use Elias' term, figurations, which have emerged in personal and societal histories of relating and which continue to evolve as those patterns are taken up in ordinary, everyday interaction. In any relationship, however, some constrain and / or enable others more than those others enable and constrain them. In other words, the power ratio is tilted towards some and away from others. This patterning of inequality depends upon relative need. If, for whatever reason, I need you more than you need me then the power ratio is titled towards you. Moreover, relative need can change so that patterns of power relations are not fixed but can shift around. What is true of individual persons is equally true of groups of people. All who belong to a particular group are similarly enabled and constrained by their belonging and this enabling constraint takes the form, I would say, of having to participate in the group's

dominant discourse. If I am to continue to belong to the Group-Analytic Society then I must conform enough to what we are jointly negotiating to be the dominant discourse. Go too far out on a limb and you will be ostracised, as we all know. How the discourse is being shaped and just who is most prominent in doing the shaping then becomes a power issue of great concern to all who seek to retain their belonging. Inclusion, then, requires some degree of conformity to the dominant discourse and those who do not, or cannot, conform are excluded and find their belonging in some other group if they can.

Just as power relations are a central aspect of all relationships between individuals so they are of relationships between groups. Elias explored the highly complex processes, largely unconscious, through which groups develop and sustain patterns of power relations between themselves. In his famous study (Elias & Scotson, 1994/1965) of the community of Winston Parva, Elias described what happened when a number of people were relocated to Winston Parva from areas of London destroyed by bombing during the Second World War. Those already living there had, by virtue of having been there for a long time, developed tightly knit family networks consisting of three generations. Naturally they spent time visiting each other and so had rich possibilities for gossip. The group of newcomers, of course, had family structures of only one generation and therefore meagre resources for gossip. The consequence was that the established group had much greater opportunities for shaping the dominant discourse. In their gossiping they described the newcomers as poorly educated, badly behaved and dirty, while describing themselves as well educated, well behaved and clean. Elias distinguished between what he called 'praise' gossip, or charisma, and 'blame' gossip, or stigma. Furthermore, the newcomer group came to accept the stigma and held much the same view of themselves and the established as did the established. In other words, classifications in terms of binary opposites emerged in their conversations, the principal binary opposite being between 'them' and 'us'. Farhad Dalal (1998; 2002) has pointed out how in doing this we tend to homogenise 'us', obliterating any difference between us and we also tend to homogenise 'them', obliterating any individual differences between them. In so doing we locate all difference between the categories. Elias pointed to how the two groups seemed to be caught in an unconscious process that no one was really intending in which to sustain membership of either group people had to conform to the dominant discourse.

Now there are two important aspects to these processes. The first is that they are processes of identity formation. Who one is in this community depends very much on which of the groups one belongs to. Failure to participate in a conforming way in the dominant discourse raises very real threats to identity. The second aspect is that these are processes of power relating. Elias noticed how members of the established occupied all the important official positions in the community. The dominant discourse serves the purpose of sustaining current patterns of power relations which can only change in challenging the dominant discourse with the anxiety provoking threats to identity which this brings.

I suggest that process of the kind I have just been describing are to be found everywhere in organisations. I have already mentioned the shift in the pattern of power relations in the education and health sectors. Over the past two decades, in particular, we have seen an enormous shift in the power ratio away from local bodies, which could and did challenge the policies and decisions of central government, to the organs of central government which now face very little challenge indeed. Tightly interwoven with this shift, indeed powerfully sustaining it, is a dominant discourse to do with modernisation and efficiency. Who can challenge such evidently 'good' aims? Given dominant ways of thinking about the nature of organisations as cybernetic systems, who can challenge the methods of achieving these aims through the setting of targets and the

monitoring of performance? These aims, these methods of achieving them, the centralisation of power they require and the discourse of marketisation and managerialism that underpins them are extremely compelling because they reflect so faithfully the main tenets of modernism. The modernist discourse of choice, freedom and democracy seems so unassailable that we hardly dare to see how violent and aggressive it really is in terms of peoples' identities. Democracy is so self-evidently good that it seems treacherous to notice the contradiction, indeed aggression, involved in compelling people in other cultures to be free and democratic even though such concepts might mean little to them.

Ideology

In talking about the dominant discourse, I have, of course, been talking about ideology. It is ideology which renders the dominant discourse unassailable and makes the current pattern of power relations feel natural. In our communicative interacting and power relating, we are always making choices between one action and another. This may be on the basis of conscious desires and intentions, or unconscious desires and choices, for example, those that are habitual, impulsive, obsessive or compulsive. In other words, human action is always evaluative, sometimes consciously and at other times unconsciously. The criteria for evaluating these choices are values and norms, together constituting ideology.

Norms (morals, the right, the 'ought') are evaluative criteria taking the form of obligatory restrictions which have emerged as generalizations and become habitual in a history of social interaction (Joas, 2000). We are all socialized to take up the norms of the particular groups and the society to which we belong and this restricts what we can do as we particularize the generalized norms in our moment by moment specific action situations. Elias' work shows in detail how norms constitute major aspects of the personality structures, or identities, of interdependent people. However, norms are inseparable, although different, from *values*. Joas draws on Dewey (1934) to argue that *values* are general and durable criteria for judging desires, norms and actions. Values are criteria that are *attractive and compelling in a voluntary, committed sense*. Values give life meaning and purpose, and so are not experienced as restrictive. They are the highest expression of our free will, presenting a paradox of compulsion and voluntary commitment at the same time. Values are inspiring motivations to act toward the *good* (ethics), which arise, and continue to be iterated, in particularly intense experiences of social interaction as inescapable aspects of self formation and self transcendence. Such experience takes hold of peoples' imaginations and the experience is idealised in the imaginative construction of a 'whole' which does not exist but is, nevertheless not an illusion or a fantasy but, rather, the experience of value and value commitment. What 'whole' means here is the felt continuity and coherence, the felt unity, of experience. Values are not deliberate choices, indeed, they are experienced as not of our positing. Although values have general and durable qualities, their motivational impact on action must be negotiated afresh, must be particularised, in each action situation involving the spontaneous discrimination of the 'I'. It follows that values are contingent upon the particular action situations in which we find ourselves.

I think that together the voluntary compulsion of values and the obligatory restriction of norms constitute *ideology*. The basis of individual choices, from this perspective, is thus fundamentally social. The criteria for evaluation are, at the same time, both *obligatory restrictions* taking the form of what ought and ought not to be done (norms) and *voluntary compulsions*, taking the form of what it is good to do (values). Emotions, such as shame and fear of punishment or exclusion,

provide the main constraining force with regard to norms, while feelings of being recognised and feeling worthy act as positive reinforcements. Emotions such as gratitude, humility, altruism, guilt and feelings of self worth provide the voluntary, compelling force of value experiences, as does hatred and contempt for other groups.

Now this view of ideology, intimately connected to power relations, communicative interaction and dominant discourses, all as social processes in which our very identities arise, immediately challenges central tenets of modernity to do with autonomous individuals and instrumental, rational reason. We come to see what is ethical as that which we negotiate in the contingent situations we find ourselves and we come to see how intimately connected the experience of value and value commitment is to our very identities. For me, this means that government policy on public sector governance should not be discussed and judged simply, or even most importantly in terms of modernisation, quality improvement, and equal treatment for all patients. I think we need to be reflecting on what these policies mean for who we are and what we are doing together. I think it is outrageous that a government should base public sector governance on the instrumental use of shame to ritually humiliate large numbers of people, not to mention the public 'execution' of institutional leaders. Even if this did bring down waiting lists, without any unintended and often dubious consequences, which has not yet happened, even so we would need to ask what kind of society we are creating in so doing. Is this what we now accept to be ethical behaviour? When we think and talk about an organisation as a thing, a system, we can quite unwittingly take up the associated, quite unreflected, ideology of efficiency. What happens then is a covering over of issues to do with power relations and conflicting values with the consequent silencing of any who feel uneasy about this modern cult of performance and its culture of deceit. It becomes extremely difficult to negate the official ideology and this guarantees continuity with very little potential indeed for transformation.

Continuity and transformation of identity at the same time

This brings me to the title of this lecture which refers to organisational identity as the paradox of continuity and potential transformation at the same time. I have been arguing that organisations do not *have* identities. Identity is not a state we can identify as a cognitive answer to the question of who we are and what we are doing together. Instead I have been arguing that identity is the narrative thematic patterning of ongoing processes of interaction between people characterised by relations of power which are sustained by dominant discourses constituting ideologies. Identity is continually iterated in one present time period after another in specific, local, contingent situations. Identity as process is highly paradoxical. It takes the form of generalisation, of social object, and idealisation-denigration, as cult value. But at the same time it takes the form of particularisation in particular contingent situations. The general and the particular cannot be found separately but only as aspects of the same processes of interaction. There is a further paradox in that we are perpetually forming social while being formed by it at the same time so that identity is simultaneously individual and social. And then there is the paradox of continuity and potential transformation at the same time.

In iterating the patterns of interaction we may call identity we are repeating similar patterns from one present time period to another. Identity, sameness, reflects the habit and routine of which we are normally largely unconscious. But because we are talking about temporal processes not states, each iteration is hardly ever exactly the same as any previous one. No situation will be exactly the same as a previous time and we will find ourselves having to negotiate the contingencies as

we make particular our generalisations in slightly different ways. This will generate conflict and we will have to negotiate our way through this. Familiar people may leave our group and unfamiliar ones may join it. This is bound to affect, if only in small ways, the narrative patterns we are iterating as identity. Even without such small changes, the iteration will not be exactly the same because of the human capacity for spontaneity and imagination. It is the contingent nature of particularising the general, the spontaneity and imagination of people, the conflict this generates, that generates the variety which is an essential requirement for any transformation. And it is the property of nonlinear interaction of amplifying small differences into major changes that makes it possible for small variations to lead to emergent transformation. So as we repeat our patterns of interaction as continuity we are doing so in ways which always leave open the potential for transformation. It is in what Foulkes called free floating conversation that the potential for transformation opens up and, as we know, this can easily be closed by power relations which vigorously uphold the dominant discourse so that we participate in very repetitive stuck conversations. From the modernist perspective we have come to think of change and transformation as 'good'. I want to emphasise that it is important to avoid idealising groups and change in this way. Our experience of transformation in the education and health sector is far from good, in my view.

I have been arguing then that an organisation does not *have* an identity. Instead, it is in the activity of organising, that is the communicative interaction and power relating between us, that we are continually co-constructing our own "we" identities, characterised by the imaginative constructs of ideological wholes and dominant discourses as well as challenges thereto. It is our identities that emerge in activities of organising as continuity and potential transformation at the same time.

I started this lecture by pointing to the Group-Analytic Society as an example of an organisation and I would like to end by mentioning it again. Perhaps we could think about our experience in this organisation in terms of the simultaneous continuity and transformation of our collective identity. The questions we would then ask would, I think, centre on what the dominant discourse is, what ideology it reflects, what patterns of power relations it is sustaining and what patterns of inclusion and exclusion are evident. We would need to address these questions in relation to the same questions about the wider organisations we relate to, such as the health and education sectors and even more widely than that.

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