

**An investigation into how public  
sector and community-based  
practitioners authorise  
constructively awkward  
interventions**

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## **Abstract**

The project investigated a practice question. How can public and third sector managers and clinicians develop their capability to be constructively awkward? That is, to confront and challenge while keeping relationships intact. The literature on ineffective leadership links such outcomes to a failure of followership and the loss of an individual and collective capacity to critically evaluate accepted ways of behaving and thinking and their consequences for self and others. The experience of leaders and practitioners is that while challenge is espoused by the leadership literature and frameworks, there is insufficient guidance on how to enact such challenge, belying the ambivalence towards challenge in the workplace.

Ten people were interviewed, each with a reputation for constructive awkwardness and the ability to reflect on times when they had been silenced. The data was transcribed and analysed according to grounded theory principles and a Critical Realist ontology. The major elements of the theory to emerge were: the presence of a self-authorisation mechanism, constituents of which were reflexivity, holding a boundary position and having an explicit value base; a self-silencing mechanism reflecting the anxiety some felt in relation to looking stupid; and a reparation mechanism, that some used to backtrack when their emotive expression alienated the recipients of their challenge.

The project theory was consistent with the finding of Archer (2003) and her study of reflexivity as the means by which personal concerns are negotiated with one's social context. The project suggests that the capacity for self-authorisation was relied on more by community-based practitioners, who could not rely on professional and institutional derived authority. The project drew upon the insights into the causes of bad leadership and suggested how an active followership, described in the literature as necessary, could be practically enacted via a valid development activity.

The conclusion notes the project's shortcoming in relation to the lack of ethnic and cultural diversity in the interview group. This resulted in a lack of depth to the conclusion that community-based leaders may authorise their interventions differently. The conclusion ends with four propositions. It would be useful to: further develop the theory in relation to self-authorisation; to continue to explore the application of the concept of the psychological contract to understanding how one learns about how to manage feelings and challenge in the workplace; to test the assumption that community leaders authorise their interventions differently to public sector practitioners and that there is a distinctive community-based leadership theory that is different to the public sector discourse that currently defines such leadership.

## **Acknowledgements**

I want to acknowledge the support of my supervisors, Dr Weller and Professor Garelick who encouraged me to think, read and write and argue. Also, Dr Fleetwood who challenged me to think outside of my Tavistock training and Philip Boxer my mentor, who first talked about the issues investigated in this project. To my colleagues at the King's Fund: Pippa Gough who made important suggestions about contextualising constructive awkwardness and was always encouraging; Sue Machell, Bernie Brooks and Nicholas Bradbury for their support and encouragement. Thanks to my wife Jo, for her endless support and encouragement. To the ten people I interviewed, who generously shared experiences and helped me to think. Finally, to my father who taught me that sometimes you just have to stand up, find your voice and be awkward.

# Introduction

The aim of this project is to understand the capabilities, values and experiences people use when they question, confront and challenge in the conversations that are part of their work discourse. The objective is to apply this learning, to the development of interventions that can be applied within structured educative programmes, run by the King's Fund, my employer, for public and third sector practitioners<sup>1</sup>, by which people can evaluate and develop their capacity for being 'constructively awkward'. There are two subsidiary objectives. First, to produce development interventions that meet the criteria developed by Argyris (2000). That is, to enable King's Fund programme participants to test the validity of the propositions embedded in the development activities in relation to the work issues they face. Secondly, to develop a level of theoretical and practical competence sufficient to effectively facilitate such interventions.

The focus on constructive awkwardness has emerged from my professional role as a senior fellow in leadership development at the Kings Fund. The King's Fund is a health foundation, based in London. I intend, through this project, to face a significant practice and theoretical challenge, arising from my work listening to people reporting their experience of being silenced, choosing silence and wanting to speak up. I have felt that I have had little to offer by way of practical advice. My personal objective is then to develop my professional practice by becoming what Lester calls a 'practical thinker' (2002, p.3), a capability a colleague has called 'phronesis'. Rhodes and Garrick (2000) describe phronesis as emergent from the nexus between knowing and doing and what is right, embedded in the context of work. What is developed is a practical wisdom, rooted in the ability to use ideas from the literature, from one's own and other's experience, while remaining cognisant of how one's own assumptions informs and distorts such work.

This project is the final component of a professional doctorate (DProf) and reflects the objectives of such a programme of study to ground learning in the student's work context (Portwood and Thorne, 2000). Lee et al, 2000 describe the DProf as a process of learning to produce 'new kinds of knowledge and new ways of producing knowledge' (p.127), rooted in the intersection between work-place, professional background and the university. Lester (2002) describes the defining characteristic of a DProf as being

'grounded in practice as opposed to academic research, and explicitly geared to the needs of senior practicing professionals' (p.2).

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<sup>1</sup>The Government defines the third sector as non-governmental organisations that are value-driven and which principally reinvest their surpluses to further social, environmental or cultural objectives. It includes voluntary and community organisations, charities, social enterprises, cooperatives and mutuals' (Cabinet office, 2007, p.6).

I have therefore made use of examples from my work facilitating leadership development activities for senior public sector and community-based leaders to justify my project and to begin the process of explaining constructive awkwardness. These examples also serve to describe the potential contexts into which the outcome of this project will be grounded in practice.

This professional experience has informed my approach to the theory development required to achieve the project's aim and objectives. The potential consumers of any development activities work in a variety of contexts and structures, characterised by complexity, conflicting policy demands and the desire to achieve the variety of tasks associated with delivering high quality health and social care services. Given such a context, I have assumed that there can be no overarching explanation about how to do constructive awkwardness and that what is required is a mid-range theory. Merton (1968, quoted in Pawson and Tilley 1997, p.123), defines such a theory as lying

'between the minor but necessary working hypotheses that evolve in abundance during day-to-day research and the all-inclusive systematic efforts to develop a unified theory that will explain all the observed uniformities of social behaviour, social organization and social change.' Merton, 1968, p.39).

I have spent many hours thinking about what people report in relation to their own and others' behaviour, when they discuss being silenced or initiating a confrontation. I concluded that simply inferring theory from this experience would be insufficient. Any development activities based on such insights would risk lapsing into 'hortatory'. This is a term used by Braithwaite (2004) to critique management advice that is characterised by 'oughts, shoulds and how tos' (p.241), rather than grounded in the operational realities of practitioners. I suspect that people do not need more advice, they need practical help and such help can be developed if what is going on below the empirical surface can be theorised. Hence my decision to adopt Critical Realism and ethnographic and grounded theory principles as the basis for this practical enquiry.

Critical realism has provided ontological depth to the project's work and offered a small number of valuable practical examples of such theorising about similarly complex human behaviours. For example, New and Fleetwood's (2006) investigation into how gender determines participation in academic conferences; Archer's (2003) small scale study of reflexive voices; and Moren and Blom's (2003) enquiry into how social work interventions may work with resistant clients. Critical realism has provided a language with which to theorise about how observable effects, like speaking up or being silenced, might be generated in particular contexts. I have used principles based on grounded theory and ethnomethodology to provide systematic guidance on organising, coding and synthesising the data from ten semi-structured interviews I carried out in 2006/07. This methodology brought into



the theory development process the voice of the practitioner, without surrendering the analytic task implied by the development of mid-range theory.

### **This chapter's structure**

The first section offers an analytical description of constructive awkwardness, based on my tacit knowledge and reading as I prepared my Programme Plan and my understanding then about the aims and purpose of my final project. The term constructive awkwardness is explained and located as an intervention contextualised in and by conversation. The second section maps the risk facing the practitioner. The third section justifies the project focus and the fourth section locates constructive awkwardness in a wider, conflicted policy context. Section five locates the challenge embedded in the constructively awkward intervention in the wider leadership literature. The concluding section sets out the project questions and structure.

### **A note on the project's figures and tables**

The development of useful, simple visual aids has been important in helping to develop and present key theoretical insights. All figures have been developed by the author and, where these are an adaptation of others work, this has been referenced.

## **1.1 An initial definition of constructive awkwardness**

The origin of the term constructive awkwardness as a leadership capability is based in the work of Boxer (2003). He uses the term 'constructive disobedience' to describe a double challenge facing clinicians. They have to be capable and prepared to question their own practice, as implied by Argyris's double loop learning (1977), and challenge management structures when these act against the interests of patients. Boxer (2003) argues that clinicians may prefer to act informally and bypass blockages in the system, what he calls 'going the extra mile' (p.6). While this may make a service add up for the patient, it can be argued that greater efficiencies can be gained by an explicit commitment to working through system blockages with managers.

Proponents of Lean principles in the NHS argue that the identification and working through of inefficiencies delivers change that benefits patients (Westwood et al, 2007; Jones and Mitchell, 2006). Lean places an emphasis on engaging staff to develop a 'culture of continuous improvement' by constant questioning about how things are done and their effects (Liker, 2004, p.10). However, there is little guidance in Lean about how the Faustian pact between clinicians and manager, referred to by Boxer(2003), can be challenged. Kramer (2007), from a transactional leadership context, similar to that in the public services (e.g. Grint, 2005) believes, as in this project, that a culture of 'argumentation' is required to achieve the changes proposed by Lean.

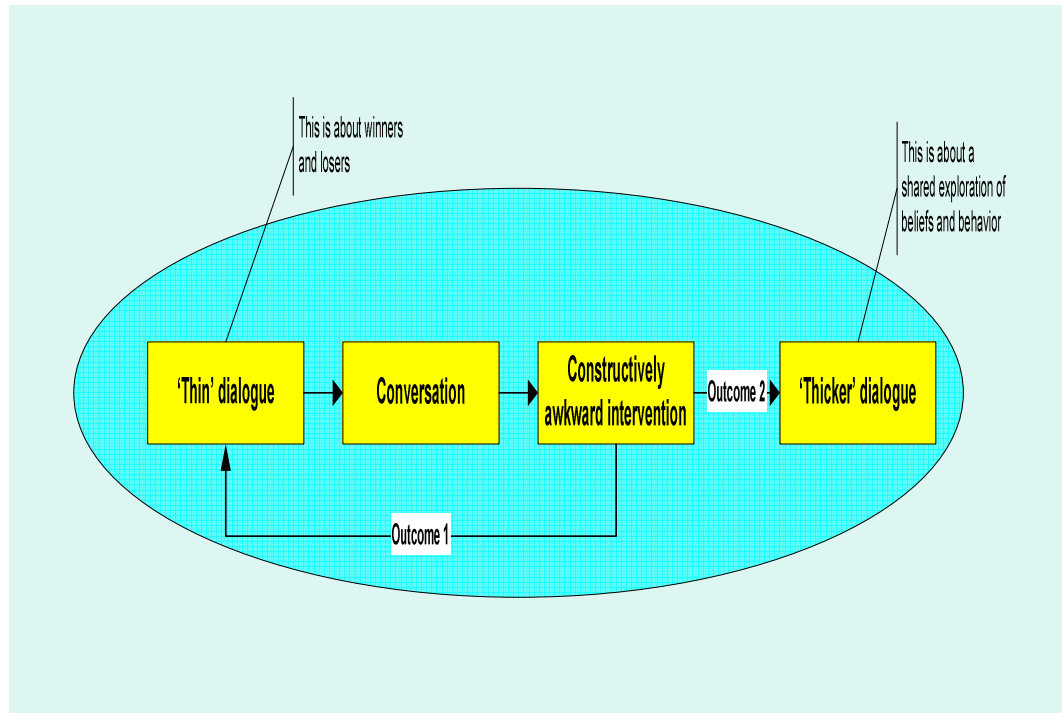
## **Why constructive awkwardness?**

I have developed the term 'constructive awkwardness' to focus attention on what is missing from Boxer's (2003) description and in a change tool like Lean. The word 'disobedience' tends to be associated with such terms as indiscipline, refusal and disloyalty. The focus of this project is to understand how one can express dissent and, simultaneously, demonstrate a commitment to a shared primary task, where task is defined in relation to an open system and what it 'must perform if it is to survive' (Miller and Rice, 1975, p.62). The application of any learning can thus be considered in relation to participation and leadership of services, teams and individuals and across sectors.

To explore further, Roget's Thesaurus (2002) links being awkward with going against the grain, reflecting Minger's (2000) four dimensions of critical management enquiry. That is, to be prepared and able to question the logic of arguments; to critique tradition, authority and objectivity. Awkward is associated in Roget's with being capable and willing to be non-conforming, un-comprehending, ignorant, foolish, impolitic, clumsy, quarrelling, wayward and bothersome.

To be constructive is to demonstrate more culturally valued attributes. It is to be productive, creative, innovative, capable of lucid explanations and to be helpful and obliging. Constructive awkwardness is a juxtaposition which helps to keep in mind a question: what would it be like to be obliging, helpful, bothersome, argumentative and lucid? This is a set of capabilities that Billig (1996) defines as a capacity for 'argumentation' and 'witcraft'.

A basic assumption in this project is that organisational life, where hierarchical leadership is the norm, may benefit from a willingness and capability to engage in behaviours that are questioning and aligned to the primary task. That is, to have conversations that seek to explore, without rancour and excess emotion, the origins and effects of deeply held assumptions about what is going on and should be going on. Walzer (1994) calls these 'thick' conversations. Such conversations are not about winning or losing ('thin conversations') they are about the exploration of ideas, beliefs and their consequences. The following diagram describes these two outcomes.



**Figure 1.1** - two possible outcomes from the constructively awkward intervention. It can result in 'thick' or 'thin' conversations.

## Constructive awkwardness as a conversation

Constructive awkwardness is assumed to be emergent from conversation. If this is the case, then how this emergence occurs in a service and organisational context is determined by the psychological work contract and wider social and cultural assumptions that underpin conversation. Conway and Briner (2005, p.53), in relation to the psychological contract, note the effect of social cues and workplace socialisation on individual behaviour and perception. Such phenomena can powerfully shape expectations about how disagreement and argument are to be managed. The effects of work and wider social values is described by Billig (1996); New and Fleetwood (2006); Appiah (2006); Ginsborg (2005); and Khane (2004), all of whom are discussed in Chapter 2. If conversation is culturally defined, it is assumed that each service or team will have its own particular cultural assumptions. That is, expectation about how disagreement, the management of emotions, turn taking and the length of intervention are expressed, valued, gendered and the domain of particular roles. Constructive awkwardness is a way of talking about the capability to go against the grain of a prevailing conversational culture and to offer what Heron (2001) calls an 'uncomfortable truth', (p.59). The following example reflects the level of challenge indicative of constructive awkwardness.

### An example of constructive awkwardness

A participant on the second day of a five week leadership programme for community leaders said the following.

'Do you know what it is like for some of us to be faced by three white programme directors?'

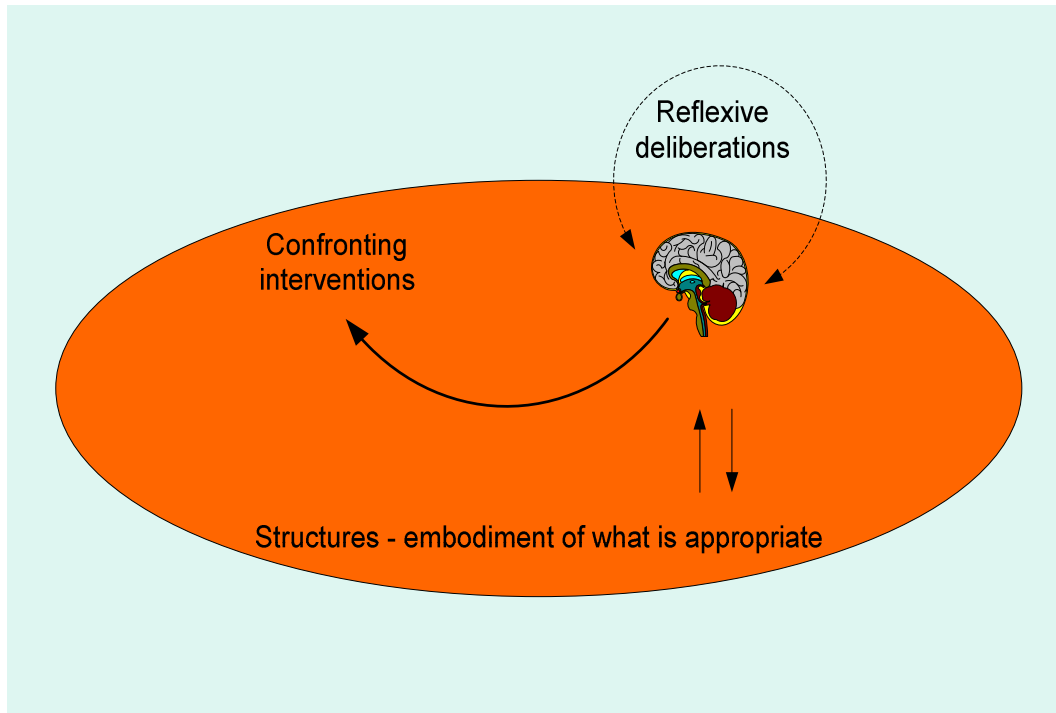
His question defines a dimension of constructive awkwardness. It is a blunt, clearly delivered, surprising, authority-challenging, assumption-probing intervention. He sought to question our understanding of what we might represent as white directors to black participants. In particular, to test our capacity to participate in conversations that explored how we might collectively re-create those aspects of structures that some found oppressive. That is, as we asked them to critically reflect upon their behaviour, could we, would we, do the same? As Gregory and Romm (2001) note in relation to facilitating critical reflection in management:

'What is important in our view, is that the facilitator, in confronting others, is also willing to subject his or her own reflections to critical self-reflection, and to challenges from others as a part of the process of engagement in the discourse' (Gregory and Romm, 2001, p.457).

His intervention took us out of our everyday context and destabilised our normal practice. We faced an ethical moment in that we had a choice. Did we, in Schon's (1987) terms, seek to 'preserve the constancy of our usual patterns of knowing in action and respond to surprise by 'brushing it aside' or could we and would we respond with reflection' (p26)? The fact that we could respond, is indicative of another dimension of constructive awkwardness. The intervention was pitched in a way that facilitated, albeit uncomfortably, a collaborative enquiry, a thick conversation.

## **Developing the definition**

Based on the example, constructive awkwardness can be construed as a deliberate act, preceded by some internal, psychological process, represented in the diagram by the brain. It is likely that the context of any intervention, which embodies a set of rules, roles and values and has the potential to be recreated in any conversation, will mediate the sense of agency that is required to initiate an intervention.



**Figure 1.2** - An initial theory of constructive awkwardness that shows the link between internal deliberations and action, which is assumed to be mediated by social structures embedded in the local context of the intervention.

This preliminary inductive reasoning draws upon Archer's (2003) study of reflexivity. Reflexivity relates to our private deliberations, the means by which personal intentions and effects are negotiated with what we take to be the social obligations embedded in the structures within which we live and work.

How structure affects individuals is complex and is assumed to confront the constructively awkward practitioner with a dilemma. This dilemma is characterised by a desire to conform to the rules embedded in structures and the desire to be autonomous. This complexity in part arises from Foucault's assertion in *Truth and Power* that power permeates social relations (Rabinow, 1984). In each conversation the practitioner initiates, power is negotiated, often without conscious awareness of the parties involved. An outcome is a pressure to conform, albeit temporarily, to one's position in what may be an informal hierarchy (Mills, 2003). This effect of holding role is described by Thornborrow (2002) in her analysis of talk in organisations. Position and role determine what sort of turn taking, talk and behaviour are expected and acceptable.

Schutz's (1979) insights into group relations suggest a further dimension of conformity. He argues that group membership is influenced by competing demands for affection, control and inclusion. This results in a conflict between the desire to develop a social identity and to individuate. The anxiety associated with

this dilemma can lead to individual and collective unconscious defence mechanisms, as theorised by Klein (1959) and by Bion (1961), in relation to groups, further elaborated by Turquet (1974) and Lawrence et al (1996). These defences, are mobilised to reduce the risk of the anxiety that can arise when expulsion or loss of self are felt to be imminent.

## **1.2. The challenges facing the constructively awkward practitioner**

The desire to belong described by Schutz (1979) has evolutionary benefits and can inhibit critical engagement with what is going on. Waller (2002) argues that being part of a group has helped develop solutions to adaptive problems that relate to survival of the individual, group and species. Developing a sense of belonging and the co-operation this facilitates, is critical in getting things done in organisations. Simon (1997), in his study of administrative behaviour, argues that where there are shared values, people are prepared to accept the authority of others and to express a willing compliance. He notes that organisations give people the opportunity to exercise power over others. If this is experienced as authoritarian, then the primary task of the organisation can slip from what it needs to do to survive, to arguing about who is in control and why. Simon's insights endorse Waller's conclusion that the evolutionary benefits of membership can be problematic in the present.

'Our adaptations also include some darker ultimate motives that people sometimes have - inter-group competition, boundary definition, and fear of social exclusion. These behaviour traits foster a hostility to other groups that often tears societies apart'  
(Waller, 2002, p.152).

The constructively awkward practitioner is prepared to put him/her self at risk in the expression of their own idiosyncratic understanding of what is going on, with less regard paid to their authority or organisation sanctioned rights to speak. This suggests that constructive awkwardness is relevant as a leadership and followership capability. Kellerman (2004), in her analysis of bad leadership, concludes that the capacity to be an active follower is critical in managing the risks of membership.

'Should followers follow the leader, or the dictates of their consciences? On the one hand, a strong argument can be made that to maintain order and get work done, followers should go along with the leader except in dire circumstances. On the other hand, followers are not sheep, nor should they necessarily be part of any herd'  
(Kellerman, 2004, p.30).

To be constructively awkward is risky. It is a commitment to the belief that 'solutions to problems derive from a deep belief in inquiry and a pragmatic search for truth' (Schein, 2004, p.397). That is, an enquiry that may challenge and subvert existing

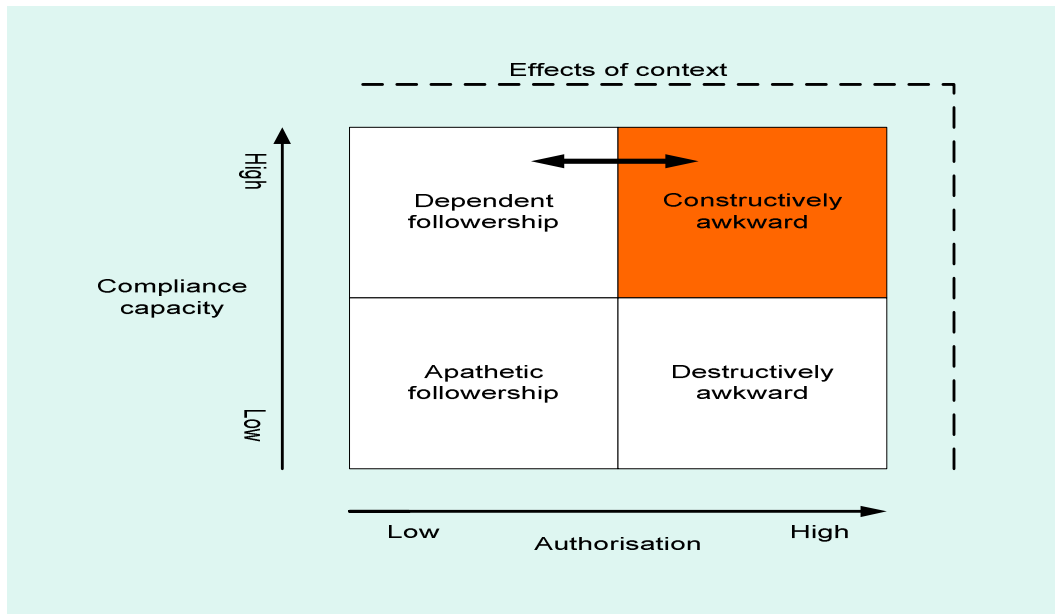
assumptions. Constructive awkwardness can be a commitment to learning at the level of Mezirow's (1989) epistemic critical self-reflection on assumptions, defined in the following terms. It is a commitment to self and others

'to examine the assumptions and explore the causes (biographical, historical, cultural), the nature (including moral and ethical dimensions), and consequences (individual and inter-personal) of his or her frames of reference to ascertain why he or she is predisposed to learn in a certain way or to appropriate particular goals' (Mezirow, 1989, p.195).

It is a commitment that is likely to raise anxiety in self and others, anxiety that is the consequence of one's certainties being questioned, the real and imagined risk of being excluded and the fear of looking stupid and ignorant. This is what Schein (2004) calls 'learning anxiety'. Such experiences can trigger a set of defensive routines to preserve a sense of what may be false competence (Argyris, 2000; 1991) adding a further barrier to achieving the 'thick' dialogue described by Walzer (1994).

## Scoping the range of the constructively awkward intervention

The diagram 1.3 below has been developed to locate the constructively awkward practitioner in a set of roles that reflect the dilemma between being capable of a critical engagement, to question what is going on and acknowledging the desire to belong. The diagram conceptualises four possible positions in relation to this dilemma.



**Figure 1.3** - Positioning constructive awkwardness. The practitioner is defined by their capacity for compliance to get the job done and self-authorising questioning interventions.

### **Dependent followership**

This position is associated with high compliance, and low authorisation. Such a person accepts another's authority as described by Simon (1997). However, under certain circumstances, the identification of which is the objective of this project, s/he is willing to put at risk their affiliation and question what is going on and so move into the orange box.

### **Constructively awkward**

This position is an expression of commitment to the common purpose and may be predicated on high levels of self-authorisation and indeterminate levels of structural authorisation.

### **Apathetic followership**

This position takes to extremes the positive behaviours associated with being constructive. The capacities to be helpful and obliging, become the more risky behaviours of pliant and malleable.

### **Destructively awkward**

This position is characterised by a constant questioning from a position of low affiliation. It is the behaviour of the aggrieved. It is to repetitively pick a fight and to be indifferent to the effects of this behaviour on an individual's and team's capacity to collaborate.

The following explains why understanding the processes underpinning constructive awkwardness is relevant. I do this in relation to the professional challenges I, and participants in Kings Fund development programmes for public and third sector leaders, faced.

## **1.3 Justification**

My interest in the subject of constructive awkwardness arises from a deficiency in my professional practice that I want to address. In particular, the usefulness of the advice I have given people who are being bullied and silenced through intra-psychic, interpersonal, group and organisational pressures. These deficiencies are best illustrated by two work-based vignettes. The first confronted me with a lack in my educational practice about how to address the issue of developing sufficient self-authority to overcome structural constraints. Up to this point, I had just assumed that people had the capability to act but in certain situations were unwilling to exercise this authority. The second exposed how my limited range of explanatory ideas undermined my work with a manager to effectively challenge established management practice, an obvious site of the constructively awkward intervention.

### **1. A doctor's story**

The following arose from a leadership programme for senior registrars. I was leading a session on group facilitation and had talked about confronting skills. A participant described being



under enormous pressure to carry out a delicate ear operation with the wrong instruments. He was still upset by how he resolved this situation, as he had gone ahead with the operation because he felt that to question would put his career at risk.

I had nothing constructive to say to him. This was the ethical moment, associated with Schon's (1987) choice of avoiding an uncomfortable truth or facing what is lacking in one's practice. In Schein's terms, this was a moment of impossibility, when what one knows is recognised as lacking in relation to what needs to be faced. Here, Schein (1989) is talking about a crisis in a consultancy assignment.

'As I listened to the discussion I reached a terrifying conclusion - neither my clients or I had the faintest idea what this job would be really like' (Schein, 1989, p.64).

Barrow (1999, describing the role of impossibility in scientific advance, identifies the anxiety of this moment within a liminal space, where what is revealed is the limits of one's knowing 'an inevitable by-product of the knowing process' (p.2). While facing impossibility is the way of progress, it is a difficult place to occupy in front of a group of doctors. I chose to give advice, ('you need to be more confronting'), a decision that Braithwaite would correctly dismiss as 'hortatory' and 'discursive' (2004, p.241).

## **2 - A public sector manager's dilemma**

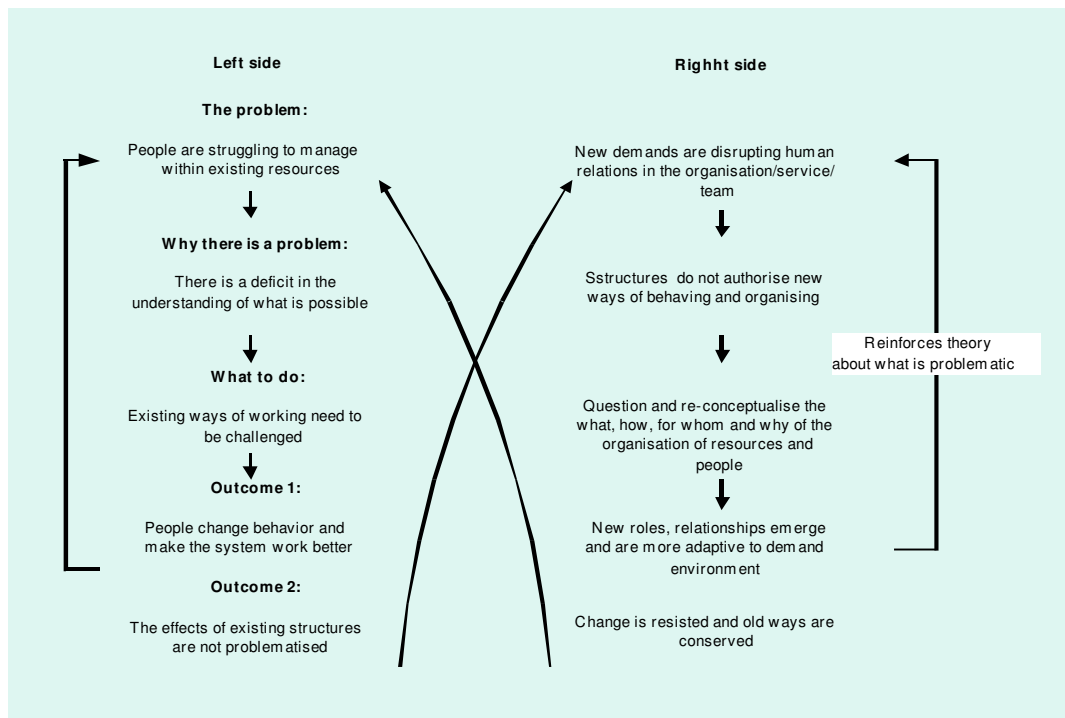
I wrote the following evaluation of a consultation with a senior manager, who was responsible for leading a partnership to co-ordinate a borough-wide learning disability service. Her authority was rooted in the public sector policy discourse of using partnerships to personalise services (Banks, 2002). Once again, I felt I had little to offer. The following is an early extract from my reflective journal.

She is an effective leader of the partnership, attentive to different voices, has the confidence of members and has established a network of suppliers. As she turns to her line manager, this capability, her sense of confidence and authority is diminished. She particularly notices this effect when her conversation with her manager involves requirements from the partnership that question the supply-side logic of the authority. Her manager will veto proposals from the partnership and this undermines her authority in the partnership. This is not about her professionalism but an inability of her manager and wider system to hold a dilemma. She acts as a transformational leader in the partnership and when this partnership questions the supply side logic she has to act transactionally to hold off this pressure, mirroring the hierarchical control she feels from her manager. She feels she must let either her boss down or her partners, as if she can only be loyal to him or the partnership (May, 2005).

I did know that advising her to challenge her manager, however capably she did this, would probably end up with him becoming

irritated and nothing changing - she would do the wrong thing well. While her intervention may confront problematic behaviour, it would lack explanatory 'grip', in that it would fail to problematise the effects of structure. That is, how embedded rules, roles and values would frame how people could respond to her partnership, leadership and wider personalisation task.

I used the case-material to formulate an underlying dilemma, using the structure developed by McCaughan and Palmer (1994), to capture two sorts of constructively awkward interventions.



**Figure 1.4** - the structure agency dilemma. The constructively awkward intervention can be based in different assumptions. Acting from either can produce two types of outcomes. One reinforces and the others questions the assumptive base of the intervention.

The right side characterises a constructively awkward intervention that seeks to question how things are done. That is, are we following procedure? The underpinning logic is to pay close attention to a practitioner's experience and skills, the learning from the literature in relation to challenge and securing the opportunity to practise new ways of behaving. The development of a theory of constructive awkwardness may help practitioners facilitate this sort of questioning more effectively. I may have something more useful to offer other than just advice.

The left side of the dilemma is encountered when simply acting within agreed procedures and structures is part of what is problematic. Facing Boxer's (2003) double challenge, 'flips' the dilemma to the left. The challenges people face cannot just be explained in terms of problematic personal and inter-personal behaviours. Trying harder will not work.

What the manager required was an alternative formulation to explain her experience and that of her partnership colleagues, a formulation that helped her to evaluate her experience in its context and ask 'why'. Such questioning is indicative of Mazirow's (1997) third loop of learning. Her intervention would identify problematic behaviours and the assumptions that underpin these behaviours; question how these assumptions produce observable effects; and consider how useful these are in relation to the stated task. She would question these particular assumptions, given the range of possibilities and how these choices can determine ways of talking, theorising and behaving in relation to partnership working.

This questioning requires access to an alternative set of assumptions, reflecting Schein's (2004) learning theory that, as questioning at this level leads to the unfreezing of epistemic and ontological assumptions, new ideas have to be offered. The following section explores one source of an alternative theory relevant to the participants on King's Fund development programmes.

## **1.4 The policy context**

The personal challenges described in the doctor's story and the public sector manager's dilemma on page 10-12, were experienced by the practitioners in their local contexts, which are determined (in relation to this project) by wider public health policy. Policy, is described by Gough (2004) as

'essentially about choice: who's in and who's out, whose ideas hold sway and whose don't, whose needs are more important' (Gough, 2004, p.55).

It is assumed that such decisions can be hard to notice and that they reflect the overt use of power to suppress agendas and conflict and more subtly determine wants and needs (Lukes, 2004). This suggests that practitioners, if they are to consciously think about and evaluate how they 'do' constructively awkward interventions, may need the following.

- A capability to notice and critically examine the effects of the local and wider policy context in which they are contemplating a constructively awkward intervention.
- An awareness of alternative policy formulations to develop and maintain the underpinning analytic capability implied by a formulation of constructive awkwardness that draws upon

the learning theory of Schein (2004) Argyris (2000) and Mezirow (1997).

- Access to development interventions that are underpinned by an understanding of the complexity of practitioners' policy contexts.

The following section explores an element of that policy context and how competing demands, both articulated and implied, help to explain why constructive awkwardness might be useful and difficult.

## **Personalisation**

Practitioners attending King's Fund leadership programmes describe a demand of them to achieve more personalised services. This requires them to construct, lead and engage in partnerships across teams, services, organisations and communities. Chesterman and Horne (2002), from a local authority perspective, describe the leadership challenge of partnership working in the following terms. It is a challenge rooted in

'the idea of deliberation, the measured process by which communities of interest bring to the surface their diverse aspirations, experience the dilemmas in their midst, explore different perspectives and gradually come to an accommodation of competing claims' (Chesterman and Horne, 2002, p.22).

Such a negotiation implies that 'thick' conversations are in order and that the capacity to question and challenge is useful. Equally, the capacity and willingness to 'rethink and rework' the behavioural routines that reflect normative assumptions, will also be required (Blackler, 1993, p.866). However, there is a lack of guidance in the leadership literature and public sector leadership frameworks (e.g. NHS LQF) about how to 'do' effective and appropriate challenge beyond detailed descriptions of the desired behaviours. For example, Banks (2002), discussing the challenges presented by the demand for partnership working, notes that guidance on how to lead partnerships can be lacking.

'Middle managers are caught between meeting explicit corporate responsibilities and adopting new, flexible ways of working. They are expected to be leading change agents, often with inadequate training and support, and at the same time fulfil routine operational responsibilities' (Banks, 2002, p.2).

This lack, discussed later, is argued to arise from an ambivalence, embedded in the hierarchical forms of leadership about challenge.

## **Asymmetry and personalisation**

The policy of personalisation can be explored through the work of Zuboff and Maxmin (2002). They argue that private sector organisations now face a new challenge, that arises from a self-

determining individualisation, which is not satisfied by having its needs met through the simple consumption of mass produced objects and services. They describe this as a move towards the 'individuation of consumption' (p.10). People will no longer be prepared to fit their needs to the supply side logic of providers. What they require is 'tangible support in leading the lives they choose' (p.4). Services have to be supplied in ways that reflects their unique context of use.

The problem, as they define it, is that business, and by implication public services, are rooted and organised around managerial capitalism. The dominant assumption is that people want services and things delivered through efficient mass production. Value is created by focusing on the organisation and its processes that secure efficiency to achieve the most profitable exchange with the end consumer. Symmetry is assumed between what is required and what is supplied. Zuboff and Maxmin (2002) argue that the capacity of the current enterprise logic to face new demand, characterised by asymmetry, is lacking. The management and leadership structure cultures have reached the end of their adaptive capacity. Zuboff and Maxmin (2002) think a new enterprise logic is required.

## **Personalisation and the public sector**

The argument of Zuboff and Maxmin (2002) does not have to be fully accepted in order to recognise that there is a public policy demand for more personalised services. The emergence of individuation can be found in health and wider public policy. For example, the Department of Health (2006) paper, *Our health, our care, our say: a new direction for community services* speaks in the following terms:

'This White Paper confirms the vision in the Green Paper of high quality support meeting people's aspirations for independence and greater control over their lives, making services flexible and responsive to individual needs. We will build on what we have done, putting people more in control and shifting to a greater emphasis on prevention' (DoH, 2006, p.5).

Brickell (2000) and Leadbetter (2004), note the challenges arising from such a policy. Brickell's paper, 'People before structures' emphasises a requirement to re-distribute power and decision-making closer to local communities and states that such a move poses a threat to 'vested institutional authority and to established political interest' (2000, p.13). Leadbeater focuses on the context of use of services and identifies the need for professionals to engage in 'intimate consultations' with clients in order to 'unlock their needs, preferences and aspirations through extended dialogue' (p.57). What is required is that the state acts as a platform upon which informed users can access networked services offered by a wide range of suppliers.

This demand has implications for how professionals think about and enact their role. In a later paper, Leadbeater (2006) also

introduces the idea of a post-industrial public service and its effects on the construction and practice of professionalism. Professional practice will be characterised as enabling: intelligent self-assessment; self-assembly of services; challenge to facilitate motivation in the service user; engagement in peer learning; and the distribution of self-diagnosis tools.

If it is assumed that personalisation challenges current organisations' forms and that a new sort of structure, capable of containing and responding to asymmetric demand is required, then there are implications for how leadership is conceptualised.

## **Asymmetry and leadership**

Albert and Hayes (2003; 2006) offer a useful concept in thinking about how leadership, and within it the role of challenge, will need to change to deliver personalisation. Their work is emergent from the asymmetric threats faced by U.S. military command and control structures, post Cold War. They argue that command and control has served the military well. It is an efficient way of deciding, resourcing and managing missions where the threat can be anticipated, assessed and responded to. Post-Cold War and post-9/11, conventional forces and civil society can be attacked and disrupted with a minimum of resources. Threats have become harder to anticipate and manage.

They argue that in what they call the 'Information Age', the ability to gather, process and communicate information to multiple locations offers an opportunity to move beyond command and control. Decision making has to be, and can now be, moved to the 'edge' of the organisation. The 'edge' is where the resources (people, equipment and information) meet with demand, to be configured in ways to fit unique circumstances. Organisations will thus need,

'To change the way they think about information and its dissemination, and about accomplishing tasks, organising and training. This also means that they need to explore new interactions among individuals and organisation and develop new processes' (Albert and Hayes, 2003, p.202).

Thompson (2006) notes in relation to their work that what is required is that 'a specific pattern of cognitive and social practices must also be adopted', the purpose of which is 'distributing decision rights to frontline personnel' (p.619). He criticises Albert and Hayes for not specifying the 'how' of this new form of relating.

Kramer's (2007) grounded theory study of Dutch peace keeping troops and their commanders in Bosnia, introduces the role of doubt and 'argumentation' in a hierarchical culture. He considered how junior officers, facing high level of operational complexity, developed ways of circumventing orders issued by remote senior commanders. Junior officers exhibited the sort of 'constructive disobedience' noted by Boxer (2003) in relation to clinicians. Kramer concludes that an adaptive response to the complexity of

peace keeping that requires idiosyncratic responses, is to create systems

'that are prepared to act and are able to make sense of their experiences and are able to discredit their existing insights [and] are better able to deal with dynamic complexity than others' (Kramer, 2007, p.75).

If it is the case that there is a policy shift towards personalisation, and this requires that some practitioners and managers are capable of authorising and expressing the doubt advocated by Kramer (2007) and Boxer (2005; 2003), what are the prevailing attitudes towards this capability? If this wider attitude can be understood it will inform the way that development interventions are contextualised.

## **1.5 Leadership and challenge**

This section makes three points. Firstly, popular leadership writers and public leadership frameworks espouse the value of challenge. 'Popular' is defined as authors likely to have been read by the people on King's Fund development programmes and described by Boyett and Boyett (1998) as 'gurus'. Secondly, there is limited guidance in this literature about how to do this challenge. Thirdly, there is evidence of ambivalence and resistance to 'doing' challenge, despite the value placed on it.

### **Popular leadership writers**

Senge (1990, 1999); Peters (1992) and Druker (2001), like Grint (2005) recognise the power of mental models to shape what constitutes reality. A leadership task is to challenge these models when they act against the interest of the business. Roberto (2005) uses 'constructive conflict' to describe a leadership capability that 'enhance[s] the level of critical and divergent thinking, while simultaneously building consensus' (p.xv). Kouzes and Posner (2003) argue that leaders need to learn to 'challenge the process' and to 'have the courage of their convictions' (p.182). Drucker (2001) emphasises the need for 'managed disagreement' to ensure an adequate airing of assumptions.

Adair (2005) identifies skill in argument and resilience as necessary leadership capabilities. Greenleaf (1998) argues that leaders must pay attention to how followers are authorised. Leaders have to then accept that argument and difference are a consequence of this empowerment.

'Power is generated in these relationship because it admits to mutual criticism, spirited arguments can occur, and it does not depend on artful stratagems' (Greenleaf, 1998, p.86).

The initiation and facilitation of challenge can be argued, based on these influential leadership writers, to be an espoused leadership

capability. The value of this capability is reflected in the definition of effective public sector leadership discussed next.

## **Public sector leadership frameworks**

The NHS Leadership Qualities Framework (LQF, 2002) and the Management Standards (MSC, 2004) are part of the espoused leadership discourse that invokes challenge. Such frameworks identify the characteristics of outstanding leaders and constitute the criteria against which leaders can be assessed. The characteristics are indicative of the transformational leadership style that is perceived to be relevant to the challenges facing the NHS (Storr, 2004) and wider public sector leadership (Peck, 2006).

The LQF and MSC describe a leader who is actively interested in a diversity of view, someone who can give and receive feedback and who is capable of maintaining a culture of high challenge and high support; someone in which the capacity for having an authoritative voice is coupled with the cognitive and emotional skills to hold their ground; and someone who can change their views when faced with new data.

These frameworks reflect the study carried out by the Performance and Innovation Unit (2001), which sought to define effective public sector leadership. Cross-sector workshops (health, local government and education) identified effective leadership as one that can 'draw on multiple views, to dissent for the sake of the task' and which recognises the need to 'make organisations safe for people who don't fit and by doing so, add richness and perspective' (p.19).

## **Ambivalence towards challenge**

Leadership in the NHS and wider public sector is complex. Complexity is defined as contexts which are hard to determine and require analysis which will not fully reveal what is going on. There is a pressure to act and interventions will have to be taken on the basis of an incomplete understanding of their effects, which will also have to be managed (Kramer, 2007). This suggests that a level of self-authorisation and the capacity to question will come to the fore. However, Blackler (2006) observes, after talking to NHS chief executives, that in the face of such complexity, leaders can paradoxically be required to act in a context of hierarchical control.

'This study shows that the popular image of empowered, proactive leaders has little relevance to the work of NHS chief executives...The approach to running the NHS that they developed has more in common with Taylorism than with contemporary approaches to management that feature, for example, the advantages of collective learning in complex work systems' (Blackler, 2006, p.19).

Kouzes and Posner (2003) note that leaders face a 'paradox of routines' (p.189) within their own organisations that can reinforce a directive approach and a requirement for compliance.



Conformity to routine is necessary to get things done. Leaders and managers have to create conditions of quasi-closure in open systems to actualise their causal powers to achieve 'desirable regularities' (Tsoukas, 2000, p.40). However, routines can undermine the capability to innovate in the face of the complexity facing the NHS.

Grint (2005), like Blackler, argues that leaders can be evaluated poorly if they insist on being argumentative. Critical management theorists note that to challenge the legitimacy of representatives of particular contexts and to question oppressive practices is to face a risk. Power structures can fight back (Fenwick, 2005, Mingers 2000). Questioning and challenge can thus be heard as insubordination, resistance and a lack of followership.

### **Why is there ambivalence?**

The idea of the co-development of services, personalisation, power to the edge and learning from experience begins to look naive in the face of this developing commentary. However, if this is the reality of practitioners' experience, then it has to be faced and incorporated into any development activity. Ambivalence is explained in terms of two factors. There is a macro policy that is attempting to limit the autonomy of professional groups; and there is an understandable reluctance by individuals to taking risks.

Krefting and Powers (1998) explore the attitude to the dissenting employee voice. They argue that it is rooted in the origins of what constitutes effective management and this in turn leads to the impact of Taylorism. In particular, the assumption that only managers are endowed with the requisite skills to choose what needs to be done, leaving others to follow (Stacey, 2003). Simon's (1997) concept of 'willing compliance' is a way of describing this subordinate relationship and the requirement on managers to deliver a consenting attitude to their authority and behavioural expectations. The employee is perceived to have a limited capacity to engage in the planning and delivery process and compliance is secured through sanctions and inducements to be obedient.

'Through its domination of discourse management can enact a hegemonic view of the ideal employee, including obedience, which is so pervasive that it seems 'natural' and remains unquestioned' (Krefting and Powers, 1998, p.268).

Krefting and Powers (1998) note that some voices and emotional expression are valued, for example enthusiasm and being ready for assignments. However, others are heard as dissenting or anti-authority. One of the reasons for this differential hearing is that managers may themselves be judged by the levels of compliance they achieve. One way they can react to dissent is to personalise the attack and respond emotionally. The issue becomes the person rather than the underlying circumstances that prompted the intervention.

On a public policy front the analysis developed by Kirkpatrick et al (2005) of new managerialism and its effects on public service professions is helpful in understanding why hierarchical control is dominant. They reviewed how the 'regulative bargain' between the state and professional groups is being renegotiated (p.31). As noted on page 9, Boxer (2003) described this historical bargain as a Faustian pact, in which clinicians and managers agree to leave each other alone as long as the patients do not complain. As patients and service users have developed higher expectations, public services are moving from this 'passive consensus', rooted in an administrative model, yoked to professional self-regulation, to one that authorises managers to intervene on grounds of cost, quality and efficacy. While Kirkpatrick et al (2005) acknowledge that the impact of this management has been patchy, and professional groups have been adept at colonising new bureaucracies, there is evidence of a

'positive attachment to work organisations [rather than defensive connections to professional groups] and ...a closer alignment of professional interests with management concerns' (Kirkpatrick et al, 2005, p.99).

The increased influence of management and the demand for new ways of working can just become a 'new layer of sediment' (Leadbeater, 2006, p.190) that confuses and disables any questioning of the effects of policies and theories in use.

Some clues about an individual's capacity for challenge can be found in the analysis of the effectiveness of self-managed teams. This analysis suggests that anxiety is aroused when opportunities for-self authorisation are available. Such teams are evidence of a distributed leadership, which, like 'edge leadership, gives weight to the assumption that organisational effectiveness is not just dependent upon the qualities of one appointed leader but the leadership capability of the many (Ross et al, 2005). Self-managed teams are characterised by: collaborative working; shared determination of work processes: a developed sense of task ownership: autonomy: and a capacity to learn from experience (Flory, 2005; Tata and Prasad, 2004). The effectiveness of such teams is dependent on two dimensions. Firstly, the level of resources, authority and power delegated to the team and the wider organisational culture, characterised by an absence of policies and procedures. Secondly, the skills and competence of team members.

Kauffeld (2006) calls this second dimension, 'social competence'. This is the competence to establish and manage relationships and tensions that arise from devolved decision making. Such behavioural and emotional challenges are characteristic of, but not exclusive to, self-managed teams. Flory (2005) concludes that while people initially welcome the opportunities of self-managed teams, they go on to resist the learning task embedded in such teams. This manifests as a reluctance to challenge others, particularly if these are long-standing relationships.

Flory implies that resistance is to be expected at the level of review of procedures and the effects of underlying assumptions. Such resistance persists, despite arguments made for the importance of critically reviewing the assumptive base of human services (French, 1997, 1999; O'Brien, 1987). Argyris (1986, 1991) notes that learning anxiety can trigger actions aimed at conserving existing ways of thinking and behaving, unless there are opportunities to give and receive feedback. It is not surprising that Power and Waddell (2004) conclude that the claim made for the innovative capacity of self-managed teams for organisation-wide learning is weak.

## **The first iteration of a theory of constructive awkwardness**

The preceding analysis of prior reading and the critical reflection upon work-based experience has produced the following initial theory. This first iteration begins to describe and contextualise the capabilities embedded in the term 'constructive awkwardness'. This theory also defines the sensitising concepts and interests that frame my enquiry and thus represent, in a project that employs grounded theory principles, the 'points of departure' (Charmaz, 2006, p.17).

- The constructively awkward practitioner is capable of collaboration and compliance in pursuit of a shared primary task and putting the benefits of membership that such commitment generates at risk by their commitment to dissent.
- Dissent is the observable effect of a psychological process, that involves a reflexive voice. This process and its outcomes are mediated by the structures that constitute the context in which the act of constructive awkwardness is being considered.
- Effective practitioners can critically examine, by comparing and contrasting alternative policy formulations, the effects of the context in which they are working and contemplating a constructively awkward intervention.
- This dissent is expressed in the desire to establish and engage in the 'thick' conversations described by Walzer (1994). The purpose of such conversations is the critical questioning of the assumptions and frames of reference that help determine what is going on, and what needs to be done, in relation to this analysis.
- Conversation, the narrow context of the constructively awkward intervention, is determined by wider social, cultural and local assumptions about who gets to say what to whom, how and when.
- The authorising policy context of challenge is mixed. The espoused leadership theory validates challenge as a desired

capability. The theory in use suggests that the constructively awkward should be prepared for criticism. Any development activities have to be mindful of this reality.

On the basis of the above the following section sets out the project's questions and associated structure.

## **1.6 The project's questions and structure**

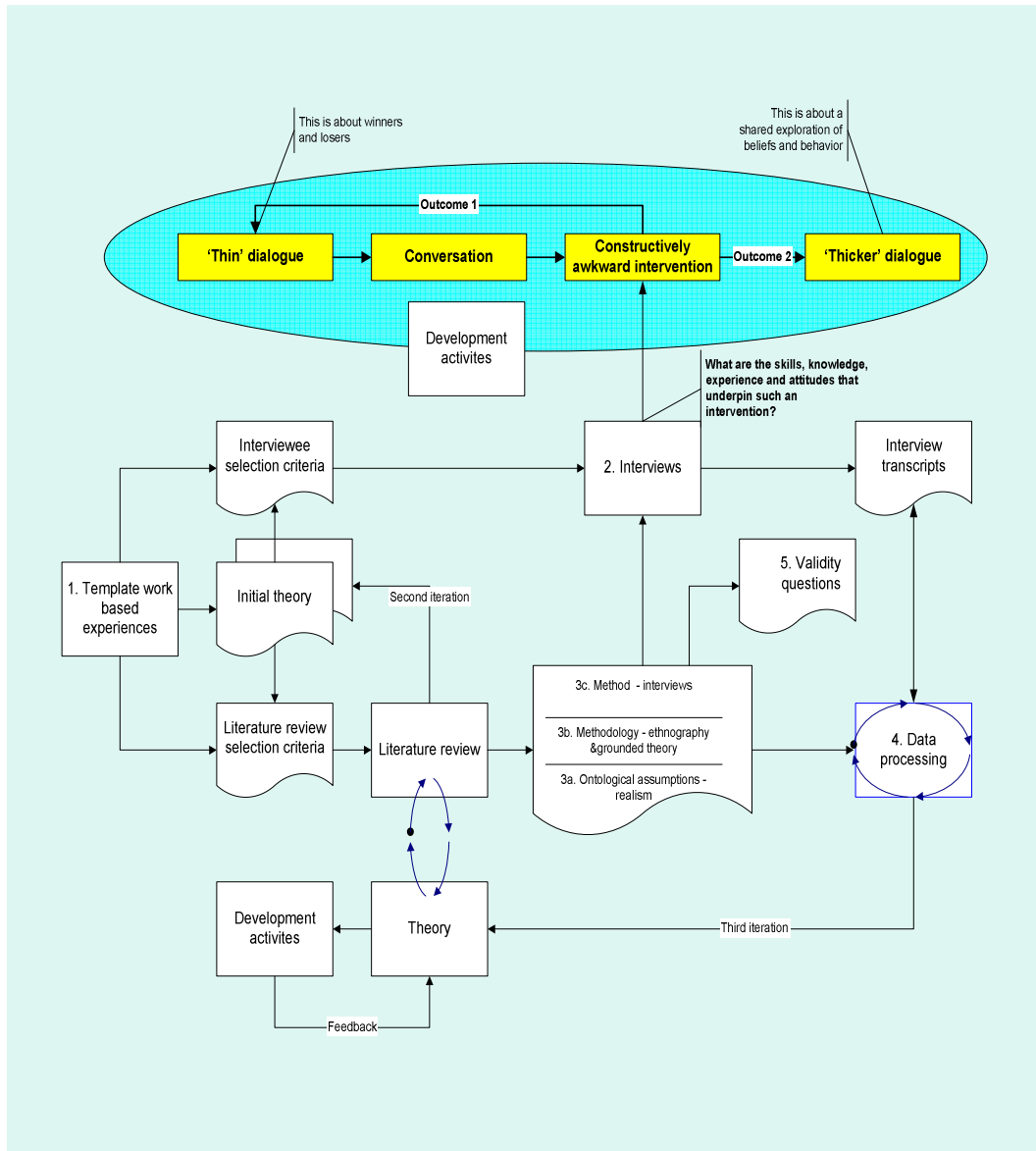
The aim of this project is to understand the capabilities, values and experiences people use when they question and challenge in the conversations that constitute the economy of public sector type discourse. The intention is to develop a mid-range theory, a level of theory assumed to be appropriate to the project's task of producing valid development interventions.

The development of such a theory suggests four questions on which to focus the enquiry.

1. How can a willingness and capability to question and challenge the actions, ideas, and assumptions of others be developed?
2. How can an intervention in a context where there is the risk of being silenced, punished for speaking out and/or seen as difficult, naive and foolish be initiated and sustained?
3. What constitutes a useful theory to enable the development of the relevant skills, knowledge and experience? That is, a theory that addresses the following sorts of issues:
  - How do people know when they should challenge?
  - What triggers their intervention?
  - How do they explain why they have intervened?
  - How does context and personal experience determine the intervention?
  - What skills are required to intervene well?
  - How do people keep relationships viable post challenge?
4. What is an appropriate ontology and methodology to ethically access the private deliberations of constructively awkward practitioners and synthesise this with relevant extant theories to underpin development interventions?

### **The project structure**

The following diagram maps the key project activities designed in relation to the questions above. These are explained in relation to the relevant chapter headings.



**Figure 1.5 - The project structure and activities**

## The project activities

### Chapter 1

This chapter articulates an initial description and a first articulation of a theory of constructive awkwardness, based on work based template experiences and reading prior to the project. The scope, structure and relevance of the project to my professional practice are set out.

### Chapter 2

In this chapter the relevant literature is reviewed. Section 1 explores constructive awkwardness as a challenge to power.

Luke's conceptualisation of power is discussed but Foucault's ideas are highlighted as offering hope in relation to leadership that may be silencing and oppressive. Section 2 defines the context in which constructive awkwardness might be useful by reviewing the literature on bad leadership as a source of insight into the role of active followership. Section 3 considers the generative effects of a clearly articulated ethical framework in relation to authorising the constructively awkward practitioner. Section 4 explores the underpinning skills and capabilities required to be constructively awkward. The chapter concludes with a second iteration of the mid-range theory of constructive awkwardness.

### **Chapter 3**

Section 1 describes three experiences that helped to determine the selection criteria for the semi-structured interviews. Section 2 identifies the ethical issue associated with being an 'insider researcher'. Section 3 identifies the methodological challenges I faced and how I managed them in relation to the development of a valid theory, rooted in first person accounts to underpin development interventions. This substantial section has three components. The first title explains my decision to employ a Critical Realist ontology to probe and theorise below the empirical surface of what interviewees said (Sayer, 2000). The second explains how I processed the interview data using grounded theory principles based on the four stages identified by Straus and Corbin, (1998). The third section explores the implication of taking an etic stance towards the interview accounts and how I thought about and managed reflexivity.

### **Chapter 4**

In this chapter I discuss how I processed the interview data based on what I intended and how this turned out in practice as I gathered and coded the interview data. I discuss what I learnt about my own practice as a researcher and identify the main components of the theory to explain constructive awkwardness in particular contexts.

### **Chapter 5**

This chapter presents the third and final iteration of the projects theory, based on the synthesis of the first and second iterations and the learning from the interviewees. This is where the practitioner's voice is integrated to produce a valid mid-range theory capable of sustaining useful development interventions. Such an intervention, as a concrete outcome of the project, is proposed and elements of it discussed.

### **Chapter 6**

In this chapter the main conclusions of the literature review are reviewed and the findings of the project are integrated into previous work. The major components of the data collection and data production process are summarised, including a discussion of the strength and limitations of the approach taken. The chapter ends with questions and proposals for future work.

# Chapter 2 - The literature review

## Positioning the review

Chapter 1 concluded with a first draft of a theory to describe and contextualise the capabilities embedded in the term 'constructive awkwardness'. The wider purpose of this theory and its subsequent developments are rooted in the grounded theory and ethnographic principles that underpin the methodology described in Chapter 3. The theory has been described as a point of departure and relates to what Glaser and Strauss call 'theoretical sensitivity' (1967, p.46). Such sensitivity is useful in directing the researcher (and reader) to what s/he thinks might be the issues and their possible explanations.

The aims of the literature review are two-fold. Firstly, to locate the emergent theorising in others' 'significant theoretical arguments' (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007, p.194). Secondly, to manage the risks of reflexivity by developing a transparent theory development process and evidencing a commitment to a sense of curiosity that seeks out new patterns and ways of connecting ideas and events (Cecchin, 1987).

The outcome of the review is a second iteration of a theory of constructive awkwardness.

### The chapter structure

Section 1 explores constructive awkwardness as a challenge to power. The idea of a 'strategy ceiling' is introduced to differentiate questions that are authorised and those which are not, reflecting vested interests. Lean as a key tool in the NHS is reviewed in relation to authorised questions and to note the effects of culture on questioning. The concept of the psychological contract is briefly discussed as a way of thinking about how challenging interventions may be encouraged (or not), which leads into a discussion of Lukes' (2005) conceptualisation of power. Foucault's ideas are highlighted as they appear to offer hope in relation to leadership behaviours that may be silencing and oppressive.

Section 2 defines the context in which constructive awkwardness might be useful. This involves reviewing the literature on bad leadership because this is where there are useful insights into the role of active followership, a role that may authorise confronting interventions.

Section 3 considers the generative effects of a clearly articulated ethical framework and its role in helping the constructively awkward practitioner define the good of their own and others' behaviour in the context of conversation. Section 4 begins to define the underpinning skills and capabilities required by a practitioner. How an intervention gets authorised in the face of what may be considerable anxiety and uncertainty is considered.

The chapter concludes with a revised mid-range theory of constructive awkwardness.

## **2.1 Challenge and power**

Challenge has a political dimension. It seeks to question how power is used, particularly in the context of transactional leadership, to construct behaviours and contexts which need remedying. Leaders can invoke contexts which they know how to manage (Grint, 2005). This can result in complex situations being simplified. Grint gives the example of President Bush and the war on terrorism. It is presented as a crisis that requires command and control. It can be argued that a complex situation is polarised into simple options and an effect of this simplicity is to make critics of this policy look unpatriotic. Grint notes that John Kerry, who attempted a more complex conversation, was portrayed as indecisive and 'flip flopping' (2005, p.1489).

### **The questions that can be asked by whom**

Questions about the 'for whom' and 'why' of an organisation, questions that can speak to complexity, can be pushed above the 'strategy ceiling'. This term is used by Boxer and Palmer (1997) and denotes what sorts of questions are authorised (below the ceiling) by the leadership of an organisation. They argue that to face complexity, talking about what the organisation does and how resources are to be organised is insufficient. What is required is feedback from the organisation's 'edge', where those providing the service meet with users. The feedback will be in the form of questions about whose needs are privileged in relation to what should be done and questions about the particular ways of organising resources in relation to demand. In simple terms the edge challenge can be characterised as speaking to what is silent and left out of any formulation of demand.

Blackler et al (1999, 2000) investigated how a complex defence manufacturing organisation faced changes in its procurement environment. Using activity theory, they explored how the learning implied by Boxer's raising of the strategy ceiling, could be enacted. Learning can take place as the tensions and dilemmas in the activity system are addressed. Embedded in this assumption and reflected in the case material, are the willingness and capacity to notice the effects of structure, to speak from any insights such noticing might generate and to manage the intra- and inter-personal and group consequences that might be catalysed.

Blackler (2000) exploring the links between power and organisational learning notes that the decentred collaboration that underpins asking 'why' question, in a context characterised by complexity, requires high level interpersonal skill. Skill is required because it is hard to notice how 'the pragmatism and security of familiar arrangements obscures vested interest and power plays' (p.848). The possibilities of what can be done become confused with 'descriptions of what already exists' (p.848) reflecting Tsoukas's (2000) observation that (noted on page 71)



what managers are capable of doing can be conflated with what they are observed to do. In an earlier paper, Blackler notes that learning requires engagement and that 'the confidence to act is a prerequisite for learning' (1993, p.881) His work asks a question, reflecting the practical outcome of this project, about how such skills and confidence might be developed.

'The ability to engage, negotiate, cross boundaries and contribute is the essence of decentred collaboration and important questions arise about how such abilities might be nurtured' (Blackler, 2000, p.849).

The focus of this project is on defining this ability to question and the acquisition and deployment of such skill in the particular contexts of King's Fund programme participants.

### **Implication for Lean thinking**

In Chapter 1 reference was made to Lean as a change tool used by potential consumers of this project's development activities. What follows is a more detailed elaboration of Lean with particular reference to the effects of organisational culture on what is essentially a structured critical enquiry process. Culture is defined as a 'shared pattern of basic assumptions' learnt to

'solve problems of external adoption and internal integration' taught to new members as 'the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems' (Schein, 2004, p.17).

Liker's (2004) research, carried out with the cooperation of Toyota, interviewed over forty Toyota engineers and managers using an ethnographic approach, to define what Lean was and the underpinning skills, attitudes culture that sustained its effectiveness. Such attention to context is not reflected in the versions presented to the NHS (e.g. Jones and Mitchell, 2006). In his introduction, Liker notes that

'most attempts to implement Lean have been fairly superficial' because using the tools rather than establishing a conducive culture has been the focus of attention (Liker, 2004, p.7).

Liker (2004) identifies fourteen principles that define Lean. Number fourteen relates to being a learning organisation characterised by 'relentless reflection and continuous improvement' (p.250). Reflection is the means by which any shortcomings of a project are identified and counter measures agreed. Liker reflects Blackler et al's assumption that 'expertise is culturally situated' (1999, p.6). Japanese culture reinforces and replicates the assumption that asking questions starts with the individual and facing one's own weakness, being sorry for the consequences and having a plan to improve things. Liker notes that this cultural belief was problematic when used with U.S. employees of Toyota who preferred to speak to what went well, suggesting that Argyris (1999) is correct in assuming that it's

tough teaching smart people (from some cultures) to learn because they individually and collectively act to avoid not knowing.

The version of Lean produced by the NHS Institute for Improvement and Innovation (NHS Institute) and the NHS Confederation are positive about the effects of this approach and its consequences. The NHS Institute article does not mention reflection. The tone is instrumental and the effects of context and culture to conserve or support questioning of ways of organising are not problematised. The Confederation article cites positive cases studies, which are presented as if sound logic, coupled with standing back and observing the whole system, will produce change. What is not defined is how far back people can stand and upon what their critical gaze should fall.

This lack of definition has practical and emotional consequences. On a recent development programme for twenty five senior foundation trust managers, the majority talked about a culture, that highly valued Lean, and also appeared to value a permanent sense of instability, as if they could do better, that they should not relax. A consequence of this culture became apparent when people were embedded in an educational context. They talked about what they believed could not be discussed in their work deliberations. For example, talk of coercive management, overwork, the desire to have a child and be ambitious, and to express negative feelings were not authorised even though they probably impacted on performance.

This self-silencing suggests that, at least in this organisation, the triple loop posited by Mezirow (1989) was not authorised. Such reflection questions the origins of frames of reference and how these lead to a focus on particular sorts of situations and problems. Such questioning will bring into focus the effects of the prevailing management culture. A lack of questioning of the management leadership culture increases the risk that one's performance will be judged against a wrong or incomplete theory. Morgan (1997) notes that questions of power are not incorporated in the critical reflection proposed by Lean. The insights of systems thinking according to Miller and Rice (1975) and Menzies (1998) are also absent. They argue that systems of work, with a varying degrees of adaptability, are mobilised to help people manage the anxiety aroused by the task. This means that activities will always be sub-optimum in crude efficiency terms.

'A major constraint on the efficiency of any activity system is that technology has not eliminated, and never will entirely eliminate, the need to mobilise human resources, which bring with them to the enterprise more than the activities they are required to contribute'  
(Miller and Rice, 1975, p.66).

The foundation trust managers could be evaluated poorly, which they (and their managers) would tend to attribute to some defect in themselves. This suggests that reflection on self and others should not be detached from an equally critical reflection upon

culture and its underpinning explanatory assumptions. Liker, while advocating Lean is critical of the failure to develop a supportive culture. That is, one that is characterised by stability, support of self-reflection and acceptance of responsibility, a common purpose, security, respect and professional development. He notes that Lean thinking based on the Toyota Way, involves 'far deeper and more persuasive cultural transformation than most companies can begin to imagine' (p.11).

### **Implications for the psychological work contract**

In this section the relevance of the psychological work contract is discussed. In Chapter 1 the contract was introduced because constructive awkwardness was assumed to be rooted in conversation and that conversation is partially determined by organisational and wider culture. The concept of a psychological contract could be a means by which people internalised the cultural norms and assumptions about 'doing' dissent and argument. However, in the literature reviewed here this aspect of the contract is not directly addressed.

Cortvriend (2004) conceptualises the NHS psychological contract as a socialisation, a

'set of perceptions, expectations, beliefs and schemas about what each party are entitled and obligated to give in exchange for the others contributions' (Cortvriend, 2004, p.178).

Guest (1998) in his review of the value and context of the psychological contract supports the idea that the contract can include implicit rules and expectations.

'The socialization process for any newcomer to the organisation and the social information processing that occurs, results in assumptions about appropriate behaviour and expectations about the consequences of conforming or transgressing which go beyond the context of the formal contract. Is this a psychological contract?' (Guest, 1998, p.651).

He conceptualises the employer/employee contract as a continuum. At one end are the formal contractual obligations, at the other the implicit rules and expectations about reciprocal commitment and the meaning of employment. The mid-ground is occupied by the rules that define appropriate conduct and the agreements and expectations that emerge from conversations between a manager and their subordinate.

Argyris (1960) was one of the first researchers to consider the impact of the formal organisation upon the individual. He argued that this exchange was based on contractual issues such as wages and the relational based on the 'the norms of the employees informal world' (p.166). For example, the need for control over one's work environment and opportunities to relate to others. This and Cortvriend's (2004) conceptualisation does not exclude the possibility that such an exchange of expectations includes

information about how one learns about what can be said by whom, in what context, at what time, with what level of emotion. Guest and Conway (2000) in their survey of the psychological contract in the public sector stress that the contract is based upon subjective perceptions but that 'it is these perceptions that can be crucial in shaping related attitudes and behaviours' (p.1).

Cullinane and Dundon (2006) take a more critical stance to the concept of a psychological contract. They argue that the contract should be seen to arise from particular structural factors at a moment when organisations are having to face increasing levels of complexity, that require more and more flexibility from their staff. The managers developing the psychological contracts draw upon internal management assumptions and external economic, cultural and social factors to

'construct a set of value judgment and expectations...to combine to engender a set of values and norms within an organisational setting' (Cullinane and Dundon 2006, p.121).

Cullinane and Dundon argue that an imbalance in power means the employment contract is an exchange between unequal partners. The risk is that this imbalance is used to impose a set of values and norms that favour 'a particular command and control culture of management' (p.122). They also argue that the concept of a psychological contract is itself an aspect of this socialisation process. It is a concept that seeks to redefine the meaning of work and the relationship between employee and employer without subjecting this relationship to critical scrutiny.

Conway and Briner (2005) identify three main factors that shape employees perceptions of the psychological contract. Firstly, prior experience such as pre-employment experiences (community, cultural, educational), reflecting Ringer's (2002) stance that any group like activity, is partially determined by our very earliest experiences. Secondly, the content of local HR practices and the authority and style of managers, though Guest and Conway (2000) note that the presence of progressive HR practice does not lead to greater satisfaction with the employment relationship in the public sector. Thirdly, that the contract is subjectively understood and a key determinant of this understanding are 'social cues and workplace socialization' (p.53). These cues come from colleagues and observation about the way things are done. As a result of this process, individual experience is gradually socialized to be similar to that of existing members of the organisation.

This limited literature review suggests a psychological contract may be a useful concept in thinking about the extent to which constructively awkward interventions might be authorised, encouraged and determined. However, there appears to be a frustrating lack of explicit attention, other than that implied by Cullinane and Dundon's (2006) inclusion of structure and power, about how challenge and dissent can be an explicit part of the psychological contract. As will be argued on page 39, an active,

authorised and challenging followership is an organisational necessity.

## **Questioning and theories of power**

Questioning, in some cultures can be heard as awkward because it challenges whoever has the power to construct organisational reality and knowledge (Grint, 2005). Such questioning is probing Luke's second dimension of power (2005). That is, the power to exclude another's questions from the authorised discourse. The silencing, implied by this second dimension, is imposed by the coercive elements of Luke's first dimension, which, as discussed later, can be reinforced by self-silencing, an internalised control that shades into the colonisation of consciousness, characteristic of his third dimension. This abstract reading of power, linked to the concept of the strategy ceiling, in the context characterised by Grint (2005), suggests a remote leadership that can act to limit questioning.

Mills, (2003) in her discussion of Foucault, describes power as something that is active and which permeates day to day relationships. She notes that

'power is negotiated and one's position in the hierarchy is established, however flexibly, changing and ill defined hierarchy is' (Mills, 2003, p.48).

Thornborrow (2002), in her exploration of institutional talk, uses the concept of asymmetry to describe different types of turn-taking between people. One's institutional role determines what sort of turn-taking and what behaviour is appropriate. These are the sorts of limitations that the constructively awkward practitioner may have to confront in order to speak.

Halford and Leonard (2001) theorising gender and power in an organisational context, note Foucault's distinction in *Discipline and Punish* (1977) between sovereign power, as directly applied to the body, 'through complex circuits and whole interplay of petitions and responses and disciplinary power'<sup>2</sup>. In the latter case, power is exercised through monitoring, judgments and power of the norm. It is an effect of power that is hard to notice and can 'render the body inert and docile' (p.226). O'Grady (2006), discussed later, in relation to her insights about silencing, describes this as 'power reaching into the depth of society to influence at the level of the body, will, thoughts and conduct of everyday life' (p.14). Critically, for a project that assumes that relationships and ideas can be changed through conversation, Halford and Leonard note Foucault's later view that while power acts upon the subject, the subject is not passive. The regulatory effects of power are not causal, it works indirectly and erratically through everyday relations between people. It is in these everyday relations that in a mundane way

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<sup>2</sup> Quoted in Faubian, J. ed. (1994) Michel Foucault - power essential works of Foucault 1954 -1984 volume 3. London, Penguin.

'we see the reintroduction of individuals as subjects with (some) freedom and autonomy, and it is here that we (may) see individuals resisting' (Halford and Leonard, 2001, p.228).

Braynion (2004) in his review of leadership and power in the NHS draws a distinction between Luke and Foucault, that emphasises the possibility of resistance. The individual from Luke's perspective is subject to structural power 'which is greater than their own' (2005, p.455). They may be subject to decisions that they may not be consciously aware of, making resistance very difficult. This suggests that that the constructively awkward practitioner should know 'that the absence of grievances [in self and others] does not mean the existence of consensus' (Lukes, 2005, p.455). As will be demonstrated later, some interviewees drew authority from their assumptions that they were speaking up for others, who they believed to be silenced.

### **Questioning and risk**

Despite Foucault's theory that power can change in different situations and that the individual is not passive, questioning is risky. The invitation to be constructively awkward, to raise the strategy ceiling, can be an invitation to take a critical stance against the oppressive practices of others. Minger's notes (2000), that a person can become isolated if they challenge; power structures tend to fight back. The experience of whistleblowers confirms the concrete nature of these personal and professional risks.

'The painful irony for the whistle-blower is that their personal integrity and trustworthiness, which originally motivated their actions, are put in doubt, and they frequently end up being blamed for the very thing they exposed' (Kets De Vries, 2003, p.67).

The Independent on Sunday (29<sup>th</sup> July 2007) described a leading trauma surgeon as 'breaking cover' (p.8) and who is 'risking censure from the NHS for speaking out' (p.8). Wilmhurst (1997), investigating dishonesty in medical research, notes the pressure on doctors to conceal the dishonesty of associates 'out of loyalty to the individual or the profession, or out of fear of reprisal, or perhaps because dishonesty might not be considered inherently wrong' (1997, p.569). The experience of Dr Bolsin in the Bristol enquiry supports this perception of risk.

Dr Bolsin was instrumental in questioning the performance of the Bristol paediatric cardiac surgeons. By being puzzled about the results, his reputation and motives were as much under scrutiny as those he was questioning. However, the enquiry validated his concerns and describes the problems that arise from autocratic leadership and a 'club' culture that values belonging over questioning<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>3</sup> Final Report. Learning from Bristol: the report of the public inquiry into children's heart surgery at the Bristol Royal Infirmary 1984 -1995.

The research into bullying in the NHS suggests that a conducive context for questioning cannot be assumed. In the survey carried out by Woodman and Cook (2005) for the Chartered Management Institute, 39% of all managers reported being bullied in the past three years. Public sector managers were at most risk. Cooper and Faragher (2001) conclude in their large scale survey across public and private sector in the UK that 'workplace bullying is a major social problem' (p.457). Rayner et al (2002) quote Hoel and Cooper (2000) that 10.6% people had been bullied over the previous 6 months and when the time frame was extended to 5 years, 24.7% said they had been bullied. The question is, given the risks, why should anyone speak up?

## **2.2 Challenge and followership**

The association between a leadership role and seniority was not questioned in the literature cited in Chapter 1. The theories of Greenleaf offering a model of servant leadership (1998) and of Ross et al, of a distributed leadership, conceptualise leadership as a capability of leaders and followers. If the constructively awkward practitioner seeks to question who has power and its effects, then the notion of an active followership, and the attitude of leaders to this challenge, may help to authorise the intervention.

Both leader and follower respect the autonomy and integrity of the other and each allows and encourages the other to find his or her own intuitive confirmation of the rightness of the belief or action' (Greenleaf, 1998, p.55).

Linking constructive awkwardness with an active autonomous followership, willing to and capable of questioning above the strategy ceiling relates to the project questions noted on page 22. In terms of developing useful development advice the following is worth emphasising: why and when is an active followership necessary, and when might be a conducive context in which to initiate and sustain challenge? These questions are the foci of this section. Their exploration requires going into some of the more extreme outcomes of the leadership/followership dynamic.

### **Going to where the difficulties are**

Roth (2005), exploring the role of philosophy in the age of genocide, argues that philosophers like him have to go where the difficult conversations are. In his view, the relationship between philosophy and genocide has not always been one of opposition. A similar argument is made by Sands (2008) in relationship to the role of lawyers in enabling torture in Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib. While he invokes Nazi Germany as the benchmark of collusion, he makes the distinction between comparison of outcome, which is

not valid, to one of principle. Lawyers, like philosophers and presumably leaders and managers, have responsibilities for what they do.

'I felt uncomfortable even making this kind of comparison, but what struck me was the underlying issue of principle: the idea that lawyers, as the guardians of constitutionality and legality, have a special responsibility to ensure rules of law are protected' (Sands, 2008, p.30)

Bad things happen under the auspices of a leadership that effectively motivates followers. Sands' (2008) work is a reminder that leaders, mobilising lawful structures and willing advisors and supporters, can co-create the context for unlawful things to happen.

'The primary responsibility rests with those who signed the orders and took decisions, but they were not alone. In removing the obstacles to aggressive interrogation, the lawyers lent their active support and became willing accomplices' (Sands, 2008, p.269).

Adams (2006), exploring this leadership/followership dynamic in relation to the abuses at Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, talks about a leadership context that leads to 'moral inversion'. He uses the term 'administrative evil', the negative form of Simon's (1997) willing compliance, to describe the risk of a slide into a lack of awareness of what is being done. His prescription is more effective line management.

Gourevitch and Morris (2008) carried out an ethnographic study of the soldiers accused of abuse in Abu Ghraib prison. The stories told illustrate the huge difficulty of expressing a right to dissent where the management/leadership context is fractured by extreme threat and confusion about what things mean, and where espoused policy and that sanctioned on the ground, are divergent and where who is accountable to whom for what is confused. The absence of a conducive context means the right to dissent can be an empty right.

'...they knew if it wasn't illegal, it ought to be. They knew they had the right, and that it was their duty, to disobey an unlawful order and the right to report it to their immediate superior; and if that failed - or if that superior was the source of the order - to keep reporting it up the chain of command until they found satisfaction' (Gourevitch and Morris, 2008, p.164).

McKie (2004), like Sands (2008), takes a historical perspective to nursing. He notes that nurses have a duty of care, and when they lose a critical awareness of outcomes, the risk of collusion with systematic abuse increases. Nurses must remain alert to the

'propensity for caring to include empowering and inhumane aspects, demands rigorous ethical critique in the areas of technology, power and context' (McKie, 2004, p146).



This logic is not new. Winnicott (1947) argues there is an ethical requirement to face one's hatred aroused by 'the heavy emotional burden on those who care' (p.194). Not to face this emotion is to risk doing awful things. McKie (2004), Sands and Burleigh (1994), reviewing the role of clinicians in German euthanasia programme in 1900-1945, recognise that history can remind us of the capacity of leaders and professional groups to behave in ways that are harmful. As Roseman (2003) notes in his analysis of the Wannsee conference (January 1942), the intelligent professional can collude with irrationality in the right context.

'Despite the euphemism of evacuation, the minutes unmistakably contain a plan for genocide - formulated in sober bureaucratic language...Serious intelligent men had conferred together and delved into the details of the half-Jew , the quarter Jew'  
(Roseman, 2003, p.1).

Straub (1989), reflecting Waller's (2002) evolutionary effects of group membership, and Janis and Mann (1997) and Harvey (1988) on collusive decision making, identifies the elements of the context that can authorise the collusive relationship between leaders and followers. There has to be a sense of emotional, physical and cultural threat; a sense of disruption to personal and group identity; an increase in the sense of belonging to an in-group; incremental acts of violence targeted at an out group; a strong respect for authority; limited flexibility in sense-making; and a lack of intervention by bystanders. Marchak (2003), thinking about how people can do terrible things, notes the following based on his review of the literature.

'The possible answers proposed in the literature include the human tendency to obey authority; praise; group support; conformity to group norms; distancing and de-humanization and modernity' (Marchak, 2003, p.110).

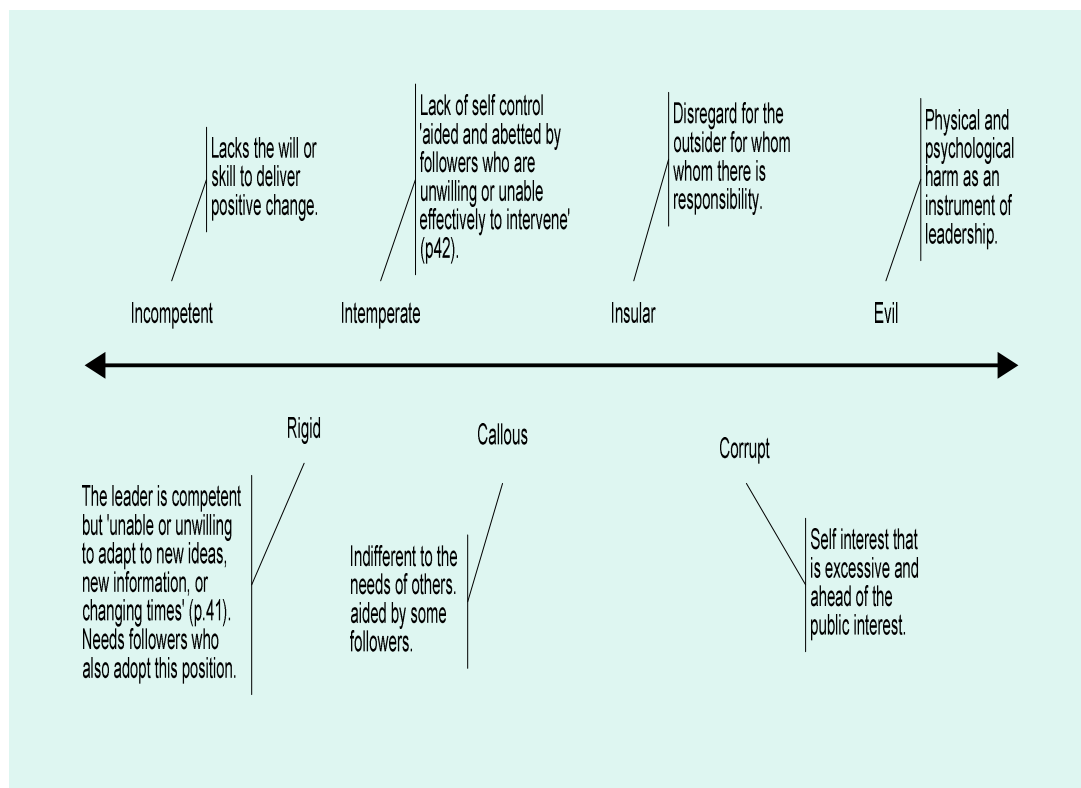
Pawson (2002), speaking from the very different context of an evidence based policy practice, notes that 'knowledge should speak to power, but in reality does so 'in a whisper' (p.227). Vaughan (1996), in her analysis of the decision to launch what some knew to be the defective space shuttle Challenger, identifies a culture of compliance, which silences by ascribing the articulation of contrary evidence to the role of 'deviant'.

'...how conformity to rules and norms, incrementalism, precedent, patterns of information, organisational structure, and environmental conditions congeal in a process that can create a change resistant world's view that neutralises deviant events, making them acceptable and non-deviant' (Vaughan, 1996, p.410).

There are real and imagined fears about speaking up and consequences for not doing so.

## Defining bad leadership

The negative effects of leadership described above constitute a site for the constructively awkward intervention. Kellerman (2004) proposes a continuum of outcomes that define this sort of leadership. This continuum helps to realistically locate where constructive awkwardness might be useful in the face of real and imagined risks. Such a diagram begs the question about what constitutes effective leadership, itself a disputed concept (Storr, 2004). However, a useful definition is that proposed by Edmonstone and Western (2002), based on their review of leadership in health care settings. In such a context, effective leadership 'enables people and organisation to face adaptive challenges where new learning is required' (p.35). As noted below, Northouse's (2004) definition, rooted in collaboration and common goals is both useful and problematic.



**Figure 2.1** - a continuum of bad leadership based on Kellerman (2004)

Heron (2001) uses the term 'degenerate leadership' (p.204) to describe a leadership that lacks awareness or experience. He uses the term 'perverted' to describe leadership that is intentionally harmful. Both Heron and Kellerman argue that leadership should be seen as capable of these outcomes. Leadership is too narrowly defined when confined to the influence of a group or individuals to move towards a common goal. The assumption can be that a common goal does not require examination in terms of the 'good' that it implies.

Padilla et al (2007), writing about the toxic triangle between destructive leaders, susceptible followers and environment navigate around this evaluative question by arguing, like Northouse (2004), that leadership is a functional role. Significant achievement requires the uniting of individuals in a common purpose. Leadership is judged on how well this co-operation is achieved and, when divorced from outcomes, can be considered 'value neutral' (Padilla, 2007, p178). They think the utility of leadership emerges over time. Such an assertion begs the question about what constitutes useful outcomes and the impossibility or desirability of conceiving of leadership as value neutral, particularly in the face of the preceding political and historical analysis.

The assumption made in this project is that in accepting the benefits, the shadow side of leadership should be acknowledged. Accepting this possibility, may alert some to the uncomfortable requirement to act. However, history also teaches that challenge can be silenced and threats to job and life are real. In the context of this project, leadership defined as evil or perverted is not taken to be the everyday challenge facing individuals likely to be the targets of this project's development interventions.

## **Defining an active followership**

Even if the extreme outcomes of leadership are excluded, an active followership remains necessary and difficult. The pressures to be acquiescent can be enormous, even in the face of the evidence of incipient disaster. Beatty (1995), writing about human factors in aircraft leadership, at a time when compliance resulted in accidents, notes the following.

The problem of the subordinate conforming to the ideas and wishes of his superior, and being too scared or too wary to risk his job and promotion, is not confined to aviation (Beatty, 1995, p.157).

To be a follower is thus to be faced with Kellerman's dilemma.

'Should followers follow the leader, or the dictates of their consciences? On the one hand, a strong argument can be made that to maintain order and get work done, followers should go along with the leader except in dire circumstances. On the other hand, followers are not sheep, nor should they necessarily be part of any herd' (Kellerman, 2004, p.30).

McMaster (1997) in his analysis of the decision making of President Johnson and his principle advisors, leading up to the US involvement in Vietnam, notes how a rigid leader in Kellerman's (2004) terms can surround themselves with complaint followers.

'Above all President Johnson needed reassurance. He wanted advisors who would tell him what he wanted to hear, who would find solutions even if there were none to be found. Bearers of bad news or those who expressed

views that ran counter to his priorities would hold little sway' (McMaster, 1997, p.61).

The argument for an active followership, capable of independent thought and action is strengthened by the Heron's (2001) link of complicity with perverted leadership. Gottlieb (2005) argues that the complicity is linked to managing the anxiety aroused by contemplating taking a stand.

'To go against this grain requires courage. We risk alienating our employers, compromising our standing in the profession, affronting people who think we are overstating the case in an overly emotional way and- the ultimate threat to a young academic philosopher - not getting tenure' (Gottlieb, 2005, p.293).

### **The importance of denial**

Cohen (2001) argues that risk of over-compliance, noted above, can be moderated by a capacity for denial. Denial has two purposes. Conventionally it is a defensive reaction to something disturbing. That is, 'nothing has happened here' or 'it's not what you think'. This can be expressed individually and 'built into the ideological façade of the state' (p.10). Certain meanings are endorsed and others are not. Cohen argues that individuals have the potential to keep information in the zone of awareness and use appropriate language to describe what is going on to avoid the normalising effects of language. The task of active followership is to keep feeling, mobilise emotions to support action and to remain puzzled in the sense of 'a signal that something disturbing or special has been recognised' (p.262). Denial is a refusal to accept taken for granted explanations about what is going on.

'Denial in the sense of shutting out the awareness of other's suffering - is the normal state of affairs. This is precisely why so much effort has to be devoted to breaking out of this frame. Far from being pushed into accepting reality, people have to be dragged out of reality' (Cohen, 2001, p.247).

### **The role of the Fool**

Kets De Vries (2003) confronts the myth of rationality as guiding force in leadership. He values the role of the Fool, a loyal subject, capable of denial and who, when suitably self and contextually authorised, can confront leadership's tendency to hubris.

'The jester is privileged in that, under the guise of madness or stupidity (which suggest harmlessness), he can iterate the otherwise unspeakable... The sage /fool is often the only person who can protect the king from hubris' (Kets De Vries, 2003, p.63).

Firth and Leigh (1998) associate the role of Fool with being on the boundary of an organisation. Being on the inside risks being silenced. Being on the outside enables seeing and speaking from an ability to notice 'otherness' (p.45). Boxer and Palmer (1994)

use the term 'Fool' in relation to organisational consulting. The Fool holds him/herself and the client in a sustained questioning of how assumptions about what is going on throws light on some issues and puts into darkness others. Samuels (2001), describing different types of political style uses the term 'Trickster' for someone capable of breaking the rules, someone capable of 'ingenuity, improvisation, flexibility...seeing things differently, doing things differently' (p.93). This is someone capable of the positive attributes of the 'Shaper', described by Belbin (2004) as a necessary team role. That is, someone who can confront 'inertia, ineffectiveness complacency or self deception' (Belbin, 2004, p.72).

To be constructively awkward includes the questioning disposition and sense of personal, and possibly the structural, authority of the Fool, acting from their capacity for denial. Williams, in her 1997 Reith Lectures, defines this disposition as the ethical project. One should strive to remain oneself. McKie (2004, p.140) characterises this position as being prepared to face two sorts of questions. Firstly, what is being asked of me as I face this situation? Secondly, what sort of organisation or community am I part of?

To ask these questions and evaluate the responses, requires and reflects a personal ethical framework.

## **2.3 Ethics and organisational life**

Bass and Steidlmeir (1999) argue that leadership has a moral dimension. Congruency with these values is evidence of an ethical expression of leadership. This proposition is predicated on questioning what they call good governance, questions that seek to explore the 'ends, means and consequences' (p.184) of leadership. The language used has to be sufficiently precise to discriminate what is being said. Singer (1993) notes that morality and ethics are used interchangeably. This can make it harder to differentiate between what people say they would do and what they actually do.

Storr (2004) defines ethics as what people should do. It is an active 'guide to conduct' (p.417). Morals are discerned from how people behave when faced with choices. The development of ethical standards is discussed by Blackburn (2001) and Solomon (1997). Blackburn emphasises the transcultural requirements to deal with basic issues like property and sexuality. He does not assume these standards have to be the same. He avoids relativism by factoring in power.

'...it is usually not at all certain that the values we are upholding are so very alien to the others...typically it is only the oppressors who are the spokespersons for their culture or ways of doing things' (Blackburn, 2002, p.24)

He avoids the extremes of subjectivism by factoring in the role of conversation as the site of what Singer (1993) calls 'ethical

reasoning' (p.8). Who believes what and why needs to be worked out. Solomon (1997) emphasises a more personal source of organisational ethics.

Solomon (1997) asks what the proper unit of study in business ethics is. He concludes that one drawn from economics is too abstract, and is 'utterly inaccessible to the people for whom we supposedly do business ethics' (p.206). Likewise, the focus on individual responsibilities is too narrow. He opts for the 'the individual within the corporation' (p.207). He calls this micro-business ethics. The focus is on the values that define individual responsibilities and role behaviour.

'People in business are ultimately responsible as individuals, but they are responsible as individuals in a corporate setting where their responsibilities are at least in part defined by their roles and duties in the company and, of course the 'bottom line'' (Solomon, 1997, p.208).

He argues for no separation between personal ethical standards and those expressed in one's organisational life. Good organisational values emerge from the individual in conversation with a receptive context.

These arguments suggest there are some basic characteristics of a 'good organisational citizen'. It requires the willingness and capability to question leadership in terms of the espoused and ethic in us that it embodies. Such questioning requires self-authorisation. Sufficient self-authorisation is linked to contexts that authorise conversations within which the effects and outcomes of leadership and management can be discussed in an ethical framework. Conversation in organisations tends to be too instrumental to facilitate such talk.

## **Conversation**

Two sorts of conversation are considered. The first is 'instrumental' and is only briefly discussed. The second is conversation as enquiry, a conversation that is socially and historically contextualised and assumed to be conducive to constructive awkwardness. Focusing here reveals some of the complexity arising from the interaction between structures, as the embodiment of rules, beliefs and values and an individual's sense of agency.

### **Instrumental conversations**

These conversations are seen as discrete, neutral contexts in which skilful practitioners exercise leadership. For example, writers offering advice about dealing with difficult people (Lilly, 2002; Harvard Business School, 2005; Salter & Langford-Wood 2000). They stress the need to depersonalise the encounter, anticipate the reactions of the other and recognise that own emotions can distort the confronting intervention. The context of the individual who is the client of the intervention and wider social factors is not explored.

Writers on coaching (Clutterbuck and Megginson, 2005; Rodgers, 2004; Claridge & Lewis, 2005), introduce the idea of special sorts of conversation, orientated towards challenge of self and others. These conversations are again characterised by having a leader of the process and a recipient of the intervention.

While the issues under discussion may be complex there is an assumption that authoritative advice and skilful facilitation will help to understand that they have to change or re-frame how they are seeing their situation. An alternative view is held by Khane (2004).

## **Conversation as enquiry**

Khane (2004) observes that complex problems will not be solved by talk as telling. Authoritative intervention may work for simple problems but not where there is complexity. Appiah (2006) and Walzer (1994) see conversation as the means of negotiating difference about the way the world is. They challenge a relativist position to create tolerance. Such a stance is evidence of a retreat into relativism in the face of disagreement and will result in silence and no learning.

Appiah (2006) talks about a process of exploration of values and beliefs based on the agreement not to agree. You do not have to share someone's values to recognise how they might motivate someone. Disagreement is integral to the discussion of the application of values.

'If this is the aim, then the fact that we have all these opportunities for disagreement about values need not put us off. Understanding one another may be hard; it can certainly be interesting. But it does not require that we come to agreement' (Appiah, 2006, p.78).

He invokes a distinction between 'thick' and 'thin' values. Thick relates to judgments about right and wrong that are enmeshed in a complex social context. 'Thin' values are context free, e.g. it's wrong to kill yourself. Walzer (1994) talks of a 'moral discourse, [where] thinness and intensity go together, whereas with thickness comes qualification, compromise, complexity and disagreement' (p.5), what Appiah (2006) calls the negotiation of self-interest. Disagreement can and will occur:

'when one party to a discussion invokes a concept that the other simply doesn't have. This is the kind of disagreement where the struggle is not to disagree but just to understand' (Appiah, 2006, p.47).

Ginsbourg (2005) raises the effects of the wider cultural context of conversations, what he calls 'the micro-elements of daily practice' (p.140). He asks what kind of rhetorical traditions people have; what they think is a reasonable time to speak; what are their attitudes to being 'right'; losing face and listening to the other's argument. Zeldin (1998) notes that the social etiquette of

conversations has changed over time. There is now an assumption in some cultures of the right to free speech. This was an:

‘empty right until people freed themselves of the feeling that they did not know how to express themselves properly’ and they also needed to overcome ‘the old ingrained dislike of being interrupted, which seemed like a mutilation’ (Zeldin, 1998, p.33).

Establishing and sustaining conversation is the objective and context of a constructively awkward intervention. There is the assumption of a capability to speak and this implies some sense of agency. The literature on conversation recognises that agency is determined by the structures that are invoked through conversation. These structures reflect the cultural history and local context of conversations.

In this next section the literature on empowerment and being silenced is reviewed.

## **2.4 Skills and capabilities**

This section begins with a review of what enables a sense of empowerment and assertion, both of which seem relevant to a theory of constructive awkwardness. This review suggests that while there is some useful behavioural advice on offer, the fundamental question of the ‘how’ of an intervention based on speaking up is unclear.

### **Empowerment**

Suominen (2005) defines empowerment as the feeling that one can act and successfully execute a certain action. He distinguishes between verbal, behavioural and outcome empowerment. Verbal is the ability to state one’s opinion and debate this with different groups. In his study of head nurses in Finland he found that they felt most able with peers and manager and least with people outside their directorates. Behavioural is the ability to work in groups to identify problems, gather data, recommend solutions and develop new skills to do more challenging work. This was most felt when working with peers. Outcome empowerment is the ability to determine the cause of problems and solve them. This was the least experienced.

The study of empowerment is superficial in the absence of a theory about power that enables a critique of structures (Masterson and Owen, 2003). It is superficial, because attention is switched to the individual and masks the effects of structure. Disempowerment is explained away in terms of an individual’s competence and experience.

Patrick and Laschinger (2006) linked nurses’ sense of diminishing authority to structural changes. These are changes that reduced access to information, resources, support and opportunities to learn. Critically, the loss of formal recognition of work role and access to networks were felt to be particularly disempowering.



The study by Mok and Au-Yeung (2002) adds a cross-cultural dimension to conceptualising empowerment and the assumption that being challenging is good. While supporting the value of access to networks and information, they note the assumption in the western literature that empowerment and involvement in management process is to be desired. Their study of Hong Kong Chinese identified an avoidance of public confrontation and criticism. What was valued was open mindedness and conversation.

### **Assertiveness**

What is briefly considered here is the body of self-help literature associated with assertion. Defined by Dryden and Constantinou (2004) as having

‘preferences met, our opinions voiced, our emotions, and beliefs honestly communicated in an appropriate way at the relevant time’ (Dryden and Constantinou, 2004, p.3).

They, along with other assertiveness theorists such as Back and Back (2005) and Bishop (2000) differentiate assertiveness from aggression, which is a bullying indifference to others’ concerns and passivity, a submission and an avoidance of speaking up for one’s self.

Dryden and Constantinou (2004) describe the required behaviours based on six core skills. These are preparation, including what to say and where to say it; the expression of what needs to be said simply and, if required, repeatedly; attention to how the other is reacting via listening skills and appropriate body language; the avoidance of defensive behaviours that can spoil the communication with others; the use of self disclosure to match, model and encourage disclosure from the other; and, when required, being prepared to negotiate a realistic compromise.

Underpinning these skills is a preparedness to question one’s own thinking reflecting the level of enquiry proposed by Schein and Argyris. The assumption attached to our sense of our right to be assertive, may need to be critically examined and changed first via an intellectual process and then embedded through practice.

Back and Back (2005) talk about an inner dialogue as a means by which to check if an intervention is required and what it will constitute. This checking assumes a set of explicit rights which may be under threat.

‘rights are important because they are one of the bases for deciding whether other people are behaving aggressively’ (Back and Back, 2005, p.44).

The sense of one’s rights as the basis for deciding on what to intervene is a view shared by Bishop (2000) in his practical guide to being assertive.

## **The problem of the focus on the individual**

O'Grady (2005) argues that a focus on the individual reflects a western bias for personal responsibility that 'discourages the contextualisation of experience' (p.18). When this bias is internalised it can lead to self-silencing and self-policing. Blaming ourselves, we go quiet and this is heard as compliance. New and Fleetwood (2006) investigated how gender determined engagement at realist conferences. They concluded that people held and acted from assumptions about the sort of contributions different genders should make; what constituted an effective presentation; how much argument there should be; the support one should show to a fellow speaker and how much time it should take to make one's point. Structures are internalised and reproduced by individuals even though they may be disabling. They noted that this? level of threat can be over-estimated. We catastrophise and miss opportunities for speaking up.

Macalpine and Marsh (2006) add a dimension to the meaning of silence and the effects of context on empowerment. They consider the experience of minority groups. Being gay or black can feel wrong in the face of the silent assumption of heterosexuality and whiteness. They argue that in these situations, power is expressed through the silence. This is silence as discourse which authorises certain ways of talking and thinking. This boundary is maintained by self-policing as embarrassment or fear. This makes it harder to question how language and practice,

'discursively conceals what would be otherwise be so noticeable - the continued huge disjuncture in power/status/life chances between black and white people' (Macalpine and Marsh, 2006, p.443).

Self-policing is linked to Jack (1991) and her work to understand women's self-reported experience of depression. She noted that an outwardly compliant self was often mistaken for agreement and this external compliance was enforced by internal processes:

- Judgment of self by external standards and reduction in the power of internal standards.
- Putting the needs of others before self.
- The inhibition of self-expression.
- The splitting of self into a compliant public and private emotional self.

Besser et al (2003) based on their investigation of loneliness suggest these processes apply to men as well.

'The construct of self silencing was hypothesised by Jack (1991) as way of accounting for the predominance of depression among females rather than males. However, subsequent research has shown that self silencing is relevant for both females and males...' (Besser et al, 2003, p.1737).

The process of going silent may not be within conscious control. The next section argues that going quiet can be a deliberate tactic of resistance to the pressure to conform to real and imagined demands.

### **Silence as resistance**

Van Dyne et al (2003) differentiate three types of silence to argue that silence is not the opposite of speaking but is 'strategic and proactive - conscious, purposeful and intentional' (p.1365). She describes an Acquiescent Silence that withholds relevant information and is associated with disengaged behaviour and sense that one cannot make a difference; a Defensive Silence that omits information because of fear of the consequences of speaking; and a Pro-Social Silence, that omits speaking to protect others.

Another manifestation of choosing to withhold an aspect of self is the emotional labour, required of many people working in service industries. Noon and Blyton (2007) describe this as the work performed by employees in contact with 'clients' to induce particular feelings and responses by the display of a specific set of feelings, some of which are determined by management and backed up by monitoring and sanctions. This definition implies the possibility of a dissonance between felt and displayed emotions and a capacity for the self-regulation implied by the behaviours described by Van Dyne et al (2003). Noon and Blyton (2007) link self-regulation to resistance that may be exercised by employees in the face of work that is experienced as alienating, an

'objective condition of all work under capitalism' and 'alienation varies between occupations, and to this extent is experienced subjectively by employees' (Noon and Blyton, 2007, p.247).

A particular form of withdrawal they describe is 'mental escape', characterised by the 'withdrawal into ones own thoughts' (p.269) that is, a resigned, sometimes cynical acceptance of current circumstance. This behaviour is more likely in monotonous, low status, highly regulated and monitored work. It is a form of resistance, in that management values are held at a distance and not internalised.

Empowerment arises from an interaction between some personal processes and structures and an outcome of empowerment is speech. Another outcome can be voluntary silence or a silence that is in less conscious control. The next section aims to theorise these personal processes by referring to the work of Archer (2003).

### **Reflexivity and empowerment**

The contents of reflexive conversations are private deliberations about future behaviour. These deliberations, as suggested by Back and Back (2005) and Archer have causal power.

'Fundamentally we cannot account for any outcome unless we understand the agent's project in relation to her social context. And we cannot understand her project without entering into her reflexive deliberations about her personal concerns with the objective social context she confronts' (Archer 2003, p.131).

These deliberations endorse one's personal ontology. A person can claim to know best what they think about what they know and experience, what Archer calls 'self warranted' beliefs (p.50). While a person can draw erroneous conclusions about their knowing, such beliefs have 'special epistemic status' (p.50). The causal power of reflexive conversations arises from reflecting on this personal ontology and deciding what is important to oneself. There are three outcomes to these deliberations.

- The identification and prioritisation of our concerns.
- The prioritisation of this personal agenda in relation to what one deems desirable and achievable given the context.
- A decision about what we are going to do.

Reflexivity enables us to recognise how social roles and obligations apply to us in particular and how this determines and is modified by our intention to act. Archer describes a range of reflexive talk. The focus here is on 'meta reflexivity', a conversation characterised by self-examination. The aim is to move between 'self-knowledge - self-criticism - self-improvement' (p.273). This will enable a person to enact the qualities they desire to be manifest in their behaviour.

This sounds like the ethical conversations proposed by McKie (2004). That is, what is being asked of me in this situation and how do I act from what I think is right? This will lead to tension if the context imposes silence on particular issues of concern to the meta-reflexive practitioner. They resolve this tension by acting from their ethical principles and Archer describes them as 'birds without nests and foxes without holes, finding no resting place' (p.261). Their ethical stance can be heard as subversive, as they can be indifferent to structural constraints. They 'willingly pay the objective price, rather than conform, collaborate or compromise' (p.291). This is not naive resistance. Interventions are initiated in recognition of the constraints and consequences.

The 'communicative reflexive' is more likely to question their own motives in? risking disempowerment. Their internal dialogue lacks the causal powers of the meta-reflexive. Their pattern is one of thinking followed by discussion about the content of their deliberations with others. Less trust is placed in the internal dialogue and others are used to fill any real and imagined missing information. Archer does not use the term, but communicative reflexives, in seeking reassurance, are perhaps expressing learning and survival anxiety (Schein, 2004).

However confident the meta-reflexive is, there are likely to be situations in which acting from these deliberations will also evoke

anxiety in self and the recipient of any intervention. In the next section I explore this uncertainty as a necessary condition and outcome of constructive awkwardness.

## **Facing uncertainty**

The outcome of the constructively awkward intervention will be uncertain. Liminality is a way of talking about this uncertainty as a space characterised by ambiguity, where the normal limits to thinking and action are relaxed.

Liminality is a preoccupation of writers interested in exploring a practice that can be sustained in uncertainty, in particular where underpinning explanations and assumptions are questioned. Liminality is related to journeys, the goddess Hecate and the choices when faced with a three road crossroad. Smith (2005) describes the experience of the wives of the first lunar astronauts as liminal. It is:

‘...like crossing places or passing places; those twilight regions of our lives where established rules disappear and uncertainty holds sway and the ground seems apt to crumble beneath our feet...’ (Smith, 2005, p.240-241).

French (1997; 1999) and French and Simpson (1999) link liminality with learning and seeking uncertainty constitutes a working method appropriate to leadership and learning in complexity where new approaches are required. Learning means not reverting to ‘truth from moments past’ (1999, p. 6). The focus is on what is yet to be revealed. Isaacs (1999) reflects the difficulties to be faced when giving up certainty. It is to ‘enter into the dark forest of one’s own lack of understanding’ (1999, p.164). To expose oneself to one’s ignorance is to face Schein’s (2004) learning anxiety, the anxiety symptomatic of worries about looking stupid. This anxiety has to be faced if the effects and limits of epistemic assumptions are to be recognised, evaluated and developed (Mezirow, 1989, 1997).

Working with this level of uncertainty is difficult. Bion (1961) and Menzies (1989) talk of a ‘negative capability’, reflecting Keats and not ‘irritably reaching after reason’.

‘In so far as I have been able to sustain negative capability and dispense with memory and desire, I have indeed spent long periods in sessions and afterwards in a painful state of not knowing at all what is going on’ (Menzies, 1989, p.4).

This negative capability is implied by O’Brien’s (1987) exhortation to embrace error, ignorance and fallibility as leadership competencies and Sinnason’s (1991) clinical work. In the face of unspoken trauma the analyst must not ‘turn a blind eye and privilege self protection’ (p.11). She argues for a robust theoretical structure that legitimises and sustains the therapist as they contemplate saying terrible things.

'If the child does not want to see because seeing will reveal the awfulness of his predicament, the therapist in seeing must see not only the predicament of the child but also her own areas of difficulty and the theoretical structure that either does or does not support her' (Sinnason, 1991, p.11).

Sinnason (1991) speaks as the 'voice of difference' (p,17) and does so from an ethical stance, because not mentioning that which is present but unspoken can have a devastating impact. This makes speaking up 'hard emotional labour' (p.17) as speaking may facilitate healing and it may not. The liminal space does not always reveal new insights, it may just have to be endured. Rallison and Moules (2004) discuss the ethical demand facing palliative care nurses to confront the silence that can surround a dying child. The capability to speak into silence is a skill that can facilitate talking.

'The loss of a child, in its very *unspeakability*, perhaps inadvertently contributes to a silencing of this particular loss and a diminishment of the profound voice of suffering that accompanies it' (Rallison and Moules, 2004, p.290).

There is an apparent contradiction between the robust confidence of the meta-reflexive described by Archer and that implied by Sinnason's ethical stance and the uncertainty and waiting associated with liminality. Empowerment is assumed to be a pre-condition of a constructively awkward intervention and meta-reflexivity is a way of thinking about how this empowerment occurs, without the necessity of a conducive context. But, empowerment can be seen in two stages. That which is required to initiate the intervention and that required to manage its consequences. It is in this stage that uncertainty may reveal itself and negative capability is required. While a sense of one's authority is required so are effective facilitation skills.

## **Facilitation skills**

Heron (1999; 2001) provides a taxonomy of the facilitation skills required to enable work with groups and individuals. Facilitators need to pay attention to how they act: are they hierarchical, collaborative or do they assume the group's capability to organise? Facilitators have a choice of six interventions: planning; structuring; meaning; valuing; feeling; and confronting. Heron's description of confronting is apposite to defining the skills required of the constructively awkward practitioner. He defines confronting as a direct challenge to:

'rigid and maladaptive, attitudes/beliefs/actions that limit the? client or unnecessarily limit others, and of which the individual is defensively unaware – to a greater or lesser degree. A confronting intervention is supportive and 'unequivocally tells an uncomfortable truth' and 'is a greater or lesser shock' (Heron, 2001, p.59).

Confronting interventions are presumptuous in that they presume to raise an issue that others may not be aware of. Confronting can

combine elements of the other interventions and are further differentiated by being hierarchical, collaborative or autonomous. For example, confronting and meaning dimensions often overlap and the participant who challenged 'whiteness' cited on page 11 would be an example. He drew attention to what he thought was being avoided by not thinking about the meaning attached to being white and in power, in this particular educational context.

## **Recognising subjectivity**

Heron (2001), like Sinnason (1999), argues that the practitioner must be conscious of the how and why of their behaviour as they face the anxiety both present and archaic in themselves and their 'client'. In this, they reflect the values of Goleman (1996) and the requirement for emotional awareness. However, unlike Goleman, they draw upon a psychoanalytic theory to understand how anxiety mediates behaviour, and in particular the concept of counter-transference.

Sandler et al (1970) describe this as:

'the particular emotions aroused in the analyst by a particular patient. This arousal is assumed to be inevitable. It can be useful in that 'it can lead to increased insights into processes occurring in the patient' (p.69).

This response can lead to difficulties. The analyst, due to a deficiency in his/her own analysis fails to 'hear' an aspect of the client's process. It can also be a valuable source of insight into the other's emotional state. Winnicott (1949) argues for the existence and utility of the therapist's own experience as a source of knowledge about another's first person subjective world. The risk of this approach is that the mediating effects of structure are ignored. However, this concept can help the constructively awkward practitioner acknowledge there is an unconscious component to any conversation, particularly where there are high levels of anxiety. The use of the concept of counter-transference can make this unconscious component, which can mediate outcomes, available for conscious consideration. The extension of this use of counter transference outside of the consulting room is justified by reference to Skynner (1989) and his use of the concept in relation to consultancy, and Ringer (2002) in relation to groups.

Skynner challenged the traditional explanation of counter-transference by questioning why there was an emphasis on intellectualising feelings. He would offer a description of his emotional response for consideration by the 'other' in a way that does not blame but models a tolerance for feeling. His expression is not the amygdala 'burst' described by Goleman (1996) but a sophisticated expression, in part based on a view about what the other can tolerate before feeling overwhelmed.

Reverting to Archer's (2003) reflexive typology, Skynner is demonstrating a sophisticated form of communicative reflexivity. The sharing of private thoughts and feelings is a device to encourage reflection in others and is not driven by anxiety, far from it. Skynner, like Argyris, Menzies and Bion demonstrates a

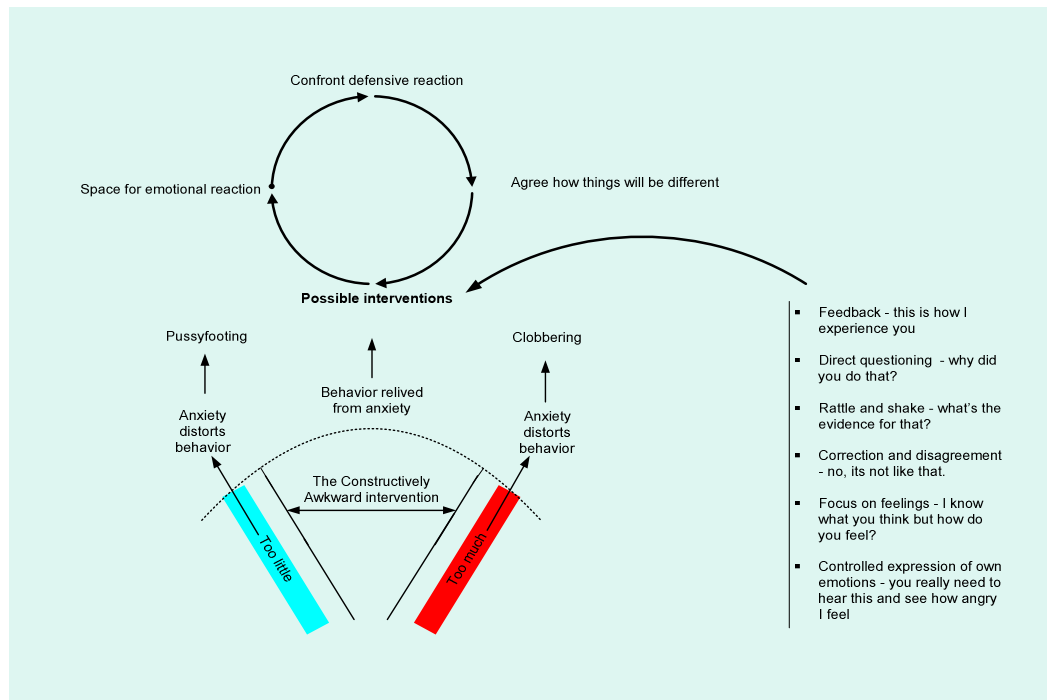
confidence in what he has to say and in his right to say it. They demonstrate the confidence and indifference of the meta reflexive and the sophisticated use of communicative reflexivity. They could hold their authority in the liminal space.

## The skills of confronting

Without diminishing the importance of Heron's other categories his work on confronting provides a useful skills-based language. He identifies three possibilities and links these outcomes to the anxiety discussed above.

'This double layer of anxiety, the present-time compounded by the archaic, if you are unable to take charge of it, can skew the intervention in one of two opposite ways: either you pussyfoot with the client, go round the mulberry bush, dodge the issue, never square up to the real agenda and at worst simply avoid the confrontation altogether; or you sledgehammer the client, become aggressive and wounding about the issue leaving the person unnecessarily hurt and defensive (Heron, 2001, p.61-62).

To hold this 'razor edge' (p.62) between sledgehammer and pussyfoot requires 'training, re-training with plenty of feedback' (p.62). The following diagram reflects possible outcomes.



**Figure 2.2** - defining the possible outcomes of a confronting intervention.

Heron defines what a good intervention looks like. It has to be on target, supportive, Lean and the other has to be in some way receptive. This raises questions mused on reflexively about place, time, range and depth of proposed and interventions in action.



The effective practitioner also thinks about what the 'target' can handle without triggering a defensive reaction that leads to uncontained fight/flight.

### **Problems with behavioural descriptions**

A criticism of Heron's writing, which can also be made about the work previously cited on assertiveness, is that there is little guidance on how to develop the required authority to enact the detailed and useful descriptions of appropriate behaviours. Self-authorisation can be inferred to develop from an intellectual understanding of one's rights and responsibilities and the understanding and rehearsal of particular interventions. The inclusion in this project of historical analysis of bad leadership and the demands on followers also supports this emergent proposition that an intellectual grasp of the issues may have generative effects on levels of self-authority.

What is also missing from these behavioural descriptions is the effects of context. It is highly likely to be a different experience confronting a subordinate than a peer or one's boss. Coffield (1999) reviewing the relationship between the researcher and policy makers makes two points. The first is that the objective of confronting is not just about personal change, it can be about challenge at the level of policy.

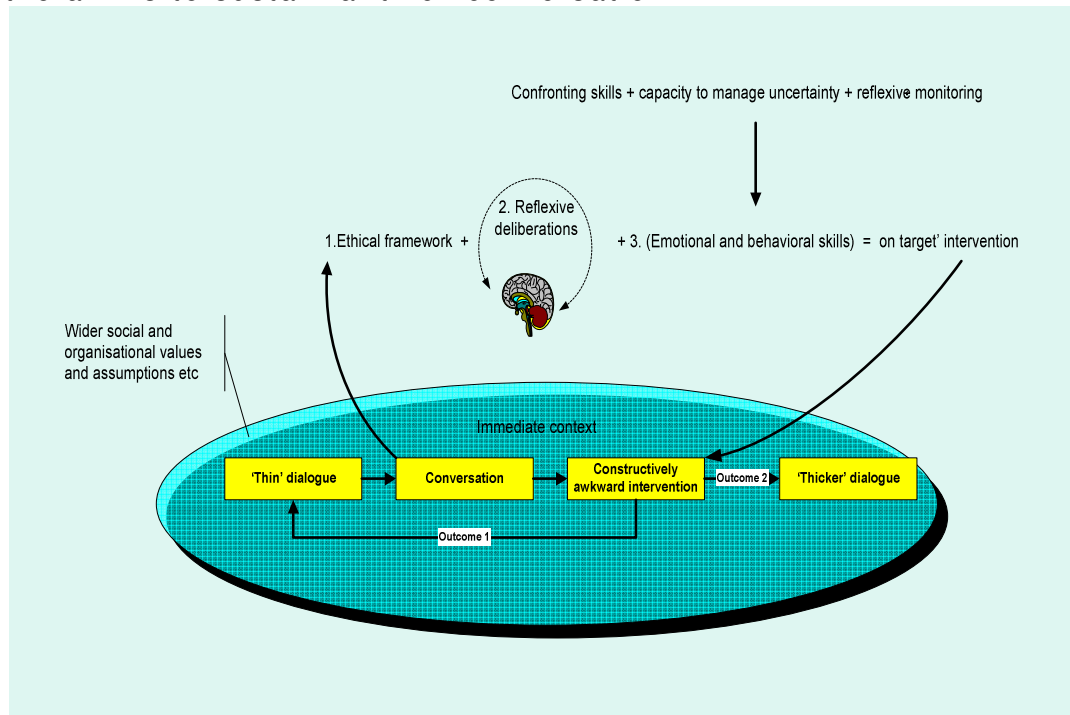
'At its best, independent, critical research exists to question the taken for granted assumptions and practice of practitioners and policy makers, to ask subversive questions, to explore alternative perspectives, to expose the strengths and weaknesses in existing policies' (Coffield, 1999, p.7).

Secondly, Coffield like Pawson (2002), notes that speaking truth to power is 'a fraught and risky business' (p.7) as vested interests are questioned and challenged. This suggest that one can be a simultaneously a competent challenging practitioner and judged to be recalcitrant and disruptive.

## **2.5 The second iteration of the theory**

In this concluding section the learning from the literature review and initial theory described in Chapter 1 are synthesised to develop a mid-range theory. Such a theory is characterised by Pawson as: 'what kinds-of-things work for what kinds-of-subjects in what kinds-of-situations (2001, p.11). The following diagram and propositions seek to refine the sensitising concepts and interests, first set out at the end of Chapter 1. This second iteration is a final clarification of the projects 'points of departure' (Charmaz, 2006). This is necessary if the challenges and benefits of reflexivity, in a project guided by grounded theory and ethnographic principles are to be managed and the voice of the practitioner is to be integrated into a third and final iteration of the project's theory reported in Chapter 5.

The figure below identifies the three components, identified so far, which are assumed to be integral to the process by which the constructively awkward intervention is produced. Two possible outcomes are identified based on the type of conversation initiated the aim is to sustain a 'thick conversation'.



**Diagram 2.3** - a theory of constructive awkwardness

The propositions that define this second theory are the following.

- Constructive awkwardness is a self-authorized act that seeks to articulate an uncomfortable truth, (act the Fool) which questions how power is used to impose and recreate particular meanings. The aim is to challenge, enquire and continue to express the desire to collaborate through dissent. This collaboration is rooted in a culture of 'thick' conversation and does not require agreement between parties to be achieved.
- The scope of the intervention is limited to bad leadership described by Kellerman (2004) excluding the extreme leadership associated with physical harm and deliberate and psychosocial harm.
- The intervention can 'work' because power, embedded in particular structures and contexts, is assumed to be exercised and modified through conversation. The practitioner is capable of noticing how particular structures affect their own and others' behaviour. They are also capable of acting on this information and resisting its effects upon their own thinking, feeling and behaving.

- Self-authorisation is linked to a reflexive voice as defined by Archer(2003). This voice can alert and propel a person to intervene or be the cause of self-doubt. Self-authorisation may be helped and hindered by the psychological contract and wider policies and values of an organisation.
- The possession of a defined ethical framework seems to also be linked to self-authority.
- The behavioural elements of the intervention are similar to those associated with confronting and being assertive.
- The practitioner requires the capability to manage themselves in uncertainty, characterised as a self-induced liminal space.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology developed to test and develop this theory.

# Chapter 3 - Methodology

## Introduction

Chapter 1 set out the aim of this project, which is to understand the capabilities, values and experiences of people who are capable of constructive awkwardness. The objective of the project is to produce a set of development interventions that are concrete, testable and contextualised (Argyris, 2000); interventions that can help people evaluate and develop their capacity for being constructively awkward.

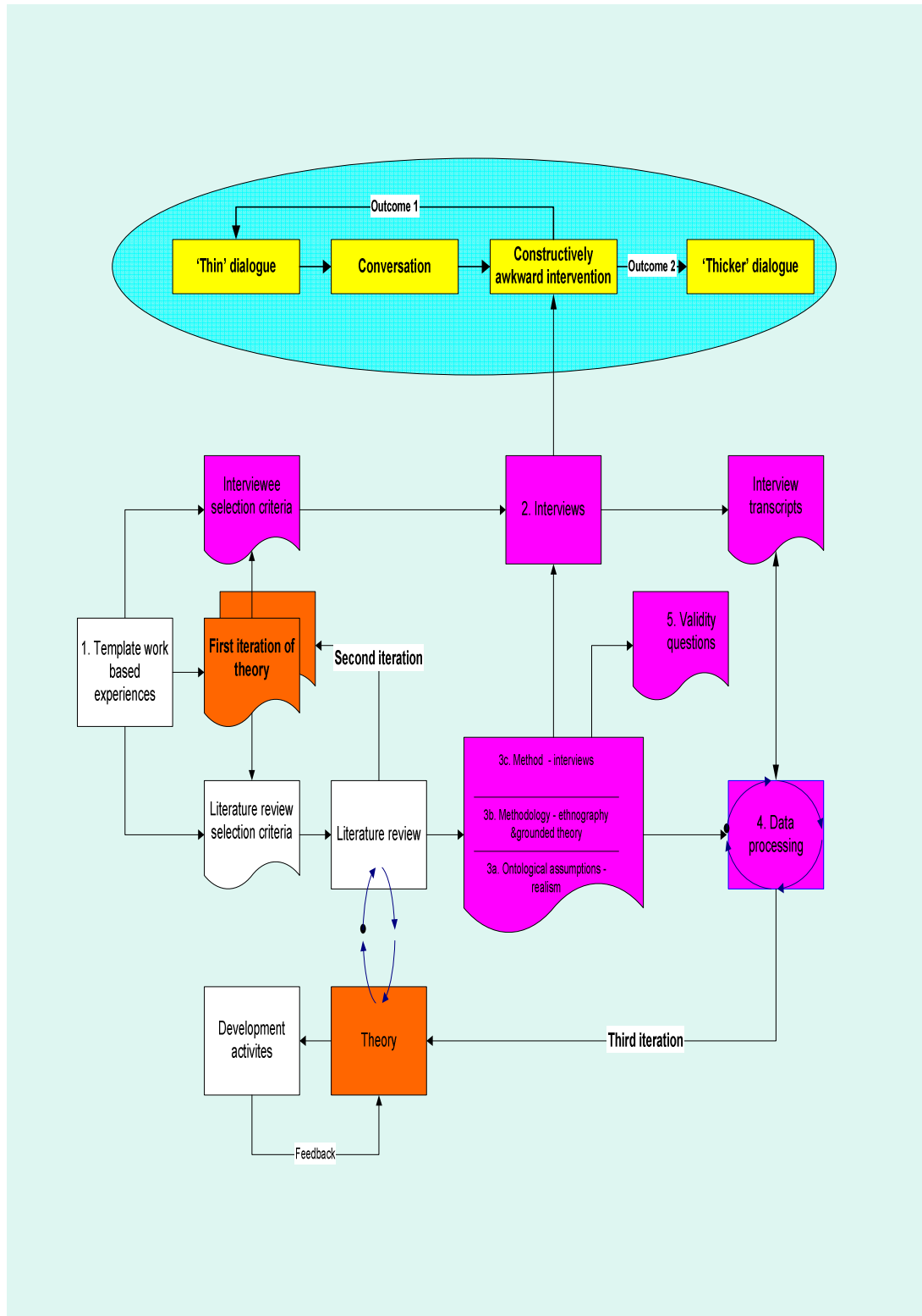
An initial theory, based on the work challenges I faced, was set out in chapter 1 and illustrated by the doctor's story and that of the partnership manager. The literature review developed this initial theorising, by locating constructive awkwardness in a leadership, organisational and social context. Chapter 2 concluded with a second iteration of a mid-range theory, deemed useful in the development of practical interventions (Pawson, 2001). The purpose of the interviews and subsequent data analysis, described here, is to develop a third iteration of this theory. The aim is to develop a sufficiently robust theory upon which to design useful development interventions. This chapter describes and justifies the project methodology by which I achieved this final stage of theory development.

### The structure of the chapter

The first section describes three experiences that helped to determine the selection criteria for the ten semi-structured interviews, and the interviewees' backgrounds and my prior relationships with them are noted. The second section identifies the ethical issues associated with being an 'insider researcher'.

The third sets out the approach to the methodological challenges I faced in the development of a valid theory in relation to first-person accounts and to underpinning development interventions. This substantial section has three components. The first, titled 'Critical Realism - a bias for practical enquiry' explains my decision to employ a Critical Realist ontology to probe and theorise below the empirical surface of what interviewees said (Sayer, 2000). The second component, titled 'Developing theory from the interviews' explains how I processed the interview data using grounded theory principles based on the four stages identified by Straus and Corbin, 1998). The third strand, titled 'Applying the insights of ethnography' explores the implication of taking an etic stance towards the interview accounts and how I thought about and managed reflexivity. The final section is a short conclusion.

The following diagram maps the project's main activities. The shapes in purple are the foci of this chapter.



**Figure 3.1** - the main project activities.

## 3.1 The interviews

### Developing the interview criteria

Roper and Shapira (2000), discussing ethnography in nursing research, argue that it is important for the researcher to account for how their own experience and aspirations influence their focus and sense-making, reflecting the reflexive dimension in the approach outlined here and discussed later. The following experiences, the first described in Chapter 1 (page 5-6), all had an impact on the interview selection criteria.

#### First experience

This experience was about being on the receiving end of a defining constructively awkward intervention. The challenge, from a black participant on a leadership development programme, drew attention to our potential to frame participants' experience and the extent to which we were aware of how our 'whiteness' might determine this. The intervention came early in the five week programme. The participant, a barrister, poet and mental health advocate stood up and spoke clearly and powerfully about what he thought was going on. He spoke for no more than a couple of minutes and as he spoke he had everyone's attention.

While I was able to acknowledge what he had said, and think about its implications for my practice (what am I missing?) and the programme (I drew attention to the potential of the programme to critically examine inequalities of power), I knew I had been offered an 'uncomfortable truth' (Heron, 2001, p.59).

#### Comment

This experience suggested that the constructively awkward intervention could be characterised as high challenge and high support intervention. It was high challenge as it drew attention to the reproduction of structure and the embedded values, roles and rules in the room. The intervention was based on a series of implied questions - *Does it have to be this way? What can we tolerate talking about? Are these people really committed to critical reflection on practice?* It was high support because while he was authoritative (clear voice, concise, standing up, eye contact) he was very controlled. The intervention, at least in this case, could be expressed in what some might perceive to be a hierarchically structured context. This suggested that in similar contexts (e.g. team meetings and management meetings) a constructively awkward intervention could be possible.

#### Second experience

This experience highlights a different context. I was speaking to a doctor and academic (whom I later interviewed), who was talking about his research. His work consistently challenged the assumptive and often unproven basis of surgical interventions and the tendency to validate professional success criteria over patient

criteria. He used the term, 'rattling the bars research'. He was as challenging as the participant in the first example, but he freely acknowledged that he was a beneficiary of the very structures he was challenging. He was, in his words 'one of them'.

### **Comment**

This experience drew attention to challenge within one's own context, profession or organisation. This suggested that constructive awkwardness could be differentiated as 'insider' or 'outside in'. If this were the case, a selection of people working in and outside professions and institutions, as they defined it, would be useful. His challenge was an academic-based challenge, well thought out, based on a deep understanding of the evidence and soberly presented in structured ways, for example, as articles or conference papers.

### **Third experience**

The example involved a colleague who, in a pre-interview conversation, related how he had stood up in a crowded train and commented on the effects of the many mobile phone users on the experience of those wishing to sit and think. I later read a description of his intervention by a journalist who happened to be on the train.

The terribly polite, middle-class war against mobile phones on trains strikes its first blow. Just as we were coming into Paddington on Thursday morning, a man just behind me in the carriage, a man in late middle age wearing a grey suit, made a rather brave and noble speech. "I'm going to say this very loudly," he said, very loudly. "I find it extremely annoying when somebody conducts a long and loud business conversation on their mobile phone while sitting opposite me on a train. It does not have to be so loud, nor continue for so long. And for those of us who are trying to read or analyse documents or just look out of the window and think, I find it absolutely paralyses the thought processes. If anyone agrees with me, perhaps you would be kind enough to make a supportive noise." As for the man responsible for Thursday's offending mobile-phone conversation, he said softly to the complainant: "There is a quiet carriage further up the train where nobody is allowed to use mobiles. You could always have sat in there." "I most certainly would have done," continued the complainant, just as loudly, "except that every seat was taken. Anyway, it is my view that there should not be one carriage reserved for those who do not like to listen to mobile phone conversations. There should be a carriage reserved for those who wish to make them, and you can all bellow together."

Viner (2005)

This report describes an audacious intervention, precipitated by his sense that there was an unspoken conflict in the carriage and that this should be named

## **Comment**

This was a template experience because it emphasised spontaneity, based on a capacity for self-authorisation. It was an act that emphatically placed the speaker outside the local culture of a train carriage (e.g. an 'outside in' intervention). He spoke with no guarantee that he would be publicly acknowledged even though he believed himself to be speaking up for his silent co-commuters.

From these experiences the following interview selection criteria were developed.

- There is evidence from self and others of a willingness to initiate high challenge and high support interventions within and outside of professions and institutions.
- A range of contexts (e.g. public sector and third sectors) are represented.
- A person is capable and willing to talk about their challenging interventions and reflecting upon the effects of these on self and others.
- There is a gender balance in the selected group.
- A person is sufficiently robust emotionally and intellectually to talk and reflect upon how and why they behaved in a challenging way.
- A range of professional and non-professional backgrounds is represented.
- A person is sufficiently robust emotionally and intellectually to talk and reflect upon interventions that have not gone so well.

## **The interviews**

I approached ten people, based on the above criteria, to take part in single semi-structured interviews (see table 1). All agreed to be interviewed. My choices in relation to numbers interviewed and their backgrounds was based on Archer's (2003) small scale multiple case study, to investigate reflexive conversations.

Her number of interviewees was small, based on her exploratory focus, feasibility, resources and an assumption that 'the aim was exploratory and the means dialogical...and the themes introduced by subjects themselves were (to prove) far more valuable (p.157). My choice of interviewees was also determined by pragmatism. I approached people to whom I had access directly or through colleagues, within the time line and resources of my project plan. I had an agreement with my employer to work part time for 2006/07 during the initial theory development and data gathering phases of the project.



Archer interviewed friends and, while I did not do this, I did interview four people whom I liked and admired professionally. Her pragmatic approach to the risks to validity were balanced by the access that prior relationship afforded. I thought this a useful model in relation to understanding a complex behaviour like constructive awkwardness. I managed the risk to validity by thinking about my role as an 'insider researcher' (see page 64). A consequence of this pragmatism is that the effects of different contexts, like ethnic diversity, work context and gender, were not more systematically addressed. However, these issues either emerged in the data processing (i.e. gender) and are present in the final iteration of the theory or constitute further research questions.

For example, Hammersley and Atkinson (1995), discussing the role of objects in ethnography note that 'people do not act in a vacuum' so

'ethnographic research needs to pay close and serious attention to the material goods and circumstances that are integral to the organisation of everyday social life' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995, p.137).

It became clear in the data processing that community based leaders may have to rely more heavily on their self-authorisation in the absence of the accoutrements of leadership enjoyed by some public sector leaders. For example, in relation to my own role, I have the job title of 'senior fellow'; my name badge identifies me with the King's Fund and secures me access to a prestigious building, with pictures of royalty, located in the centre of London and its large library and training rooms, with AV kit that I know how to manipulate to present my ideas.

The effects of material goods were not specifically investigated in the interviews, but this important question about self-authorisation and community-based leadership did eventually emerge. A reason for this omission is that as Macalpine and Marsh (2006) observe, silence can equate to power. I take access to the material goods of the King's Fund for granted, partly because I can. In the final chapter I will return to this lack of attention to the 'props' that people could draw upon or not to augment authority.

## **Interviewee profiles**

The tables below describe the profile of the people interviewed. Table 3.2 describes their personal profile and 3.3 describes the relationships I had with interviewees. This disclosure is important in relation to the discussion of insider researcher on page 69. I knew some people well and while this facilitated disclosure it also presented risks associated with proximity.

| Name   | Age   | Ethnicity | Gender | Background       | Current role                       | Presumed to act as an insider ? | Relationship   |
|--------|-------|-----------|--------|------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| Hazel  | 30-39 | White     | Female | Nurse            | NHS advisor                        | Yes                             | Indirect - response to a letter sponsored by Jo who was her manager                  |
| Jane   | 30-39 | White     | Female | Nurse            | NHS advisor                        | Yes                             | Indirect - response to a letter sponsored by Jo who was her manager                  |
| Nicky  | 30-39 | White     | Female | Physiotherapist  | NHS advisor                        | Yes                             | Indirect - response to a letter sponsored by Jo who was her manager                  |
| Ester  | 30-39 | White     | Female | Community leader | Voluntary sector chief executive   | No                              | Ex-participant of a leadership programme & occasional speaker on programmes I direct |
| Helen  | 30-39 | White     | Female | Service user     | Chair arts/advocacy organisation   | No                              | Ex-participant of a leadership programme & unpaid consultancy client.                |
| Mark   | 30-39 | Black     | Male   | Community leader | Educator/policy advisor            | No                              | Indirect - suggested by a colleague  |
| Martin | 40-49 | White     | Male   | Community leader | Senior policy Advisor              | Yes                             | Indirect- suggested by Helen   |
| Jo     | 40-49 | White     | Female | Nurse            | NHS Senior manager                 | Yes                             | Ex-participant of a leadership programme & occasional speaker on programmes I direct |
| Peter  | 50-59 | White     | Male   | Priest           | Educator/organisational consultant | Yes                             | Colleague  |
| Steve  | 50-59 | White     | Male   | Doctor           | University professor               | Yes                             | Indirect - suggested by a colleague  |

**Table 3.2.** - the interviewee profiles (names have been changed)

| Name   | Profile  |
|--------|--|
| Hazel  | We meet at the King's Fund. Ester was a very experienced manager who talked a lot about how tactical she had had to be as a complaints manager and mental health act manager to get the chief executives attention and to question the ways complaints were being understood and managed. She talked candidly and enthusiastically about her struggles to get heard.   |
| Jane   | We meet at the King's Fund. She was a colleague of Hazel, Nicky and their manager was Jo who had invited members of her team to contribute to the project. She talked openly about her experiences of speaking up for others and used the interview to think about the effects on herself and a colleague of a difficult, bullying work colleague.   |
| Nicky  | A very enthusiastic, open interviewee, who I meet at the King's Fund. She was the person who talked about feeling stupid or in her language feeling like a 'plonker' when contemplating speaking up. We entered into a short e-mail correspondence after the interview in which she continued to reflect on how she made sense of this feeling stupid and the implications for her own leadership style.                       |
| Ester  | I had worked with Esther on a number of leadership programmes. She was a forthright, passionate interviewee with strong views on the position of refugees in the UK. She talked openly about her own experience as a refugee and how she had had to learn to manage her emotions.  |
| Helen  | I had consulted to Helen for a number of years. We had first met on a development programme for community leaders. She was frank about her mental illness and its effects. Sometimes she was hard to follow but she was very clear about her role and duty to challenge stigmatising attitudes and behaviours. She was brave and interested To support me in my project. we meet at the King's Fund in the company of her dog. |
| Mark   | Mark is someone I had also worked with on a number of leadership programmes. He was an enthusiastic interviewee, in part because the interview seemed to question his assumption that he was not a leader. His self assessment was at odds with the stories of how he lead his community in the face of civil disturbance in the 80's and his life changing encounters while in prison.  |
| Martin | I meet Martin in his London HQ in a large seminar room in the basement. He was in a wheelchair, accompanied by a South American helper who sat in silence during the interview. Martin was open, particularly about how his childhood had influenced his professional and personal development. He followed up the interview with several poems reflecting on his childhood in institutions.                                   |
| Jo     | Another early interview. We meet at the Kings Fund. Jo is a hard working very enthusiastic and competent senior NHS leader. She had been a participant on a programme I co-directed a couple of years ago and we were both DProf students.   |
| Peter  | My first interview. We meet in a small room at the King's Fund. Peter is a trusted colleague who was keen to be helpful and his responses reflected his characteristic openness about his feelings and emotions and their effects upon others.   |
| Steve  | A well established academic Dr. We meet in his office, surrounded by books and papers in a prestigious London Hospital. He was extremely interested in the concept of constructive awkwardness and responded to each question fully, describing how he felt and behaved and reflected on the how what he was saying related to constructive awkwardness.   |

**Table 3.3** - the background of interviewees

## The interview plan

Heyl notes that interviewing is a means of gathering 'rich detailed data directly from participants' (2001, p.369). She asserts that it is a useful ethnographic tool when attention is paid to how 'unexamined assumptions' affect the constructions placed on the data (p.377). Yin (2003) notes that interviews are an essential source of information about 'human affairs' (p.92). The following questions guided the initial part of the conversation and were tested in my interview with Peter. I concluded that the questions, while useful, should not over determine any conversation. It seemed enough to invite people to talk about their experience of challenge. By doing this I was more likely to hear how they made sense of their experience.

### Basics

- Present and get signed the ethics forms & outline interview plan.
- Last about an hour
  - Take a break any time
  - Ask for clarification of questions etc.
  - Ground rules on use of the information and transcripts

### Areas of interest

1. The times, places and with whom you have taken a risk to speak up and confront someone or a group over an issue, which you think went well.

- What did you do?
- How did you plan the intervention?
- What skills did you use?
- How did you manage the intervention?

2. Times when the intervention has not gone so well.

- What do you think was going on?
- What did you do?
- What did they do?
- How did it end?

3. What did you learn and how have you applied this learning?

4. Times when you have been on the receiving end of a challenge.

- What happened?
- What did you learn and how have you applied this learning?

5. What sorts of issues do you tend to intervene on in this way?

- Where did you learn to do confronting?
- What did you learn?
- How did you learn it?
- What have been the implication for your practice?

What other thoughts, feelings, stories have been triggered by this conversation?

The objective of the interviews was to get close to people's experience to help theorise the generative mechanisms that enable and inhibit a constructively awkward intervention. In the next section I discuss the ethical issues that arise from this approach.

## **3.2 Ethical considerations**

### **Consent**

Each person was approached directly or through a contact I knew well. If, after an initial conversation, there was interest I sent a letter, cleared by the University's ethical committee. This outlined the purpose of the interview and project and what was being asked of informants. Attached was a consent form, signed by all interviewees (Appendix A).

### **Insider researcher**

I knew some of the people I interviewed and this implies proximity to my subjects. The insights of action researchers are useful in conceptualising the risks of proximity. Herr and Anderson (2005) offer a framework that ranges from self-study, the domain of reflective practice, to outsider studies, studies that are academic deliberations on others' action learning. This project is located between 'outsider in collaboration with insider' and 'outsider' (p.34). People were asked to formulate what they knew and reflect upon this, within a learning contract, to co-produce a theory of constructive awkwardness.

Fraser (1997), in her description of her case study in her own school, notes the importance of owning up to one's investment in a project. She warns against abusing the rights of access that proximity affords. Proximity can evoke an over-compliance, particularly if a power relationship is present. This can distort the data and/or lead to over disclosure. Tables 1 and 2 describe the relationships. The verbatim extracts of interviews in Chapter 4 evidence that people spoke openly about their experiences, even when these were difficult. Edwards (1999) talks about the ethics of intrusion even, as was the case in this project, when access is freely given. Elam and Fenton (2003), in their discussion of research into sensitive issues, warn about excessive probing and evocation of emotions and being so respectful that nothing new is learnt. This dilemma was managed by choice and timing of open questions, and providing sufficient space for interviewees to think about and reflect on their responses.

The aims and objectives of the research were justification for proximity. Proximity and the risk of intrusion are more justifiable if the aims are linked to professional development; there are advantages to informants and there is the possibility of political or social transformation (Edwards, 1999). All the people interviewed were committed to questioning truth claims. The interview process and subsequent informal conversation supports the claim that shared interests were being served by the project. I learnt about

constructive awkwardness and informants were able to formulate their tacit knowledge and capability about being challenging.

### **3.3 The methodological challenges**

In this section I set out the challenges I faced enquiring into interviewees' experience of constructive awkwardness.

#### **Interpreting interview experiences**

If people's experience is to be interpreted, what is a valid theory against which to do this analytic work, given that the initial theorising suggests that structures embedded in particular contexts mediate the sense of individual agency?

#### **Developing theory rooted in experience**

The development of valid development activities, by which people can think about and develop a constructively awkward capability, requires interventions that help people identify and evaluate current behaviours and attitudes and test new ones. The learning that is proposed relates to the three interconnected levels of critical reflection developed by Mezirow (1997; 1989). These correspond to Argyris's (1977) single and double loop learning and add a third loop, which Mezirow calls 'epistemic'. That is, understanding the origins of one's frames of reference and how these lead one to focus on particular sorts of situations and problems.

Learning at this level involves a four stage process. The: unfreezing of current assumptions and behaviours; acquisition of new ones; re-freezing; and the testing of new behaviours predicated on these new assumptions (Schein, 2004). What is required is a manageable level of learning anxiety, sufficient survival anxiety and the availability of valid (to programme participants, in the sense of relating to their experience and produced by an appropriate process) alternative theories that challenge existing knowledge (Brew, 1993). The challenge is, therefore, what is a valid theory development process?

#### **Reflexivity**

How do I manage the fact that how I hear what is being said is in part determined by my own assumptions and theories? How do I avoid what Davis (2008) describes as excessive self-absorption in my own process, that sidelines the interviewees' experience and knowledge?

In deciding how to manage these challenges I adopted a realist ontology as the analytic framework with which to analyse interviewees' experience. I used insights from ethnography and Grounded Theory principles to manage the second and third challenges.

## **Critical realism as a basis for a practical enquiry**

The development of mid-range theory needs to be more than a description of desired behaviours. Braithwaite describes much descriptive management advice as 'hortatory' and 'discursive' (2004, p.241). It wrongly assumes that encouraging people to behave differently by detailed descriptions of what is desired, changes behaviour. Braithwaite's response to a lack of theory in the management development literature is to describe what managers do in practice and he uses this information to focus on development interventions.

Braithwaite's positivist stance risks conflating what people do with what they are capable of doing. Tsoukas, from a realist perspective, is also interested in what managers do. He is interested in theorising about what may be going on below the empirical surface in order to explain what may be generating or inhibiting behaviours.

'Ontologically, management is endowed with certain powers and capabilities which are not exhausted in their empirical manifestations' (Tsoukas, 2000, p.35).

The assumption in this project is that a realist ontology offers the explanatory potential to produce the required development interventions. In the following section I describe the main components of a realist ontology.

### **The components of critical realism**

Critical realism (from now on referred to as realism), is a philosophy of science that claims that social entities, like gender and class relations and social rules, exist independently of our study of them. The nature of these entities and their effects are disputed and not directly observable. However,

'this does not rule them out of consideration for analysis, a position that distances realists -from empiricist - or positivist-orientated analysis. Furthermore, that these disputed entities exist independently of our investigations of them distances realism from postmodernism' (Ackroyd and Fleetwood, 2000, p.6)

Realism is also a practical approach to evaluation and wider social enquiry (Kazi, 2003). It is an approach that seeks to critically evaluate theories in use and to question these wherever 'accounts differ from those of actors' and where there is a risk of actions being based on false assumptions (Sayer, 2004, p.14).

There are a growing number of examples of realist enquiry into social behaviours analogous to constructive awkwardness; for example, Moren and Blom's (2003) investigation into how social workers facilitate change in clients. They reject a simple causal relationship and seek a generative explanation (retroduction) to explain what it is that occurs between intervention A and outcome

B. To do this they theorised a 'challenge mechanism' (p.56) from observing how social workers consistently challenged the untenable nature of clients' lifestyles. These interventions, when expressed in a context of affirmation of the 'good' of the client, were theorised as causative, in that they triggered an internal process of self-challenge. This led some clients to review their lives, to 'unfreeze' in Schein's terms (2004) and embrace new assumptions and behaviours.

## **The development of a mid-range theory**

Moren and Blom's explanation is indicative of a mid-range theory. This is a theory that offers practitioners an explanation of how and why their interventions might work. Such a theory is more than a working hypothesis, to make immediate sense of what is going on and how to act next, and less than an overarching explanation, that seeks a formulation for a particular phenomenon across multiple contexts. It lies, according to Merton (1968) quoted in Pawson and Tilley,

'between the minor but necessary working hypotheses that evolve in abundance during day-to-day research and the all-inclusive systematic efforts to develop a unified theory that will explain all the observed uniformities of social behaviour, social organization and social change' (Pawson and Tilley, 1997, p.39).

It is a theory with ontological depth, in that it seeks to explain what is going on below the empirical surface and develops from the repeated movement between the concrete and the abstract (Sayer, 2000). It is a theory that is sufficiently detailed to support its application in other contexts. The re-contextualising of such a theory either endorses its explanatory power or forces modifications (Bergene, 2007). Realists argue that social interventions are so complex that it is unlikely they can be exactly reproduced as they are context sensitive. However, theory can be developed by gathering:

'vast experience of the options and possibilities and to figure out what kinds-of-things work for what kinds-of-subjects in what kinds-of-situations (Pawson, 2001, p.11).

The following section describes the ontological assumptions that support such explanations.

## **Realism and ontological depth**

Constructive awkwardness is a behaviour that takes place in the open systems of the social world. The social world contrasts with the natural world in that it is dependent upon the actions of human beings for its existence. The social world, while dependent on human action, is not the product of it. There is an 'irreducible material substrate' (Ackroyd and Fleetwood, 2000, p.12) This substrate is theorised in terms of levels, and realists distinguish between three ontological domains: the real, which exists regardless of our understanding of it and is the domain of generative mechanisms and structures; the actual, which refers to



what happens when these powers, located in the real are activated; and the empirical which relates to what can be sensed and is only ever a partial view of what is going on.

The assumption of 'ontological depth' means that knowledge of the world is not reduced to what can be accessed through the senses. To assume anything less is to fall foul of the epistemic fallacy.

'Epistemology exhausts ontology to the extent that it determines the nature of our world and the inherent limits of our ability to understand it by imposing the fundamental categories and concepts through which we know it' (Reed, 2005, p.1623).

Danermark and Gellerstedt (2004) highlight the risk of 'context stripping' (p.351) when the commitment to ontological depth is forgotten. They note, in relation to the theorisation of disability, the risk of simplifying the experience of disabled people by omitting reference to the physical body. They argue for a complex construction of disability drawing upon the depth of realism and the generative effects of stratified and emergent mechanisms. As Sayer notes, it would be a surprise, 'if the world just happened to correspond to the range of our senses and to be identical to what we experience' (2000, p.11).

## **Criticisms of realism**

Adopting a realist ontology can be problematic. Contu and Willmot (2005) consider the contribution of realism to management and organisational studies (MOS). They argue that the realist ontology is itself a theory-laden construction which, like other explanations, inevitably fails to capture the totality of what could be described. Something is always missing from any explanation. They counsel against a wave of 'ontological correctness' (p.1659). The value of realism's focus on ontology is that it can tease out such assumptions and 'inform empirical studies with this awareness' (p.1659), studies that make up a large proportion of MOS. In this sense, the foregrounding of ontology can be expressed as an analytical skill, like that proposed by Mazirow's (1977) concept of triple-loop learning. He emphasised the importance of reviewing performance; the assumptions that underpin behaviour; and understanding the origins of one's frames of reference and how these lead one to focus on particular sorts of explanations, situations and problems rather than any other.

Despite the cautionary tone noted above, realism brings a useful depth to social theorising. It does this by providing an explanatory framework in which to theorise what may be going on below the empirical surface. Key to this work is the explanatory power of generative mechanisms.

## **Generative mechanisms**

Generative mechanisms are located in the real, have the power to produce events and their existence has to be inferred from activity in the empirical domain. Mechanisms are explanations about how

material and human resources and contexts interact to bring about certain effects (Moren and Blom, 2003). They are metaphors to help explain what is going on. The outcome of a mechanism is 'always contextually determined' (Danermark 2001, p59). The case was made in Chapter 2 that constructive awkwardness was a behaviour likely to be exercised in the open systems of organisational life. The more open the system, the more complex the configurations of context, mechanism and outcome. Fleetwood and Hesketh's (2006) investigation of human resource management supports this assertion. They observed that events in the workplace are 'multiply caused, complex and evolving' (p.236). This level of complexity has implications for the scope of any realist explanation. Ackroyd and Fleetwood (2000) conceive of explanation in the following terms as;

'revealing the mechanism which connect things and events in causal sequences and requires the elaboration of structures, mechanisms, powers and relations that are the condition and the continually reproduced and/or transformed outcome of human agency' (p.15).

That is, reflecting Pawson's pragmatic description of theory as 'what works for whom in what circumstance' (Ackroyd and Fleetwood, 2001, p.4).

### **The stratification of mechanisms**

The conceptualisation of the real is deepened by the assumption that mechanisms operate at different levels, the specification of which is subject to discussion. Danermark (2001) describes mechanism at the social/cultural, psychological, biological and molecular levels. A key property of this stratification of the real is 'emergence'; that is, 'something qualitatively new emerges at one level that cannot be explained by mechanisms working at another level' (Danermark, 2001, p.57).

The realist investigation of New and Fleetwood (2006) into participation in conferences demonstrates the explanatory potential of stratified mechanisms. They developed an explanation that 'retroduced the ensemble of orders, structures, resources and rules, that could generate effects (p.89). They did this by asking people about how they felt about their interventions and what level of challenge they felt was acceptable. They noted that the value and acceptability of challenging interventions, as applied to self and others, was gendered. Men and women had different strategies and tactics and these were, in part, determined and re-created by the roles and rules embedded in the structures of, in this case, academic life.

New and Fleetwood argue that agents' behaviour is mediated by mechanisms embedded in particular structures and that structures exist with a degree of objectivity. Structures require agents to reproduce their effects but are not dependent upon these agents. If this were not the case, simply talking and thinking differently would eradicate oppressive structures.

## **The potential of mechanisms**

Mechanisms act transfactually. They continue to have influence, and the power to shape events, even if a countervailing mechanism is operating to prevent their activation. The literature review of bad leadership and genocide demonstrated that the potential for being constructively awkward is not always actualised even though some people knew something needed to be said.

The activation of countervailing mechanisms cannot be linked in a simple causal way to the context or the behaviour of any individual. Realism emphasises that the multiplicity of combinations of mechanisms, resources and contexts undermines predictive outcomes. A mechanism is best described as having tendencies which do not relate to any particular outcome, but is a 'force [which] drives, propels, pushes, thrusts, asserts' (Fleetwood, 2004, p.48). This complexity has implications for the knowledge that can be generated by a realist approach.

In the next section I explain how I developed a valid theory, capable of supporting effective development interventions and rooted in Grounded Theory principles.

## **Developing theory from the interviews**

I have chosen Grounded Theory because, as a novice researcher, it provides me with systematic guidance to organising, coding and synthesising interview data. Grounded Theory, like realism and ethnomethodology, to be discussed later, shares a flexible approach to data gathering; theory development; the status afforded to first person accounts; and a commitment to critically questioning and challenging the effect of structures on individuals and groups.

My reading of Grounded Theory research supported the assumption that working from Grounded Theory principles could help theorise complex human behaviour. For example, Ekins (1997) investigated how cross-dressers talk about and make sense of their experience and behaviour. He offers a practical insight in how to develop theory in relation to a complex human experience, already permeated by theory, that shapes how informants talk about their experience and may constitute an explanatory framework that some wish to resist and question. They may resist because it is oppressive or categorises certain behaviours as deviant in an unproblematised (in this case) medical model. Ekins' interest is in theorising the different accounts that people have developed, particularly in relation to the challenges they have faced.

Willumsen and Hallberg (2003) used Grounded Theory to theorise how a problematic dilemma in service delivery was managed. The dilemma was held by professionals and not part of the formal management discourse of the organisation. How do practitioners manage inter-professional collaboration, which requires standardised services that can be efficiently produced and monitored, and the requirements of individual children for tailored

services? They identify a 'readiness to act', to make different bits of service add up to a service useful to the user.

In a similar vein, Allen and Laliberte (2001) questioned what was going on to make some doctor-patient communications, in relation to younger women with breast cancer, so difficult. Thulesius et al (2003) investigated communication during end-of-life cancer care. Both are examples of grounded theorist commitment to going where the difficulties are. The purpose is to ask some basic questions. What are the main problems here and what are professionals and patients doing to resolve them and how can learning in one context be tested in others? For example, Allen and Laliberte (2001) discussed how generalisations can be made from the specific theorising with cancer to HIV/AIDS. Both share characteristics of power asymmetry where 'physicians' experiences can be incongruous with patient expectations' (p.54).

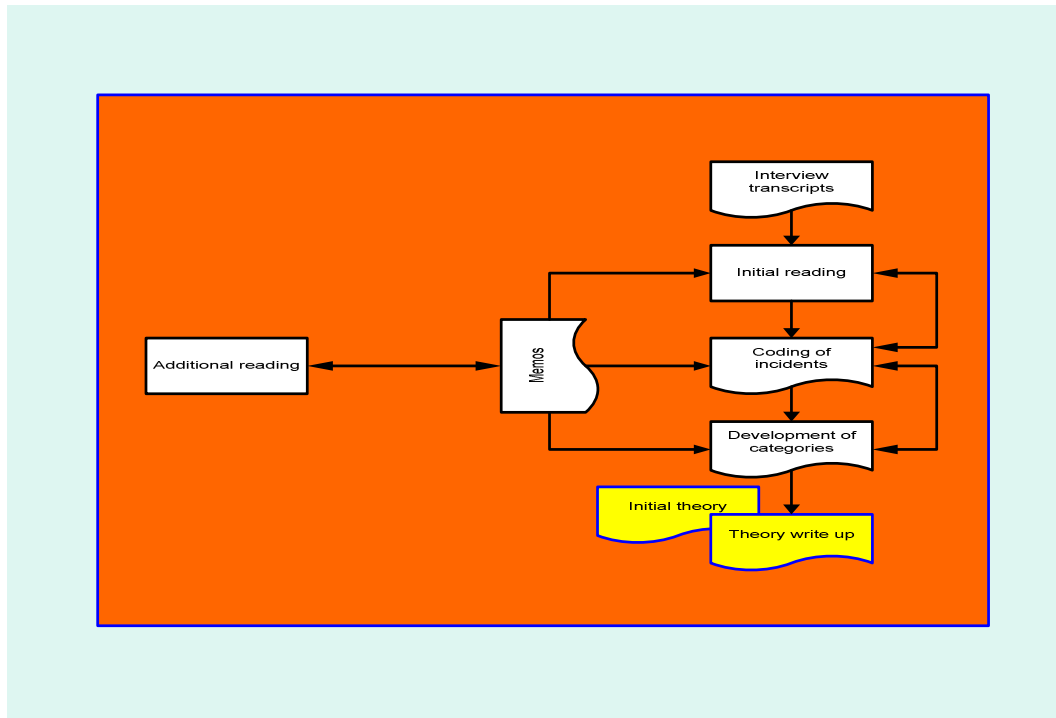
Theory is not presented as fact but as possibilities. The validity of theories is framed in terms of fit with the data, its relevance, workability and modifiability. This validity is developed through the constant comparison method and the development of increasingly abstract concepts and theories.

'Ultimately, the emerging content shapes how you use the tools. Your Grounded Theory journey relies on interaction - emanating from your world's view, standpoints and situations, arising from the research sites, developing between the data, emerging from your ideas, then returning back to the field or another other field...' (Charmaz, 2006, p.179).

Charmaz's comment reflects the characteristic movement between concrete data and abstract theory associated with the mid-range theory I want to develop. What follows is how I applied Grounded Theory principles to my data analysis.

## **Applying Grounded Theory principles**

Strauss and Corbin (1998) argue that theory development is based on a two-stage process. The first is inductive: the raw data, after an initial read, has to be systemically separated, synthesised across the data set and coded, the aim of which is to develop an 'analytic grasp' on the data (Charmaz, 2006, p.3). That is, to develop a theoretical framework that can explain 'who, what, when, where, why, how and with what consequences an event occurs' (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p.22). Glaser and Strauss (1967) propose a four-stage process to develop theory, which I followed.



**Figure 3.4** - the detailed data management process.

### 1. Initial coding

I first coded each incident, using NVivo 7 software (QSR, 2006), into as many categories as possible, comparing a particular incident with others already coded to a particular category. I coded incidents, rather than using word-by-word, or line-by-line coding, because I had specifically asked people about their experiences of constructively awkward events. I was guided in my coding by the criteria developed by Charmaz (2006). The final list of categories and their constituent codes are set out in Appendix C.

I tried to remain open to the meanings that could be construed from the data and not to be over-influenced by the theory developed from the literature review and prior experience. This analytic stance was enabled by a reflexive conversation about what I was coding and why. This stance evidenced Charmaz's requirement for an intimacy with the studied phenomenon and sufficient detachment to penetrate how people explain their experiences.

### 2. Memo writing

As I developed my coding, I was thinking about what I was noticing about different contexts; the origins and range of behaviour; and values and consequences of what was represented in an incident. I developed and noted these emergent ideas in my data journal. The memo work recorded in my data journal raised the initial descriptive categories to a more abstract level, as categories were integrated.

### **3. Developing categories**

This third stage, based on the theorising of stage 2, led to a sense that a more solid theory was emerging as categories became saturated. However, as the two examples of coding development below show, this was not a linear process.

#### **Example 1 - noticing the effects of gender**

I developed a new initial code ('access to target') to capture an emergent question about the need for the 'target' of a constructively awkward intervention to be present in the room. This obvious fact risked obscuring an interesting question about what a person, arriving in a particular place, embodied by their presence. Were they willingly present and engaged in conversation? Were they present as a senior manager, recreating particular authority structures; as a subordinate; or peer? Was the meeting planned or spontaneous? Could the interviewee require the person to be in the room?

This questioning triggered a more focused reading and then a text query of the interview data, to explore how a bounded conversation was established and the degree to which wider structures were replicated. This enquiry helped to define the importance of a 'boundary disposition' as a position which authorised questioning of what was going on in the final theory.

This review work revealed a bias in my reading of the data. As I went through each interview, identifying what people said they needed in order to get someone into a room for a conversation, I (eventually) noticed that only the women interviewed spoke at this level of detail. I noted the following in my data journal.

'The only references are for women. What is this telling me about self-authorisation? Do men and women think about this differently? If they do what is the evidence for this from the interviews? (29<sup>th</sup> October 2006)

Up to this point, I had been assuming that the constructively awkward interventions were characterised by a male confidence, in which questions of the right to speak were not consciously felt, and this confidence was reflected in the interviews. Taking a more critical stance to my initial assumptions helped me to widen my definition of constructive awkwardness and to notice that Mark, for instance, did talk about his lack of usual confidence when faced with senior NHS managers, people he thought knew more than he did. I moved from defining constructive awkwardness as a set piece event, boldly initiated, to thinking of it as a capability that could be expressed as spontaneous, confronting intervention to a very carefully worked out, tactical, but equally confronting intervention. The following is from my data journal.

It is a capability. Why am I saying this? Because of the distinction between the big constructively awkward events - the set pieces and people like Hazel who tell stories about having to manage the CEO around complaints, where they

have less power but they still need to be challenging. (30<sup>th</sup> October 2006)

The memo reminded me of prior reading and Zeldin's (1998) notion of the 'way of the weak'.

'The way for the weak to move the strong is not by force but by modifying their relationship, changing the angle of approach' and to do this requires 'a great deal of patience and, above all an ability to cope with fear' (Zeldin, 1998, p.162).

His concept seemed to support this notion of a tactical intervention.

### **Example 2 - the emergence of self-authorisation**

The original code for this process was 'decision to intervene', reflecting the attention I placed on understanding what happens prior to an intervention. Under this main code, I coded any material that seemed to be evidence of what was going on privately within interviewees. For example, I coded material that related to the expression of strong emotions, which tended to be anger. In my data journal notes I linked anger and disruptive effects on fluency of thinking and speech. I assumed that high levels of arousal would disrupt thinking and speech, reflecting my reading of Goleman (1996) that exercising emotional intelligence was a pre-requisite for effective communication. I eventually questioned this assumption and concluded that accessing and expressing emotions could also be critical in developing self-authority, particularly if one could not rely on more formal authorising contexts.

Also coded were references to catalytic events. These were events interviewees associated with feeling aroused and their sense of their values being challenged. Interviewees also talked about how their past experiences of being questioning and being questioned by significant others (role models) helped to determine their decision to intervene.

On the 8<sup>th</sup> October 2006 I noted in my data journal that the coding list was too complicated if my aim was to produce a mid-range theory capable of underpinning an educative intervention. This triggered a review of the code, to raise the level of abstraction of the initial codes. The descriptive code 'decision to intervene' was replaced by 'self-authorisation' which related more closely to the process I thought was being described. This code contained the evidence that underpinned the self-authorisation mechanism theorised and reported on in Chapter 4.

The analytic work in these examples reflects Glaser and Strauss's advice to move between the data and theoretical deliberations and to periodically 'stop coding and record a memo of your ideas' (1967, p.107). In the introduction to the literature review, I noted that the timing of the literature review is contested in Grounded Theory (Charmaz, 2006). My assumption then, and confirmed

here, is that while there are risks associated with prior theorising, the example relating to noticing gender demonstrates that without at least some prior reading and thinking, I may not have noticed my bias and its limiting effects.

#### **4. Theory write-up**

This final stage is the theory described in Chapter 4. It reflects my sense that what I had produced was a 'reasonably accurate statement of the matters studied, and in a form that others going into the field could use' (Strauss and Corbin. 1998, p113), reflecting my objective of producing a valid theory located in the wider literature as defined by Argyris (2000).

### **Compatibility of Realism and Grounded Theory**

This section assumes a working compatibility between a realist ontology and a Grounded Theory methodology. Ackroyd notes that realism supports 'methodological pluralism' (2004, p.137) and Strauss and Corbin emphasise the need for flexibility in method (1998). There are also differences, particularly in relation to the power of language to construct social realities in particular contexts. Both realism and grounded theorist attribute power to language, for example, the work of Allen et al (2001) and Ekins (1997) previously noted; the realist investigation of New and Fleetwood's (2006) into gender and contribution at conferences; and Moren and Blom's (2003) theorising about how social work interventions 'work'.

However, critical realism's commitment to social constructionism is weak, as would be expected in the stratified ontology described above. As Ackroyd and Fleetwood note, the role of discourse is accepted but realism does 'not take the next unwarranted step and conclude that the social world is merely socially constructed' (2000 p.12). The implications of this assumption are discussed with regard to how I positioned my self in relation to interviewees' accounts. I explore this challenge by considering ethnographers' insights into reflexivity.

### **Applying the insights of ethnography**

During the course of reading about how to investigate private experience where there is the risk of intrusion, I read a book by Armstrong-Coster (2004). This presents a longitudinal, in-depth set of interviews that 'open that silence' that surrounds the experience of dying (p.2). The narrative is organised in relation to four stages of dying, contextualised in a wider theory relating to how public policy and individual social contexts determine people's experience of their dying. What is demonstrated is her primary purpose of understanding how an individual experiences dying and to give them 'voice'. There was limited interpretation of their experience and, while this limits any theorising and generalisations, if one was working in a hospice or facing such an event, her work would have impact. You could be sensitised to some of the issues, reflecting Fetterman's observation about ethnography, that 'the insider's perception of reality is



instrumental to understanding and accurately describing situations and behaviours' (1998, p.20).

A similar focus on an individual's experience in a different context is demonstrated by Hockey (1986) and his exploration of the experience of the private soldier in the British army. His intention is also to tell their story 'as close, and as faithful to their point of view as I can make it' (p.5). He acknowledges that the best that can be done is an interpretation of this experience, filtered through his own idiosyncratic interpretation. He makes an element of this process transparent by acknowledging that he is focusing his data collection in relation to exploring how patterns of collaboration and conflict with structures enable the task of soldiering. Porter (2000), mentioned below, questions the validity of his account and, by implication, etic accounts generally.

The back cover of Hockey's (1986) book reveals that he was a soldier in the British army. He does not discuss the effects of this experience on his ethnography, though his familiarity with army life has presumably enabled him to get very close to his subjects. They trust him as they share the hardships of training; they treat him as an insider. Porter, as a realist, is critical because there is no questioning of why the soldiers think and behave as they do. Hockey's account is not pitched at the analytic level of grounded theorists like Strauss and Corbin (1998) and Charmaz (2006). His account, like my own coding examples above, may pay insufficient attention to reflexivity, as for example, does his unquestioned assumption about masculinity and martial values.

'It is the infantry alone who do the destroying the enemy face to face: the ultimate test of courage, aggression, endurance, of manhood' (Hockey, 1986, p.33).

Both these ethnographic studies seek what Goodley et al (2004) describe as 'immersion within, and investigation of, a culture or social world' to make public private experience' (p.56), to 'render the familiar strange' (p.57). Both studies reflect a preference for the emic perspective. The insider's perception of reality is instrumental to understanding and accurately describing situations and behaviours ( Fetterman, 1998, p.20).

Fetterman (1998) sets out a useful continuum. At one end are ethnographers only interested in the emic perspective. As we have seen, this is the domain of what Hammersley calls 'insightful descriptions' (1992, p.13) that aim to remain close to a person's experience with limited theorising. At the other end of the continuum is the etic perspective. I am interested, like Porter, in developing realist theory with an etic approach. That is, using categories and ideas that 'reflect the analyst's social science ideas'. My aim is to use and develop concepts from the prior theorising reported on in Chapters 1 and 2, to organise my findings 'and link them to significant theoretical arguments' (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007, p.194).

## Developing an etic perspective

Porter (2000) is critical of the emic perspective. He argues that ethnography, particularly from a realist perspective, is not to

‘ideographically illuminate small-scale social events, but to use examination of human agency to shed light on the relationship between human agency and structure (Porter, 2000, p.143).

Porter is drawing on realism’s critical stance towards the effects of structures. Structures can be oppressive, so adopting a non-evaluative stance towards people’s accounts is not appropriate. He concludes that ‘understanding actors’ viewpoints may be a necessary condition of social knowledge, but it is not a sufficient one’ (p.146). The effects of structure have to be included if there is not to be ‘analytic superficiality’ (p.146). He goes on to summarise, based on Hammersley (1992), further issues of concern. That is, do descriptions in themselves generate useful social theory and do these descriptions actually describe the social world as it really is?

An ethical question is raised by concerns about the effects of structure. To what extent does one have a duty to interviewees to alert them to this possibility? Charmaz and Mitchell (2001) make a distinction between ethnography, as entering into the subject’s world, and grounded theorists ‘going around’ with the intention of mapping the phenomena and maintaining a level of objectivity to the subject’s sense making. Davies (2008), discussing ethnographic interviews, talks about the co-creation of understanding and the possibility of new understandings developing for interviewees. Her advice is to focus on the process by which new understanding emerges, ‘to see these developing understandings in terms of the various perspectives on which they are based, rather than some gradual move towards the truth’ (p.115).

My own practice in the interviews was to err on the side of ‘going around’. I think there were two themes that evoked a more questioning stance. The first was to do with Mark’s reluctance to accept that the term ‘leader’ applied to him. In retrospect, I thought that I had been provoked by what I took to be the effects of racism, reflecting Macalpine and Marsh’s (2006) powerful white discourse in action. People who lead their communities during civil unrest can be criminalised. The second theme was to do with several interviewees’ sense, which I contradicted, that they were stupid when they asked what seemed to be appropriately challenging questions. I had felt it myself many times and realised how it had silenced me.

Hammersley (1992) argues that we do not have direct access to people’s experience. The task is not to try and reproduce this experience, but to represent it’. Such work ‘must always be from some point of view which makes some features of the phenomena represented relevant and others irrelevant’ (1992, p.50). Later, Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) talk of ethnography not as set of

procedural tools, but as a distinct analytic mentality with a 'particular mode of looking, listening and thinking about social phenomena' (p.230). They identify four components to this approach, which complement the curiosity and questioning embedded in Grounded Theory and realism.

### **Guiding ethnographic principles**

Firstly, the researcher should not jump to a quick conclusion, which may be a particular risk when the territory is familiar. For example, the coding examples presented on pages 73-74 evidence my too quick understanding about what constitutes a constructively awkward intervention, the issues being the validity of the thought produced and the lack of awareness that this rapid summing up was going on. However, Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) point out that at some point a hypothesis about what is going on must be constructed.

Secondly, attention must be paid to appearances and to questioning what they might mean. This is the critical realist commitment, espoused by Sayer (2000), to probe below the empirical surface and to locate a person's behaviour in a wider social, cultural, historical context, a context they may not be aware of. This analytic stance can be described as a point of departure, by the researcher, from the first person account. Hammersley and Atkinson think this divergence is necessary if the researcher's desire is to contribute to academic knowledge rather than 'further the practical enterprise' of the people in the study (2007, p.231). Davis (2008) supports an analytic stance that is close to the informant but also held at a distance, because useful knowledge is not gained through introspection or an identification with the subject.

Thirdly, the aim of the ethnographer's approach is to make the strange familiar, to facilitate understanding. This stance is underpinned by the assumption that people's behaviour can be understood even if it does not appear so initially. Simultaneously, it is to keep the behaviour unfamiliar to avoid misunderstanding it. This requires the suspension, noted above, of immediate explanatory accounts.

Lastly, the researcher needs to examine the contexts from which people act, including what they may be unaware of and remain interested in, and how they themselves think about how context influences them.

This section has set out the approach to the interviews and the status of the accounts produced by the interviews. My approach was etic and I have noted an ethical challenge arising from the co-creation process. In the next section I further explore the practical consequences of reflexivity.

### **Questions of validity**

Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) argue that the search for a methodology that facilitates uncontaminated access to data is

futile as 'all data involves presuppositions' by the researcher (p.15). Thus, reflexivity is a 'significant feature of social research' (p.15). The concept of reflexivity is a reminder that the stance the researcher takes to their research is shaped by prior experience, values and their social and cultural context. Thus, how reflexivity is managed relates to matters of validity and the claims made for this project's theory. Maxwell (1992) considers validity in relation to realist enquiry and develops an account which is compatible with Grounded Theory and an ethnographic approach.

'Validity is not an inherent property of a particular method, but pertains to the data, accounts, or conclusions reached by using the method in a particular context for a particular purpose' (Maxwell, 1992, p.284).

He argues that not all accounts of what is going on are 'equally useful, credible or legitimate' (p.283). Data processing and theory development means facing three sorts of validity questions:

- Interpretative validity -is reflexivity accounted for?
- Theoretical validity - is the explanatory account coherent and credible?
- Descriptive validity - is the account of interviewees' experience accurate?

I build my validity case by offering further evidence about how I was confronted by, and learnt from, my lack of insight into my own theoretical preoccupations, which risked both interpretive and theoretical validity.

### **Example - a lack of insight**

My initial ideas were rooted in the epistemic assumptions of the Tavistock paradigm (Palmer, 1997), reflecting my training. During an academic supervision my attention was drawn to the unacknowledged effects of this analytic focus. My attention was on the intra- and inter-personal experience of practitioners. While I had met one of the criteria set by Porter (2000), to make clear the assumptions that underpin the claims of the project, I had inevitably failed to notice what I could not notice. My supervisor, speaking from his own set of assumptions encapsulated by Critical Realism, suggested that structures, with their embedded rules and expectations, might be relevant to how people behaved. At the time this was a significant shift in my professional knowledge and an example of Mezirow's (1997) triple-loop learning. My advisor's intervention drew attention to how my assumptions determined my analytic focus, narrowed my sense of what constituted reality and threatened the validity of my theorising.

### **Managing reflexivity**

The effects of structure on agency and its explanatory potential are now obvious and have been reinforced by the commitment of this project to a realist perspective, an ontology shared by some of the authors discussed here. These are writers who argue that realism and a commitment to Grounded Theory principles

constitute a way of managing the challenge of reflexivity and its threat to interpretive validity.

Archer (2003), from a realist perspective, argues that the challenge of understanding the other and the personal and cultural situatedness of sense-making as researcher (what realists describe as the double hermeneutic) should not be turned into an impossibility. Both she and Manicas (2006) refer to the success of every day communication.

Archer (2003) argues persuasively that as 'authors' of our own private conversations we should not be seen as holding any 'personal warrant to know better than anyone else the meaning' (p.155) of what we think and what we say about that thinking. However, this is not to privilege third-party interpretations. Archer's position is to privilege the first person account of their thinking and feeling but to accept that this 'knowing' may be incorrect.

'I enjoy self warrant whenever I truly believe that I am thinking (or feeling) X at the moment; ipso facto, I am justified in claiming to know my own state of belief, even if that belief itself turns to be untrue' (Archer, 2003, p.50).

The other's account may be superior (or not). They may notice how our unconscious defences against anxiety shape how we consciously perceive ourselves, reflected in the account we give of our thinking and feeling (e.g. Klein, 1959).

However, conversation works despite the difficulties we may have. Manicas (2006) describes the researcher's task as coming to some agreement about what are already ongoing interpretations by members whose 'activities constitute their world' (p.63). He refers to the concept of 'exotopy' to describe the challenge of empathy required to understand another's world and face the fact that such objectivity and neutrality is always compromised by one's own subjectivity. Nance (2000) defines exotopy as attempting the impossible, 'to see the world from another's place' (p.12) and then return to one's own place because this is the only place from which action is possible, be it social action or the understanding of the other.

A way of conceptualising the disposition this requires is Boxer and Palmer's (1994) 'plus one' position, posited by them in relation to process consulting.

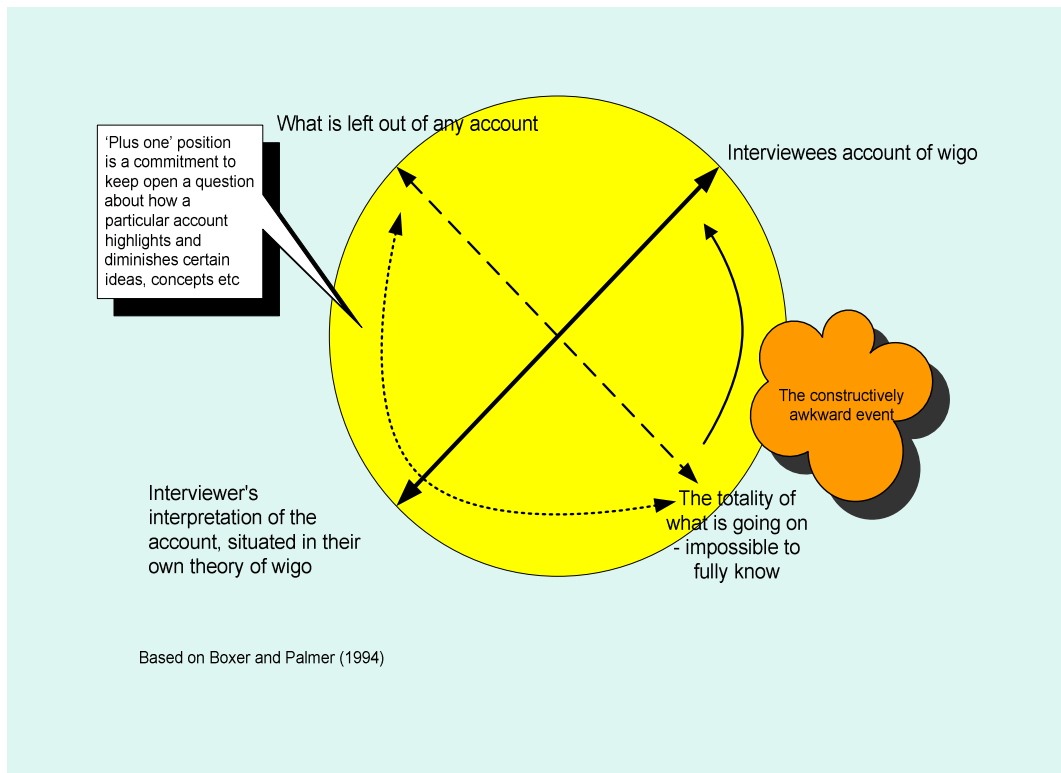
'[Consultants] articulate what is ignored or excluded by the terms in which the client's situation is described and interpreted. Inevitably, the conversation constructs readings of the situation, which highlight some aspects of the situation and how they are to be understood, and obscures others. It is like a torch shone into a room, which picks out what the beam strikes and leaves other things in darkness. The 'Plus One' position is an active refusal to forget this' (Boxer and Palmer, 1994, p.5.)

Such a position, taken in relation to listening and theorising, can help to manage the risk identified by Sayer in ethnographic work of a 'hall of mirrors effect in which our theories are confronting themselves or reflections of themselves, so that any distinction between subject and object has melted away' (2000, p.33). Davis (2008) notes that such a distinction is a pre-requisite of social research.

The following diagram is a way of conceptualising a disposition in relation to the ethnographer's commitment

'to explore the phenomenological reality of actors' understanding and interpretations and their effects on social structure, and not to take these interpretations as fully constitutive of social structure' (Davis, 2008, p.22).

The plus one position reflects Cecchin's (1987) capacity for curiosity. That is, to be alert to the possibilities in sense-making. Such a disposition is part of achieving the 'analytic incisiveness' of Grounded Theory by preventing gross identification with the subject and subsequent unfocused, random data collection, processed using stock categories rather than emergent codes (Charmaz and Mitchell, 2001, p.160). A lack of curiosity undermines both interpretative and theoretical validity.



**Figure 3.5** - the 'plus one position' as way of managing reflexivity

## **Managing theoretical validity**

Theoretical validity was managed by developing a lengthy literature review. The aim was to demonstrate the transparency, and a degree of comprehensiveness, of the initial theory. Yin (2003) describes an 'internal validity' (p.36). He argues that to demonstrate internal validity requires confidence in the accuracy of the causal explanations offered. Confidence has been built through the iterative nature of explanations associated with mid-range theory and the use of a realist ontology, one that 'asserts that there is a social world independent of our knowledge of it and an epistemology that argues that it is knowable' (Davis, 2008, p.18).

Confidence was built on the origins and clarity of the initial theory and its application to interviewees' different experiences. Evidence has been offered of the revision and development of the emerging theory.

## **Managing descriptive validity**

Descriptive validity relates to the accuracy of the account of the things heard during the interviews and ascribed to particular interviewees. The interviews were audio-recorded and the transcripts and follow-up notes retained. There were two technical failures during the recording. The first was complete failure to record the interview with Ester. I wrote notes of the session immediately afterwards and sent them to her for agreement. The notes were seen as a reasonable record of the key themes. The second failure was an interruption of the recording of the interview with Martin. About five minutes were lost towards the end. No follow up action was taken. The failure became clear during the interview and I switched to note taking.

The quotes used can be checked. What is not available from the transcripts is the emotional content of the interviews. However, its presence can be inferred by the language people used to describe their thinking and feeling. What is also missing is a sense of the frequency of the constructively awkward type events described. It is difficult to conclude how common the behaviour was in relation to that individual. However, such empirical judgments are not the focus. It is the explanatory logic, in which emotionality is identified as evidence of an underlying mechanism, which is to be judged.

## **3.4 Conclusion**

The investigation of interviewees' private deliberation presented interesting methodological challenges. The first was to develop a language, based on a realist ontology, to conceptualise what might be going on below the empirical surface. The second was to develop a practical approach to data gathering and processing. The use of Grounded Theory and ethnographic principles helped to identify and then manage the risks of prior theorising and were circuitous in guiding the approach to data gathering and analysis. The output of the data analysis processes is considered next.'

# Chapter 4 - Findings

## Introduction

This chapter introduces the voice of practitioners as revealed through the ten semi-structured interviews held in 2006/07.

### The structure of the chapter

The first section describes the contexts defined from interviewees' roles and experience. The second section proposes a set of three generative mechanisms to explain what is going on below the empirical surface. That is, how people, in particular contexts, with their personal and professional resources, constrained and enabled by the structure, produced the effects they recalled when asked about being constructively awkward. The overarching aim of this chapter is to develop the validity of the theory proposed by letting the reader read extracts of interviewees' first person accounts. The concluding section evaluates the process of theory development, first described in Chapter 3 and applied in this chapter. This evaluation is based on the criteria developed by Strauss and Corbin (1998).

## 4.1 The context of the proposed theory

The aim of the project is to understand what people do when they are constructively awkward in the context of a conversation. The objective of the project is to develop learning interventions by which people might develop their capacity and willingness to be constructively awkward. Chapter 3 identified mid-range theory as appropriate to developing the sorts of explanations required for valid development interventions (Pawson and Tilley, 1997).

Such a theory is more than a working hypothesis, and less than an overarching explanation of how to be constructively awkward in all the contexts that conversation can take place. This section identifies the contexts from which the subsequent theory is emergent from and may have some application to. Or, in Pawson's pragmatic terms, help 'figure out what kinds-of-things work for what kinds-of-subjects in what kinds-of-situations (2001, p.11).

The following four contexts were embedded in the interview criteria, based on the three experiences discussed on pages 57-58. These experiences were identified as having an impact on the interviewee selection criteria. Subsequent work to process and analyse the interview data (e.g. memo writing reported on page 72) brought into sharper relief the importance of gender and organisational context in terms of the tactics and self-authorisation required by the constructively awkward practitioner. It should be noted that other criteria, likely to be relevant in determining context such as ethnicity and age were not explicitly considered. The omission of ethnicity is considered in Chapter 6.



## **Contexts**

Context is defined by Pawson and Tilley (1997) as referring to the 'spatial and institutional locations of social situations' and the norms and values and interrelationships found in them' (p.216). I considered the backgrounds of the people interviewed and the situations in which they described their experiences. Four contexts were identified that were assumed to influence how people behaved and were responded to.

### **Professional role**

Interviewees had formal roles. These roles were rooted in professional competencies, authorised by wider professional and societal values and exercised in organisational contexts, and more open, community based settings.

For example: Nick as a doctor questioning the assumptions of other doctors in the context of medical conferences; Martin questioning how disabled people are represented in a formal policy making process; or Jo confronting poor planning in an IT meeting.

### **Organisational**

Interviewees acted in formal, hierarchically constrained meetings between peers, juniors and managers. These meetings may be planned or ad hoc. Interviewees could assume a level of authorisation to speak, linked to seniority and the ways in which local culture determined what was acceptable management practice.

For example; Nicky confronting a doctor about poor advice to a patient; or Jo responding to a corridor challenge by the CEO about the behaviour of a subordinate.

### **Self-authorized**

Interviewees established and sustained a context conducive to what it was they wanted to say. They used their capacity to self-authorise, to invoke what Moren and Blom (2003) call a 'context mechanism' (p.59). Such a mechanism, characterised by self-disclosure, could evoke a more receptive context to whatever the practitioner has to say<sup>4</sup>.

For example: addressing fellow commuters on train about the use of mobile phones; alerting the captain of a yacht to a collision risk; challenging the assumption that mental health service users could not speak for themselves; and challenging the explanations

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<sup>4</sup> Moren and Blom (2003) studied how social workers and clients relate to each other to create change. They theorised that when a social worker spoke from their own experience of challenge this could enable the client to believe in the good intentions of the worker rather than it just being a 'job'. The social worker's intervention moved the context from formal, in which the client took up a position of resistance, to a more collaborative stance. Different rules were assumed to apply in the subsequent conversation. This concept sensitised the data analysis to the possibility that unfavourable contexts could be changed.

that a group of black community leaders held about their sense of disempowerment.

### **Gender**

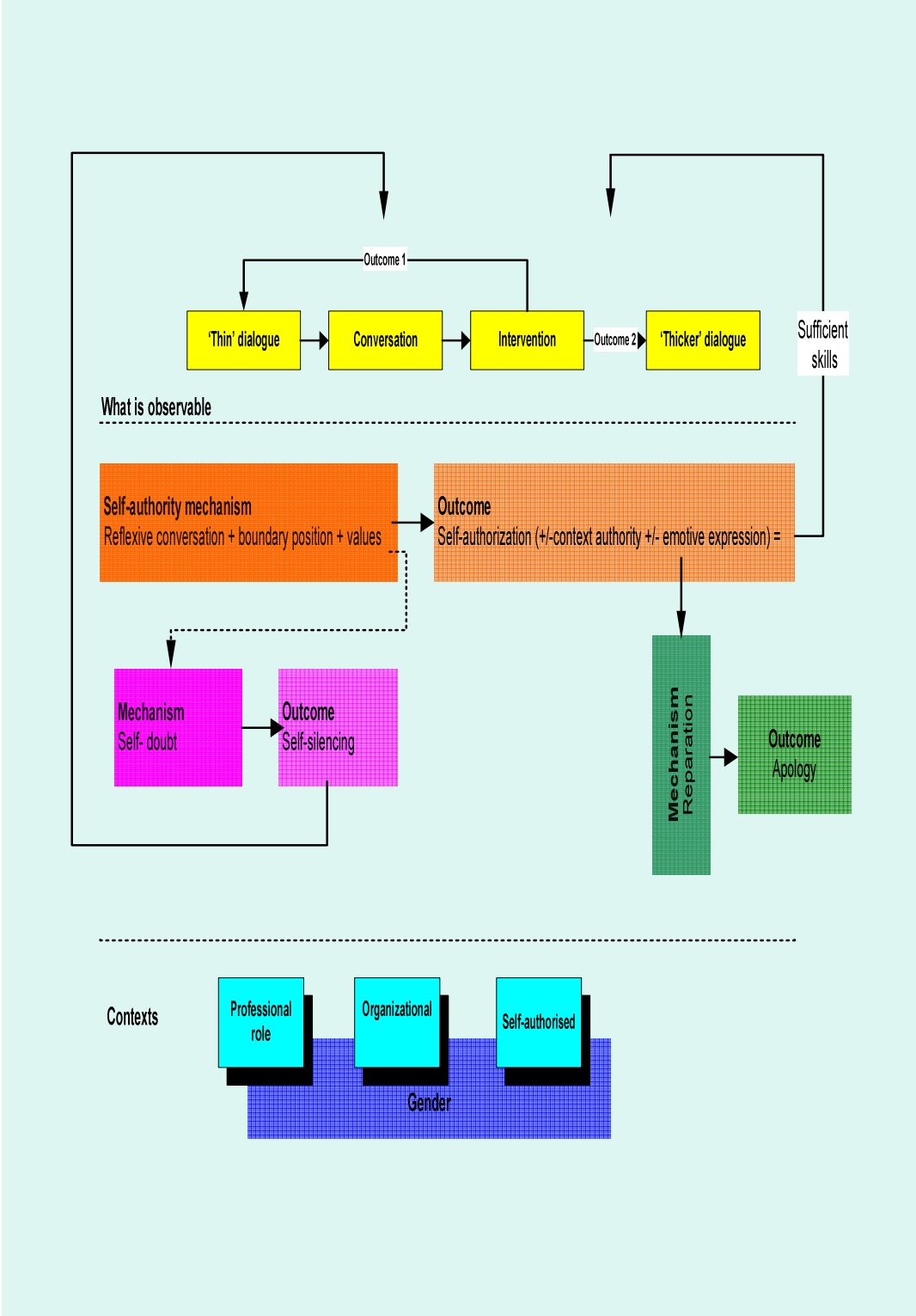
While interviewees did not discuss gender, this context was theorised from the data to explain the differences in how self-authorisation was developed, the tactics used to initiate and sustain an intervention and the valency for self-doubt and self-silencing.

For example; Nicky's very thoughtful approach to her CEO about a complaint and Peter's explosive confrontations with his church members.

These contexts are not exclusive. They are an approximation of the fine-grained contexts described by interviewees. They are assumed to be sufficient to produce valid mid-range theory as they are 'likely to have a common thread running through them traceable to more abstract analytical framework' (Pawson and Tilley, 1997, p.39).

## **4.2 The mechanisms**

The following figure identifies the empirical surface in terms of the conversational model first proposed on page 8. Three mechanisms are proposed (self-authority; self-doubt; and reparation) in relation to the four contexts identified.



**Figure 4.1** - an overview of the theory

## **A self-authority mechanism**

This mechanism has three components which need to be assembled to produce sufficient self-authorisation to initiate an intervention; the outcome is not guaranteed.

### **Component 1 - reflexive conversation**

Reflexive conversation, discussed on page 42, refers to private, internal conversations, which have causal powers, the purpose of which is to deliberate about what is going on and how one might be involved. Archer (2003) identifies two types of reflexivity, both of which are concerned with self-examination and differentiated by the level of confidence placed on these deliberations. The communicative reflexive is more likely to doubt their thinking and seek reassurance from others. Seeking another's opinion can undermine self-authority and delay or postpone action.

#### **Communicative reflexivity**

For example, Nicky in a follow up note after her interview described an experience crewing on a yacht. She has noticed a buoy in the channel and after some private deliberation, tells the captain. The crew laugh at her, saying it was obvious. The captain thanks her and tells her that saying what may be obvious is important for a crew relaxing after a race. Reflecting on her experience she said:

*'It means that I am left making a value judgement about whether or not to speak up in the face of too little information or confidence to make that very decision. I guess what I mean is that if I had enough info. and experience (in relation to those I'm with) I would not be having the conversation with myself about whether or not to speak up! ...I find it really frustrating and total illogical nonsense.'*

This sounds like a communicative reflexive conversation. The decision to speak is delayed while she debates if she has sufficient information and confidence to speak. Despite these deliberations she does speak, suggesting that she has a way of increasing her agential powers.

The uncertainty v action dilemma is present in Jo's interview. As a senior manager she felt she had a duty to give feedback. The content of this feedback was based on what she noticed. Like Nicky, as she noticed, she thought about how much others knew compared to what she knew. Her decision to feed back was preceded by questions about her right to speak. Accessing her values appears to be integral to having an effect on her sense of agency.

*'I think there's something about integrity and honesty and integrity is really deep in me around actually not ignoring it and everyone just gossiping behind these people's backs... It's [her proposed intervention] probably coaching I*

*suppose and you've got to have a legitimacy to be able to do that. You know, who the hell am I to do that?'*

### **Meta reflexivity**

By contrast, the men did not talk much about their doubt<sup>5</sup>. Their reflexive conversations tended to be instrumental or about what others were doing. An example of the former comes from Mark. He talked about two voices that reflected his origins and current work.

*'...my internal conversation might be between the grass roots me and the a bit more professional me and that's probably how I ..... that's probably how I managed to keep my balance.'*

He was talking about presenting to NHS organisations. His reflexive conversation synthesised his formative experience with the requirements of the task. He talked about matching his voice to the audience. His reflexive conversation was self-monitoring like Nicky and Jo but lacked the self-doubt. Steve, a doctor, was the most confident and articulate about his right to challenge, coining the term 'rattling the bars' to describe the intention of much of his research. His reflexivity was nearest to Archer's self-confident practitioner. Below, he describes his thoughts as he presents a paper at a conference. He does not question his 'right' to be there. His deliberations are about managing the event and his own behaviour.

*'...you're really multitasking in your brain which is exciting...you're marshalling all the thoughts of how you might deal with that [question/challenge] but you're also conscious of how the rest of the audience, to what extent are they supportive of this person? To what extent could you play this off against what somebody earlier has said? ...So obviously if you sense that actually they're overstepping the mark, then making clear that you're not an easy target and smacking them quite hard back, but obviously not doing that to somebody who is genuinely saying, I don't understand this point, could you explain it more? ... And that's the excitement I suppose of coming out and thinking, yeah, I handled that pretty well, I think I got it right. Or mmm, I should have been...'*

Steve talked about being part of the context that he was challenging and recognised that his self-authority was partly based on the generative effects of his professional and organisational context. The extract also shows a reflexive process during the intervention. This helps to keep it on track so that he does not behave in a way that threatens his authorising context (he did not want to come across as a bully). Like others, he reviews his performance because he thinks this delivers better performance. Nicky also talked about a review process but it was characterised by self-doubt. This doubt was symptomatic of a basic value about intervening and being brave.

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<sup>5</sup> It has to be said that the possibility of gender difference only emerged after the interviews, so I did not ask about doubt specifically.

*'I think about afterwards everything I wish I'd said. And then I think, but if you were there and that had come to your mind. Would you have been brave enough to say it?'*

Nicky found contemporaneous review difficult if she felt angry or bullied. She could describe her emotional state but not effectively control it. The control of emotions is present in Peter's response to a question about reflexive conversations prior to intervening.

*'But it's like there might be warning bells which I stubbornly ignore. If there are warning bells, and I suspect there are, if that's the internal voice, I ignore it with a kind of reckless wilfulness.'*

Peter recognises his emotional state and ignores it, as if too much critical deliberation on one's emotional state may undermine self-authorisation. This proposition begs a question about what triggers an emotional response. Two possibilities arise from the data: worries about looking stupid; and values being challenged. The challenge to values was felt internally and becomes public when linked to an intervention. That is, in some situations, in relation to some values, some people felt obliged to intervene.

The next section describes how people positioned themselves in relation to the events they intervened on.

## **Component 2 - taking a boundary position**

Martin a disabled man, institutionalised as a young child, talked about being an outsider. He knew that some people wanted to be 'inside', but he knew he always migrated to the outside because he was interested in difference rather than sameness. He felt being an outsider enabled him to do some awkward questioning.

*'It's about asking the questions that people are thinking but don't want to ask because of the culture. And I always feel that I'm outside and being outside, you can ask questions which may seem bloody obvious and probably are bloody obvious but people don't ask them, and it's sort of the Emperor's new clothes scenario'...*

The outsider position is linked to formative events. Mark's experience of discrimination, prison, civil disturbance and community leadership painted a rich description of the possibilities that arise from being on the boundary. He was an outsider, initially determined to justify his treatment as unwanted. He talked of prison and meeting someone who challenged his self-destructive logic and suggested the 'outsider' position was a vantage point.

*'...he gave us some books, some serious books that was written by the Black Panthers, Malcolm X from in the 60s and their idea of religion, their beliefs and their struggle in this name of blackness was totally different to what I'd been doing. So I think I started to learn and understand and I then didn't want to do things that was going to*

*undermine my blackness. So I couldn't go out and behave in a certain way and justify it because of racism because it's down to me how I react to the things that impact on me and then that was the beginning of my journey.'*

Mark had talked about having two voices. This appears to be a way he can manage the risk of working with established services and not lose his critical outsider edge.

### **Using difficult experiences**

Acting from a professional and organisational context, rooted in formative experiences, was important for Ester, a refugee from the Bosnian war. The mobilisation of deeply painful personal experience was risky. While it authorised and sustained her interventions she worried about 'prostituting her experience'. These experiences that formed the values of her work were emotionally raw. The re-experiencing of these emotions in the present could lead to depression, which she had finally learnt to manage.

Ester, Mark and Helen were people who spoke to their use of emotionally laden personal experience as an element in their self-authorisation. This suggests an important difference between those who can primarily invoke a professional role to authorise their interventions and those who achieve this status by processing profoundly personal experiences. However, Esther in particular, noted that while a professional may be very interested in this personal experience, she also had had it turned back on her as evidence of poor control and unreliability.

Esther talked of being frozen out of a discussion about racism by a Home Office facilitator at a conference when she attacked the U.K. press for its racist reporting of refugee matters. Two observations can be made. Professional role context, enjoyed by the facilitator, can be used to silence by interpreting meaning and invoking self-silencing. Secondly, practitioners who mobilise primary experience to develop self-authority use their boundary position as a vantage point and have more work to do than people who can claim professional status by way of training and qualification.

### **The Emperor's new clothes**

Steve knew he was a privileged insider, who could draw upon professional authority and choose to locate himself on the boundary, a place of opportunity and excitement

*'I'm both a sort of insider and an out... I suppose fundamentally I see myself as an outsider...It's a sort of love-hate though, you want to be part of the group but also you hate the group and I guess that is the outsider position. It's not that you completely reject it and don't want anything to do with it, that would be much simpler in a way,- it's this sort of strange ambivalence.'*

The boundary role could be temporary arising from newness in a job and being surprised by another's intervention. Jo linked joining and feeling authorised to questioning.

*'Because when you're first new in an organisation, to some extent, I wasn't aware of the culture, the when you speak and when you don't speak in the [organisation] and so I spoke because what I could see, it's a bit like the Emperor's got no clothes on, I could see that what they were doing was wrong. And what would be interesting would be if about a year later, if they'd started to go down this line, would I have had the same confidence?'*

The Emperor's story speaks to the dilemma that the constructively awkward practitioner can draw attention to. What is obvious is suppressed and speaking to it is a refusal to go along with the group. Equally, like the boy, the practitioner can be dismissed as new or naive. Jo noted that as she became established her capability to question diminished. However, Peter told a story that suggested this capability can be reinvigorated by surprise.

Peter described working for three years to amalgamate three parishes. On the day of signing one group refused. He lost his temper.

*'It was more like a blurting out so it was destructively awkward, if you see what I mean. And the time when I did it most, which is a really searing life experience for me, when I was caught off-guard - shock came into this... But at the time, I just lost my rag. I made what I'm told was one of the most fluent and articulate theological speeches of my life. I quoted every Old Testament Prophet and Jesus.'*

Loss of control is not necessarily synonymous with a loss of thinking, though he later questions the appropriateness of such an emotive intervention. The shock of the moment seems to have triggered a violent discontinuity with an assumed shared task. It was as if he stood alone while holding the shared task of amalgamation.

The boundary position is characterised as being part of what is going on and being alert to dissonance. People can find themselves in this position because of some significant and traumatic experience. Holding this position can be difficult, there are pressures to conform. The next section explores how people talked about their values which alerted them to dissonance and events which triggered the desire to intervene.

### **Component 3 - expressing values**

The people interviewed had a strong sense of what was right and wrong. This ethical framework concerning behaviour and thinking was applied to themselves and others. When asked about the origins of these values, people talked about early family life and a tolerance of argument. The data suggested a strong commitment to confront when faced, in the words of Helen, 'wrong thinking'.



For Helen, wrong thinking had directly affected her life. As a mental health service user, other people's assumptions had determined her experience. Now, as the leader of a mental health arts project, when invited to participate in service developments, she would speak up on behalf of herself and service users. Similarly, Martin, as a disabled person, felt he had a duty to confront prejudicial thinking and action.

*'I deal with anything to do with disabled and deaf people... the role is actually being constructively awkward to ensure that disempowered people get included and the issues that aren't generally integrated into strategy in the mainstream are.'*

Mark, as a black activist, had access to decision makers. He was a member of Department of Health advisory groups and a police liaison group. This access was achieved by targeting these groups for membership. He believed them to be influential. He knew he had to manage his emotions and behaviour otherwise he risked losing people's interest and being dismissed as an angry activist. He was driven to challenge the structures that had worked against him and others.

*'When you've lived all of those kind of experiences at a very young age, that's burnt inside you. I don't want to die without having seen some change.'*

And:

*'I'm a community based kind of character, I don't know why... I've grown up around large groups of black males, many of them not as fortunate as me in actually having developed some skills and knowledge and a bit of ability and understanding about the system. So I would feel I would be a sell out if I didn't do something to try and improve matters and improve life.'*

Helen, Martin and Mark created and accessed formal community and organisational contexts from which to act to change things. They were determined and methodical in their challenge of wrong thinking. This deliberate long-term approach was shared by Steve who, by his own admission, was a part of the dominant culture. He talked about the MA programme he directs. His aim is to disrupt his students.

*'I would say to all the students at the start of term, we will disrupt you in this first term, and at Christmas, at the end of the first term, you will probably be floundering and feel you know less and you're less certain about the things than you are now.'*

He felt that it was his responsibility to act in this way. He was not interested in telling people what to think but in making them confront and manage plurality in sense making. His values were rooted in the belief that good doctors were capable of testing and developing their ontological and epistemological assumptions.

Other interviewees described more emotional, spontaneous, value driven interventions.

For example, Nicky described feeling 'affronted' when her professional decision making was challenged. Peter talked about being 'affronted in my value system' when something that is unfair 'impinges on my sense of justice and my sense of values'. Ester, when confronted by a racist interpretation of data, felt compelled to challenge 'wrong thinking'. All are committed to speaking up for others.

An example of a spontaneous intervention was given by Peter. He talked about a church meeting when a request by a black church to use the parish hall was turned down. The following reflects the role of emotions in unplanned value challenging 'events'.

*'I believed it to be racist in character but for some reason the trigger point was that when I challenged them to give me a theological basis for their decision and they not only couldn't, but what made me see red was that they didn't really see where that came into it particularly. ... And I blew my top and told them what I thought of them, delivered a judgment that was somewhat politically reckless but it didn't matter, but it got me into conflict for a while with them and much more' ...*

Spontaneity appears linked to his level of arousal, a connection that questions the link in the emotional intelligence literature between confronting skills and high level of emotional control. Peter was also the person who knew about the important skill of apologising in recognition of the fact that he could upset some people with his emotive expression.

Interviewees intervened when they felt their values were challenged as part of a long-term strategy of engagement with decision-making bodies or in a spontaneous, emotive way. All interviewees were involved in work that required them to question and challenge, so it is perhaps not surprising they could be value driven. Having a clear set of values sensitises people to, and draws them into, situations where they are likely to feel challenged, which requires an intervention.

## **Outcome - sufficient self-authorisation**

Reflexive deliberation on events in order to think about how they may relate to one's values, and a disposition to intervene when challenged, generates in some contexts sufficient self-authorisation to initiate an intervention. What constitutes sufficient self-authorisation appears to be both personally and contextually determined. Context can increase/decrease the sense of self-authority and the sense of authority can be transitory.

Mark invoked his role as a community activist as driving his desire to improve things and the recognition of this role enabled access to membership of important consultative groups. Martin linked his risk taking with the authority derived from organisational membership. This membership helped him to know how and when

to make decisions. Jo as a ward manager in a children's hospital linked her authority to her formal responsibility for a physical area and her concern for her patients. She was very clear that anything that happened within the ward was her domain and her responsibility. This seemed to authorise her role as an advocate, a role which in her view authorised challenge.

*'I was the parents' advocate and the children's advocate, so I could say, no, I need to get this simplified because I really need to understand that simplified because I really need to understand that because I'm doing it on behalf of them.'*

She made a distinction between feeling authorised in this formal context and in her current senior role, where the opportunity to act for others is harder to determine.

*'I'm asking on behalf of myself and I would find that harder to do because I'm not doing it on behalf of somebody else. Although when I do that - so if I say right, I need to be able to translate this for my team and I've got to be able to communicate it to them really easily, so I'm now going to ask a really stupid question which I might know the answer to (pretending), if you could just explain it to me, then I'll be able to explain it to them really well - it's kind of using someone else isn't it? It's cheating'.*

### **Speaking up for others**

Jane talked about becoming the advocate for disaffected staff. While she felt disaffected, she realised she was expected to speak up for herself and others. She talked about her exit interview, a formal context, in which she is junior. She reminds herself that she has something to say.

*'I was taken into a room and we talked and I was just honest with the reasons why I was leaving and I think then I was challenged that, as a professional, I had an accountability to speak up and say a bit more openly the frustrations that were there and again, I was just coming to realise that I was probably frustrated and needed to move on.'*

Speaking up for others is important and Peter suggests that this authorising context can be invoked. Here, he is talking about challenging people on behalf of others about mobile phone use on a train.

*'I find it intrusive and I find it insensitive. Why don't they realise that this is upsetting people? And on this particular day it became too much.'*

Peter is articulating something about the role of the constructively awkward practitioner. The task is to speak and to get others to face 'otherness'. That is, the person or issue that is not referenced in conversation because it cannot or will not be heard. For example, Mark talked of representing his 'hard to hear community'.

## Effects of professional status

Nicky noticed how her authority to challenge was influenced by her role. As a clinician, other clinicians would listen and act on her advice. When she became a manager, the same people reacted differently, as if she had forsaken her professional authorising context.

*'I used to say well exactly the same amount of background, and knowledge and effort, and professionalism. They'd say 'Oh no, we don't need to do that'. And he said that's what management's like. Clinical people always have more clout. The clinical people always have the patient's interests behind them.'*

Mark also described the effects of changing context on his authority. He spoke at a conference on a subject he had deep personal experience of but he was in an unfamiliar context.

*' [I] did a racial health conference a couple of years ago with Sir Nigel Crisp, oh, I was terrible and that was ..... I mean health is a whole different bag. I'm willing to challenge policing, I went through all kinds of policing so I was willing to challenge. Health is just like where all those clever people are, who know more about your body than you know about your body so what can you say to them? How can you challenge them?'*

## Use of emotions

A way some people developed and maintained their authority was through the expression of the emotions aroused as their values were challenged. Implicit in the mobilisation of personal experience to augment authority was the real and imagined risk of losing control. Jane described how her emotions and the worry that they would be extroverted, disrupted her ability to think and act. This worry undermined her self-authorisation.

*'Because what I was finding was that the emotion was what was shutting me up and making me go into myself because I was scared that I was going to cry and blub and look pathetic which makes it even worse. And so to do that, I've tried to take the emotion out of it.'*

Peter described his emotional response leading to destructively awkward outcomes.

*'A sense of I'm going to have to speak to this, it's out of control. I mean obviously all the physiological things, increasing of pulse rate, dry mouth, nervousness, anxiety – all those sorts of things – a heightened sense of drama, a sense of tension, inevitability, a complete reckless abandonment of caring about the consequences. The 'here I stand I can do no other'. It's a kind of, it might be a function of a kind of mad grandiosity. I don't always ..... it's not trying to achieve anything at this point, it's a discharge – a discharge of rage and fury in order that the opponents should know where they are wrong...'*

He suggested this emotionality was due to a lack of emotional and political literacy, and posits an intra-personal mechanism. The physiological arousal is such that it overwhelms his thinking. However, he also talked about being at his most articulate when he was aroused.

Nicky and Jo draw more specific attention to how context may influence the management of emotions. In the more formal professional contexts they operate in, differences of opinion appear more choreographed. There are conversational conventions built around power relationships,. Nicky described a careful strategy of alliance building and checking with colleagues before pushing her professional challenge about the care of a patient. This challenge highlights a more subtle and tactical, constructively awkward intervention used to manage the hierarchical relationship with a consultant. An 'all guns blazing' intervention was not an option. Nicky wants the challenge to be contextualised as if it were an ordinary conversation, characterised by her conscious use of open questions. This controlled intervention was achieved despite feeling extremely anxious and her sense of having no choice. Her ethic of doing the best for her patient self-authorized her intervention. She described a reflexive commentary on her emotional state to maintain control, in contrast to its absence in Peter's description of 'reckless abandonment'.

*'I don't go in all guns blazing But also them in terms of their response. So that they're not feeling as challenged. Just so that, you know, it is an ordinary conversation, instead of a very difficult one. I try and make it into a "What do you think about this?" "I'm a bit worried." Kind of thing.'*

The consultant reacts well to being managed like this. His values are not challenged. Jo told a similar story in relation to her chief executive who was very unhappy about a report that one of Jo's team had written about high workloads for the team. The chief executive uses her power to change the context from an informal to formal conversation. The daily early morning ritual of friendly banter is suddenly replete with hierarchical power.

*'So I'm expecting the chit-chat banter and she said, can I just ask why your team, your subordinates have raised the issue that they're stressed and their workload is too much... So this isn't a chi- chat, so I then reverted into okay, I'm in a formal meeting mode now'.*

Jo rapidly controls her emotions and levels of disclosure. The chief executive asks her to punish the subordinate by taking away her favourite piece of work. Jo is appalled and says no and turns her anger on herself, evidence of the high value she places on her advocating role.

*'I didn't particularly challenge it in an eloquent way, I just went no, I don't think that's necessarily the sort of thing I would do. And I felt very angry with myself when I came*

*out of it because there's no way I challenged it in the right way and she still expected me to do it.'*

The management of emotions appears critical in mediating outcome. Mark, Nicky and Steve mentioned the strong influence of role models who express desired intellectual and emotional characteristics. Mark spoke about being issued with an ultimatum by a prominent black MP who had helped him find his first development job. Here, he relates what was said to him that got him to face the question about his capacity for good.

*'...you've got some potential and you've got a lot of power over the guys...and you need to decide if you're going to use that power in a positive or a negative way.'*

Feeling and maintaining a sense of authority can be a fragile outcome to the assemblage of the mechanism components. The next mechanism explores another facet of the emotive expression considered here. There is some evidence that increasing the emotional volume facilitates eloquence and securing attention. Sometimes emotions can be counter-productive. The next section explores a reparation mechanism.

## **Reparation mechanism**

Some people were concerned about going too far and wanting to be fair to others. Peter recognised that he could focus too much on the person, rather than the ideas they were expressing. The person became the focus of his anger.

*'No, I'm not at all able to leave it. .... [IA] .... I have to repair it, as far as it's possible. So I would do what I could, I would always do what I can.'*

He would use the structures associated with his role as priest, like a sermon or parish newspaper to 'back pedal'. This was not a panic response to losing control. The decision to repair arose from sober reflection and was a move in the constructively awkward intervention. Push people too hard, bully them and they forget the message.

Mark talked about his work with the police advisory group. He gave feedback about their capture of two of the three murderers of young girl. He demonstrates an anticipatory reparation. While other advisors were congratulating the police he balances his congratulations.

*'I'm at pains to say I'm not knocking you, at least you've taken part of the problem off but to give you more congratulations, this is what I expect...'*

He understands the difficulties the police face but explains having people who have committed crimes free in the community enhances their criminal status, undermines the rule of law and makes them more dangerous.

*'Telling them in that way I think made the message more palatable and later on, they came to me and tried to, I don't know if befriend is the right word, but tried to let me know, tried to convince me that they do take these matters seriously.'*

Nicky described a confrontation with the head of theatres, a powerful peer in the hospital. He was very angry with her challenge and attempted to prove her factually incorrect. Nicky, who rarely challenged unless she had done her research, was right. Later she phoned him to ask for his help. Her request was a tactical reparatory act.

*'And he said "You are one of the few people I've ever met in my life, who constitutes having an argument as a basis for a good relationship" . And he was more or less... I think he found it quite amusing that the next time I spoke to him, I thought now I know you can I ask you a favour. And he, I think, thought oh I would never gonna talk to him again'.*

Nicky's perception of the challenge is different to the recipient's, who appears to associate confrontation as more likely to damage relationships. Nicky assumes that the relationship is robust and can contain the challenge.

Martin also paid attention to managing relationships, to keep the challenge contained in a conversational context of policy development.

*'recognising that tension that was there enabled me to be able to intervene in a way which was constructively awkward in its best way - that it was managing my irritation, managing my colleague's irritation because my colleague was much more irritated and tends to react with emotion and not think about the overall strategy and get angry which isn't helpful'.*

These extracts suggest there is an attempt to understand the other's experience and behaviour in the context of being challenged. There was also recognition that the decision to challenge is linked to higher levels of arousal and that this can undermine empathy. Empathy seems to help match the level of challenge to the real or imagined capacity of the recipient to hear and manage it.

The picture so far is of some very determined and skilful people. It was also the case that a sense of authority was vulnerable to self-doubt. The other outcome of this mechanism was that people did not intervene even though they felt they should do.

## A self-doubt mechanism and self-silencing

This mechanism was developed to enable thinking about the effects of the anxiety associated with feeling stupid. The preparedness to talk about this feeling was, in this small sample, differentiated by gender. For example, Nicky talked about 'not wanting to look a plonker'. This would be to say something she thought might be blindingly obvious. This anxiety was triggered and sustained by a reflexive conversation that rehearsed a dilemma characterised by; *should I speak and risk being wrong and judged or stay quiet and risk the consequences if I'm right?*

*'I undergo an extremely uncomfortable period of uncertainty and internal wrangling, usually accompanied by a rapid heart rate and even hyperventilation in the most scary scenarios e.g. high level meetings.'*

Hazel described a difficult internal conversation when she made a mistake talking to her chief executive about a complaint.

*'So he would fire questions at you and if I was forced to say I don't know, that made me feel- stupid girl! Kind of thing.'*

She agreed that this voice could undermine her authority. Helen talked about a large public meeting where she felt patronised by the speaker. She could not decide whether to have another go at explaining herself.

*'I was trying to do a battle with myself, this really doesn't matter, it doesn't matter and you're probably not going to stay. I felt I was telling myself it doesn't matter, I think that's what I was doing and I was determined that I was going to have to go at some point very soon because it was very annoying as well.'*

She is talking to herself about her dilemma and tries to resolve the tension by saying that it does not matter. Jo similarly deliberates on a question about what others might know, setting up a real or imagined mismatch in understanding between self and others.

*'So maybe I've got it wrong, because everyone else seems to be acting as if things are okay and one or two other people seem to feel the same as me but I don't know, are they allies or are they enemies?'*

In a later extract, Jo added the dimension of time to these deliberations.

*'I tip over into the point of, right, I should know that, I'm now senior, I now have to be seen to be credible and I need to gain people's trust and respect, I cannot now ask the stupid question - I don't know when it is exactly.'*

This comment seems to mark a transition from the meta-reflexive to communicative reflexive voice. Mark was the only male to speak about self-doubt as undermining his confidence to speak.



At the health conference noted above, he was disabled by the thought that his audience knew more than he did. This triggered, as with Helen, a rhetorical 'how can I challenge them?' question, a form of self-silencing.

In these examples, reflexive deliberations lead to silence even though these internal conversation may be noisy and uncomfortable. If a catalyst for this is the avoidance of feeling publicly stupid, not all people responded in the same way. Some people explained their self-doubt in terms of something lacking in others.

Peter, discussing public challenge on the train, described his intervention as 'idealistically stupid'. Martin, confronting professionals whom he describes as acting in 'bureaucratically stupid' ways, uses his own apparent stupidity as a tactic to get attention focused on his way of thinking.

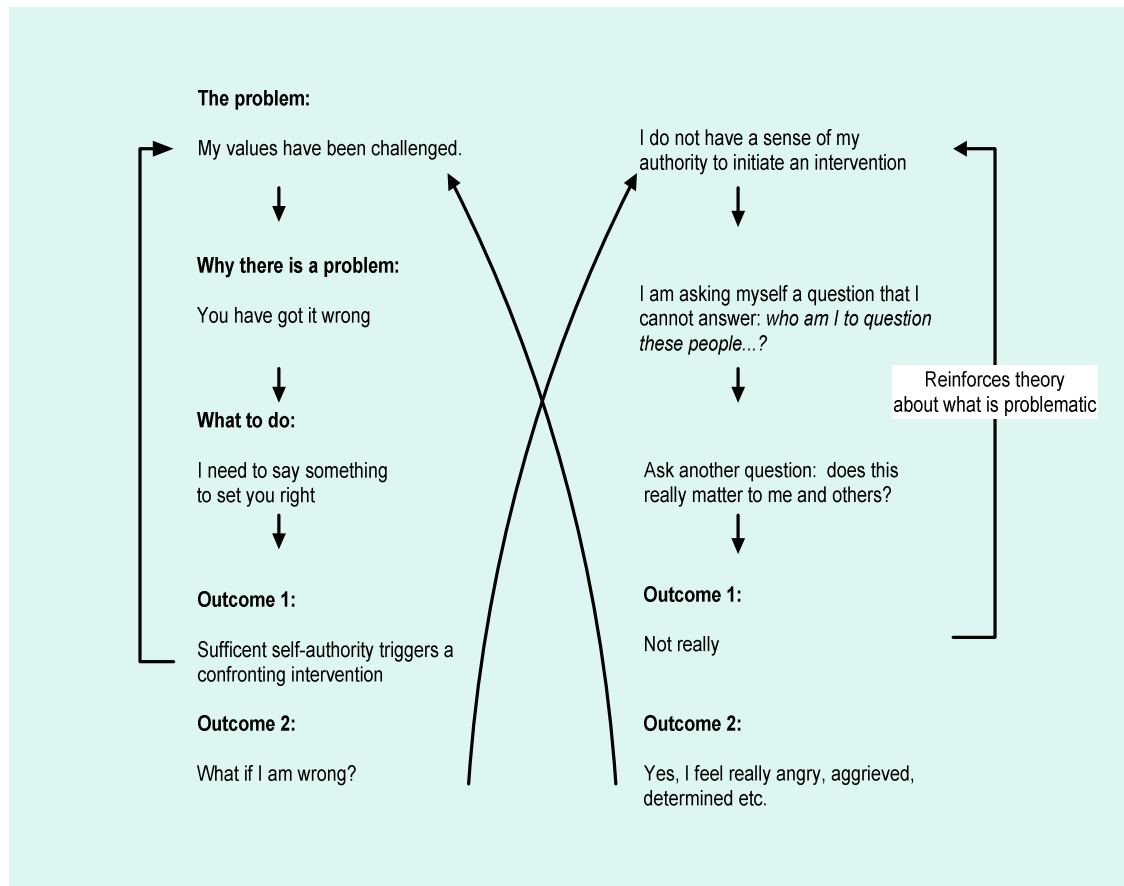
*'So, just throwing in some examples of stuff which is completely ridiculous, humorously ridiculous and stupid but also examples that actually ask questions.'*

Nicky, later in her interview, gave an example of not being listened to; an experience that might have triggered self-doubt. As she told the story she talked about 'we'. Her role with others was that of an intermediary between a regulatory body and services. She talked about her service background and that some people at the centre did not have sufficient understanding of service life. They needed to be put right. She sounded confident despite a hostile response. This confidence is assumed to be linked to her sense of certainty and acting in a group.

*'...and most of us didn't say anything in that report that we hadn't already said. And everyone else was stunned. And so clearly we weren't getting the message across. Or we weren't being heard. We were being shut up or something. So it can happen en masse as well as individually I think.'*

### **A dilemma**

This mechanism can be characterised as a dilemma. The following diagram is a simple representation of this dilemma. It is not clear how people moved from the unproductive circular - 'what if I am wrong', to asking the question - 'does this really matter?' This latter question can bring in to focus situations that may challenge personal values.. Some, like Mark and Peter avoided this dilemma. While they did experience the level of self-doubt felt by Nicky and Jo (in some contexts), their doubt facilitated a reflective practice, required to develop their interventions. It was not felt as fundamental to their sense of competence.



**Figure 4.2** – self-doubt as an outcome of a dilemma using the format devised by McCaughan and Palmer (1994).

For example, Steve talked about being well prepared. He did not challenge unless he was the best prepared in the room. If he was intervening it was because he had decided to do this because he knew it mattered. Peter modelled another way of managing this dilemma. He did not seem to think about being wrong. Such questions were occluded by his emotional arousal. If he felt passionate then it mattered and if it mattered, he should intervene.

*'A sense of I'm going to have to speak to this, it's out of control. I mean obviously all the physiological things, increasing of pulse rate, dry mouth, nervousness, anxiety – all those sorts of things – a heightened sense of drama, a sense of tension, inevitability, a complete reckless abandonment of caring about the consequences. The 'here I stand I can do no other'. It's a kind of, it might be a function of a kind of mad grandiosity. I don't always ..... it's not trying to achieve anything at this point, it's a discharge – a discharge of rage and fury in order that the opponents should know where they are wrong.'*

This is a complex mechanism, the analysis of which is limited by the small number of interviewees. However, Mark and Peter were perhaps the most rooted in a professional context. They were also men and gender does seem to be an influential context in

mediating the degree to which people felt undermined in some contexts by internal and external questioning of their authority and competence.

### **4.3 The skills of constructive awkwardness**

Two capabilities can be identified across the interviews. People could reflect upon their behaviour during and after an intervention and they believed in being very well prepared.

The reflective stance is not a surprise, given the selection criteria for this project, that people should be able to talk about and review their experience. This reflection has two dimensions: a capability to look back on life experiences; and a capability to focus on a particular event. An example of the latter is Mark. He, like Martin, had a difficult time growing up. He was able to talk about this and see how past decisions underpinned his current attitudes and behaviours. Here, he is talking about his decision not to engage with white society.

*'And I believe that we have to take some responsibility – we have to be saying to our young, hands up, we made some decisions back in the day that are really killing us now and back in the day we decided not to engage. We decided not to engage and now we don't have the skills to engage. Something I want to do is find some of those buggers who did engage, because not everyone made the decisions that we made.'*

He is not afraid to say how he thinks now and that he made a mistake. He tolerates the different choices people made back then. His reflective stance appears to lead to a more grounded approach to challenge. He has a sense of how he has developed and this may make him less at risk of being captured by his emotions.

Peter, who talked about his own therapy, spoke about losing his temper and remaining coherent. What may connect him with Mark and Ester, who used her emotions to invigorate her sense of authority, is that they have an understanding that they have had, and will continue to have, an emotional life. Emotions can be used, challenge can be pleasurable and the experience of this pleasure does not have to be suppressed. The evidence from the interviews is thin, but John said:

*'So, I have practised endlessly, honing emotions to use them as data as opposed to being at the effect of them or their victim, if you like, or simply having to discharge some form of words to get the emotion out, which is perhaps sometimes what I've done.'*

The review of intentions and emotions can be concurrent with the intervention. Nicky talked about her challenge of a consultant over the treatment of a patient they shared. As she talks she

questions herself. It is not a doubting questioning but one that seems to help her manage the pitch and yaw of the challenge. It suggests she is thinking about how the consultant might be thinking and feeling.

*'But try and prove... Get him to do something. And I think saying, you know, maybe I'm wrong here. But is it worth the risk of... or the risk of aspiration is no great deal if you've not... can you not humour me? And I don't know why that was different, but I was prepared to stand my ground.'*

Martin, an advocate of careful planning, seems to have a template in his head about how the intervention should go. He follows this and is not over-determined by what others are doing or saying.

*'I spend a lot of time thinking through what I'm going to do, that often in meeting situations I will maybe be spending more time thinking about the response or the strategy or the tactic rather than listening to exactly what people are saying at the particular moment in time.'*

Finally, Steve demonstrates the post-event reflection in which he sifts the experience to identify what went well and what he can improve on.

*'You run the tape ...you've got a complete record of virtually every second. It's incredible, you don't need a video tape, audio tape, it's all there and you're going through and thinking, oh that was good and you smile to yourself, hah, got him on that or that point, that's always made and that was so tedious that somebody always makes that point but it's so easy to whack back, and then ..... So, yeah, and feeling, yeah, and also lessons learnt, you're also thinking, mmm, the answer to that point actually would have been much better if I'd used ..... come at it this way.'*

Being well prepared was valued by Martin, Hazel, Nicky, Mark and Steve, in particular. Preparation was linked to developing and sustaining self-confidence and authority. Mark and Steve were particularly adept at creating contexts in which their superior preparation could be put to maximum effect. For example, Mark believed in understanding an organisation's policies better than its members. .

*'And if you understand what is in there and you put yourself in a position where you actually hold them to account in terms of delivering on it, then you can make some real impact in your community.'*

Reflecting on behaviour and being well prepared emerged as important skills. These modest conclusions do not reflect the skills embedded in managing one's reflexive voice, or bearing the anxiety associated with challenge.

## 4.4 Conclusion

This section evaluates the process of theory development, first described in Chapter 3 and applied in this chapter. This evaluation is based on the criteria developed by Strauss and Corbin (1998) which are listed in Table 4.3.

1. How was the interview sample selected and is the reasoning clear?
2. What major categories emerged from the data?
3. What is the connection between these categories and the interview data?
4. How did prior theorising guide the interview questions and process?
5. What is the validity of the theorising in relation to the categories?
6. How was the theory modified in relation to new understandings about categories?
7. How and why was the theory finalised?

**Table 4.3** - the evaluation criteria developed to evaluate the project's theory (based on Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p.269).

Taking each criteria in order:

- The interview selection criteria were explained on pages 57-60. They were developed from work based experiences and the underpinning criteria abstracted. Proximity was argued to be a significant benefit of interviewing people who I knew. The interviews elicited interesting and detailed first person accounts. Accounts that are part of the reality against which any theory has to be tested (Maxwell, 1992). People spoke freely and talked about difficult experiences that suggested more than simple social conversation. There was some emotional depth and people offered their interpretive accounts of what they were describing and valued the time to talk.
- The major categories from the interviews are set out in Appendix C.

- The validity questions implied by the third criteria were set out in Chapter 3. Evidence was presented to demonstrate a theoretical and practical understanding of the issues arising from reflexivity, first identified in Chapter 2. Descriptive and theoretical validity is demonstrated by the interview excerpts identified in this chapter, included to show how the practitioner voice was used to develop theory.
- The development of two theory iterations has been an explicit objective of the project. The aim has been to focus the literature review and to make explicit, in terms of managing reflexivity, theoretical presuppositions and to guide the interviews. However, I was aware of a reflexive conversation symptomatic of a desire to relate what I was hearing to my theory. That is, how does this story prove or add to my theory? My attention and emotional response could be overly orientated towards my theory. This led to a failure to think about what was not being said and not fitting with my account. A consequence for example, was a lack of questioning about what skills people thought they used and the origins of their ethical base.
- Prior theorising has been made explicit and the final iteration of the project's theory has been evidenced by relevant extracts from the interviews
- Two examples were presented of changes in thinking in relation to categories. The first related to noticing the effects of gender which opened up understanding about different sorts of constructively awkward interventions (see Chapter 3, p.78). The second related to the emergence of self-authorisation from the category 'decision to intervene' (see chapter 3, p.79).
- The project was organised around three iterations of theory. The purpose of the final version was to integrate the voice of the practitioner with the learning from the literature and critical review of experience. This has been achieved.

The implications and application of the project theory are considered next.

# Chapter 5 - Discussion

## Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to develop a robust account of constructive awkwardness, capable of sustaining the development interventions that are the objective of this project. This chapter aims to satisfy the criteria for theory development set by Strauss and Corbin (1998). That is, what is offered here is a 'reasonably accurate statement of matters studied, and in a form that others going into the field could use' (p.68).

The development of such an account requires a process of theory synthesis. Pawson et al define this as follows.

'Realist review starts with a preliminary understanding of that process, which it seeks to refine by bringing empirical evidence to the highways and byways of the initial theory map. It thus begins with theory and ends with - hopefully - more refined theory' (Pawson et al, 2004, p.31).

A preliminary understanding of constructive awkwardness was described in Chapter 1. This was based on a review of professional experience and reading prior to the commencement of the project. A more developed theory was reported in Chapter 2. This was based on the selected literature. Chapter 4 reported a theory that was grounded in the practitioner experience. These three theories, a mix of the experience and abstraction, now need to be integrated into a mid-range theory.

### The structure of the chapter

Section 1 reviews the theories reported in Chapters 1 and 2. Section 2 summarises the final integrated theory and includes some examples from the interviews to illustrate the points being made. Section 3 translates this theory into a practical intervention, the details of which are located in Appendix C. Section 4 summarises the revised theory.

## 5.1 Theory review

The following table identifies five key headings that have been abstracted from the initial two theories (from this point referred to as the 'initial theory'). The elements of each theory were allocated to one of the five headings. The five headings define the components of the final theory and have been developed to manage the integration of the initial theory developed from the interview data. The project's objective is to develop useful development interventions based on what Barnett calls 'working knowledge' (2000, p.24). Such knowledge is characterised by what works in particular contexts. It has been argued through the project that to test such knowledge requires a level of detail about the values and capabilities people may require; the psychological processes involved; how behaviour is mediated by contexts; and what sort of outcomes are desirable.

|   |
|---|
| <p><b>Practitioner capabilities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effective practitioners can critically examine, by comparing and contrasting alternative policy formulations, the effects of the context in which they working and contemplating a constructively awkward intervention. (Theory.1)</li> <li>• The behavioural elements of the intervention are similar to those associated with confronting and being assertive. (Theory.2)</li> <li>• The practitioner requires a capability to manage themselves in uncertainty, characterised as a self-induced liminal space. (T.2)</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>Practitioner values</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The constructively awkward practitioner is capable of collaboration and compliance in pursuit of a shared primary task and putting the benefits of membership that such commitment generates at risk by their commitment to dissent. (T.1)</li> <li>• The possession of a defined ethical framework seems to also be linked to self authority. (T.2)</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>Mechanisms</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dissent is the observable effects of a psychological process, that involves a reflexive voice. This process and its outcomes are mediated by the structures that constitute the context in which the act of constructive awkwardness is being considered. (T.1)</li> <li>• The intervention can 'work' because power, embedded in particular structures and contexts is assumed to be exercised and modified through conversation. In particular those conversations that are defined as 'thick' by Appiah (2006). (T.2)</li> <li>• Self-authorisation is linked to a reflexive voice as defined by Archer(2003). This voice can alert and propel a person to intervene or be the cause of self-doubt. (T.2)</li> </ul>   |
| <p><b>Effects of context</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conversation, the narrow context of the constructively awkward intervention, is determined by wider social, cultural and local assumptions about who gets to say what to whom, how and when. (T.1)</li> <li>• The authorising policy context of challenge is mixed. The espoused leadership theory validates challenge a desired capability. The theory in use suggest that the constructively awkward should be prepared for criticism. Any development activities have to be mindful of this reality. (T.1)</li> </ul>  |
| <p><b>Outcomes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• This dissent is expressed in the desire to establish and engage in the 'thick' conversations described by Walzer (1994). The purpose of such conversations is the critical questioning of the assumptions and frames of reference that help determine what is going on and what needs to be done in relation to this analysis. (T.1)</li> <li>• Constructive awkwardness is a self-authorized act that seeks to articulate an uncomfortable truth, (act the Fool) which questions how power is used to impose and recreate particular meanings. (T.2)</li> <li>• The scope of the intervention is limited to bad leadership described by Kellerman (2004) excluding the extreme leadership associated with physical harm and deliberate and psychosocial harm. (T.2)</li> </ul> |

**Table 5.1** - the core components of the initial theory



The following section integrates understanding about these core components with the theory developed from the interview data. The results are two-fold. Firstly there is greater clarity about the options and possibilities facing the constructively awkward practitioner. Secondly, the scope of the project theory is defined.

## **5.2 Integrating theory**

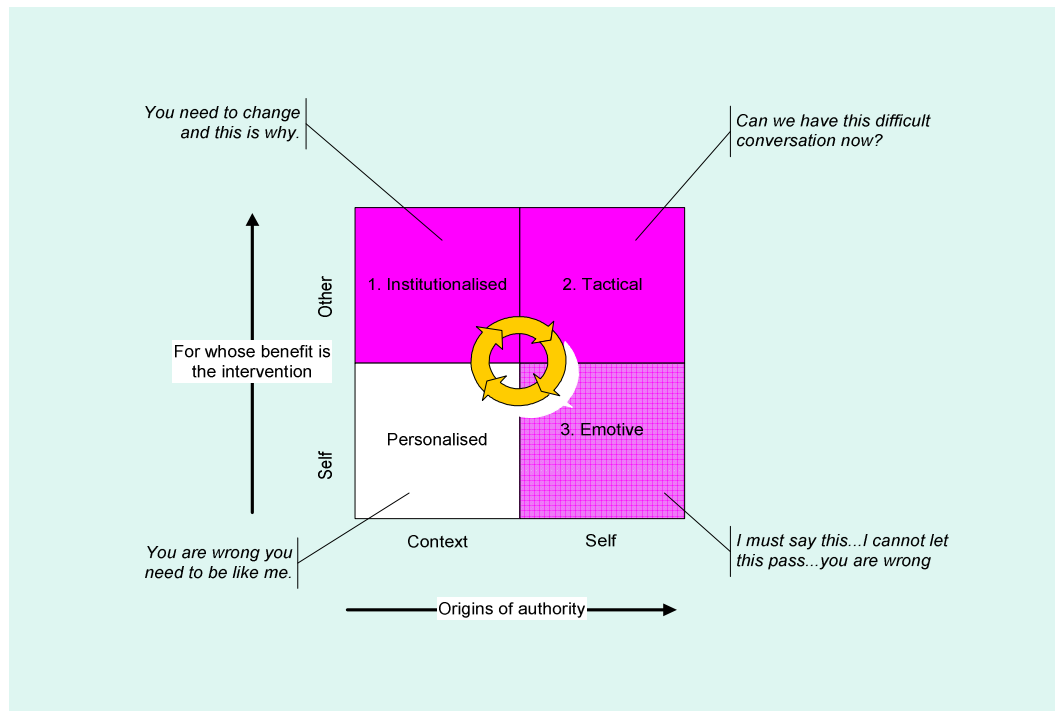
The six components of the final iteration of a mid-range theory of constructive awkwardness are set out below. The initial theory maintained a degree of separation between the elements described as capabilities, values, contexts and mechanisms. A key conclusion from the interviews and data analysis is that when these elements are dynamically linked, it is possible to define the scope of the theory and ask some interesting questions about how these various elements interact to produce outcomes.

### **A range of interventions and contexts**

The initial understanding was that constructive awkwardness was synonymous with Heron's (1999) confronting taxonomy. This comparison did not adequately reflect the range of interventions, experiences and contexts described by interviewees. It also did not reflect the dynamic relationships between these three elements.

I have used the following terms to more accurately describe the range of behaviours described by interviewees. The terms are 'emotive', 'tactical', 'institutional' and 'personalised'. These terms define both the contexts in which this theory of constructive awkwardness might be applied and the sorts of behaviours and experiences that might be required and experienced. In Critical Realist terms, what is being defined is 'what kinds-of-things work with what-kinds-of subjects in what kinds-of-situations' (Pawson, 2001, p.11). The following diagram has been developed to set out these positions.

The horizontal axis distinguishes between the primary sources of the authority to initiate an intervention. Authority is derived from organisational and professional contexts or from self. The vertical axis distinguishes between the different intentions of the intervention. Is it about improving things for others or is self-expression primary?



**Diagram 5.2** - Three sorts of constructively awkward interventions

### **1. Institutionalised (context + other = 'thickness')**

This intervention is characterised as an institutionally authorised disruption. It is a crafted disruptive intervention for the good of the other. It seeks to challenge epistemic and ontological assumptions in the sort of educative context espoused by Schein (2004), Argyris (2000) and Mezirow (1997). The ensuing conversations can be considered 'thick'. Practitioners can assume that their self-authority is enhanced by their professional and organisational membership, which can also enable access to the authorising policy-making process. They will need to keep in mind the risk that they may be experienced as oppressive.

An example is Mark's MA course. The course reflects his self-appointed duty, authorised by a university, to disrupt and challenge trainee doctors. He acts because he thinks it will produce better doctors and they should explore the source of their certainties in conversation with themselves and others.

### **2 Tactical (self + other = 'thickness')**

The intervention is characterised by high level tactical skills about the planning, timing, framing and follow up of interventions. The aim is to engage the other, who is more powerful, in 'thick' conversation. The aim is to represent the 'other' and to get that agenda taken up in the wider system conversations. The practitioner moves the strong by being conscious about how they relate to such people and are prepared to adjust their approach based on their effect.. It is an intervention characterised by Zeldin's 'way of the weak' (1998). Lacking positional authority and mindful of the negative effects of emotive expression, the person

must use their skill to create a more conducive context (see point 5 below) in which to help the other notice their need for a conversation. Self-authority is not lacking but is tempered by a realistic appraisal of personal power and context. The person is motivated by their sense that there is something wrong and which needs saying and that they must compete with other agendas.

An example is Nicky's challenge of her powerful peer. She knows he is wrong, so prepares well, does not react to his anger and follows up the conversation, reflecting her belief that colleagues can and should disagree.

### **3 Emotive (self + self = risk of thinness)**

The intervention is characterised by high challenge and emotive expression. It is presumptuous and spontaneous and the initiator has a sense of their rightness. This rightness includes the right to speak and to critically comment on what is being said. The intervention relies on self-authority and is capable of reducing the undermining effects of professional and organisational contexts, although this may be temporary. The aim is expression of what matters to self. The development of 'thick' conversation is secondary. Indeed, there is a risk of 'thinness' in that the intensity of the ethical purpose expressed may silence the recipients.

An example is Peter who, faced with racism, has to make a stand. He cannot and will not hold himself back and let it pass.

### **4. Personalised (context + self = thinness)**

This intervention is on the fringes of the constructive awkwardness repertoire. It is characterised by the combination of a strong personal belief about being right and high levels of context /positional authority to enact that belief. While this position cannot be directly associated with the interviewees it can be inferred as a risk arising from the strength of rightness some people expressed and what is known about bad leadership. The leaders described by Kellerman (2004) believed in their cause and accessed and created contexts which allowed their values full expression. This is a context that is risky when characterised by leadership hubris and a weak followership, incapable of the denial proposed by Cohen (2000).

There is no explicit example from the interviews. A theoretical example would be a leader who, acting in the best interest of one group fails to notice, receive or hear feedback that points to a detrimental effect on others.

## **Self-authorisation is critical**

There are two elements to this section. The first briefly describes the internal process by which self-authorisation can be generated and the second describes how context can mediate self-authority.

## **Internal process**

The initial theory used the concept of meta and communicative reflexive voices, as defined by Archer (2003), to acknowledge that there was evidence of an intra-psychic process, that generated the level of self-authorisation necessary to initiate an intervention. There was evidence that speaking up could be risky, so speaking up was assumed to require a particular effort. The theory developed from the interviewees, utilising generative mechanisms, has added some detail to this formulation.

A self-authority mechanism was theorised from the data. Constituents of this mechanism are the assemblage of a reflexive conversation, a boundary position and an explicit set of values. The outcome of this mechanism is sufficient self-authorisation. When this is linked to positional authority and a capacity for emotive expression, coupled with sufficient skills it can result in an effective intervention. This assemblage is fragile. It can be disrupted by excessive emotional expression and the effects of structure embedded in local contexts. Differentiating conversations as 'thick' or 'thin' remains a useful shorthand for the cultural context and challenges of such conversations and their respective outcomes.

## **The effects of context on self-authorisation**

The initial theory did not adequately differentiate between the different roles occupied by the constructively awkward practitioner. Interviewees were embedded in a range of professional/ third sector roles, operating in a variety of organisational contexts. Interviewees who occupied professional roles in public sector contexts appeared less concerned with self-authorisation and, therefore, less prone to learning anxiety (Schein, 2004). Belonging to formal structures bestows authority and such authority, to have an effect, does not have to be consciously recognised. As Macalpine and Marsh (2006) note, silence can be a discourse of power.

The community based leaders tended not to be embedded in such authorising contexts. This suggests that such leaders may rely more heavily on self-authorisation. This authorisation, which requires access to emotions and formative events, can confront such leaders with a risk. Emotive expression can be judged adversely, particularly by public sector leaders who may reflect the ambivalence towards challenge noted in Chapter 2. They may also adversely judge emotive expression because they value the level of self-control associated with being emotionally literate (Goleman et al, 2002; Goleman, 1996). Such values can be internalised, fuelling the self-judging of the meta-reflexive voice some interviewees spoke to.

This difference in reliance upon self-authority requires that any development activity has to focus both on intra and inter-personal processes and the effects of structure. A rule of thumb underpinning the development interventions is that the further

someone is from formal recognition of their role, the greater the risk of being silent in the face of challenges to their values.

## **The good of the intervention has to be questioned**

The initial theory did not adequately question the implied 'good' of the constructively awkward intervention. The four positions developed above assume the authority to speak and that this is used to say what one thinks is right. The literature on bad and degenerate leadership suggests that 'right' does not equate with 'good'. Questions therefore arise about who defines what is 'good', how this is done and by what right do people intervene. How to respond to these questions has slowly emerged from an initial conversation with a colleague, reported in my learning journal, in which my implicit assumption of the good implied in 'constructive' was questioned.

'Why is this behaviour called 'constructive'? Constructive has a positive meaning usually to improve something. So, implicit, is the notion of a current state that needs improving and a decision about what needs to change to make things better. So, this is yet another notion of the 'good'. But why is the CA leader's notion of the good any better than any one else? Why do they think they are right? What do they tell themselves?'

(5<sup>th</sup> June 2005)

The literature review noted what Sinnason (1991) and Rallison and Moules (2004) describe as the ethical necessity and willingness to be the voice of difference, a voice that does not seek the other's permission to draw attention to what is being ignored. Such a value-based stance was expressed by most interviewees. They described having to intervene using a range of the tactical to explosive interventions. Their position is characterised by Peter's comment about his behaviour in the face of racism. He describes a 'reckless abandonment', not caring about the consequences and an ethic of 'here I stand I can do no other'. Listening to him and other interviewees it was clear they had an ethical framework, which helped them notice and question what it was, about what was going on, that needed their attention.

This noticing is assumed to be the content of a meta-reflexive conversation, in which the questions posed by McKie (2004), such as - *what is asked of me in this situation? what sort of community am I part of ?* - are being deliberated. Such deliberations, followed by an intervention, suggest that Storr's (2004) criteria for ethical behaviour is being met. What people espoused (e.g. racism is wrong) was reflected in their behaviour. In some contexts they initiated challenge. It was also apparent that those working from institutional contexts did not leave their ethical values at home. They were congruent with Solomon's (1997) argument for the practice of micro-ethics, where individual values are aligned to one's organisational role.

## **How is the good of the intervention agreed?**

If intervening in a challenging way can be justified, how is the 'good' of the message conveyed to be evaluated? While not doubting the sincerity of interviewees I could imagine being silenced by some of their more emotive interventions. In the literature review, Blackburn's (2001) argument that we need some agreement about how to manage the basic transactions that define human activity was summarised. He includes in this agreement how we will manage disagreement and argument. His argument is that while underpinning values do not need to be the same, two criteria should be applied to test the quality of the process through which the good is eventually defined. These questions are; have the effects of power been factored?; and have there been sufficient 'thick' conversation during the process?

This line of reasoning suggests that a pragmatic response to the problem of defining the good of the constructively awkward intervention is reasonable. There will be competing notions of what constitutes 'good'. Exploring the process by which the 'good' has been defined is an aim of the constructively awkward intervention. As a practitioner questions another's notion of the good, they must also keep within their analytic frame their own assumptions about what they take to be correct thinking and behaviour. This review process can be a reflexive process on one's own or shared with others and/or is an explicit part of the conversation established by the constructively awkward intervention.

## **Anxiety (and perhaps pleasure) have to be faced**

The initial theory made an association between anxiety and constructive awkwardness. To be constructively awkward requires the capability to get and sustain another's attention. Without this, there is no conversation. At its most simple, this is having the skills to formulate thoughts into words and speak when anxious. However, interviewees rarely used 'anxiety' to describe their feelings prior to, during or after an intervention. While there was evidence of anxiety in interviewee stories, the term itself is now seen as problematic and raises questions of interpretive validity.

Anxiety as a concept is a useful reminder about the emotional component of the intervention. People really did worry about looking stupid and going too far and this reality has to be factored into any development activity. It follows that if anxiety is part of the experience, the management of this anxiety also has to be factored in and this was anticipated in the initial theorising. A practitioner will require the capability to manage themselves in uncertainty, characterised as a liminal space. It also follows that experiencing excessive anxiety will inhibit the reflective practice implied by managing complex interventions.

The use of anxiety as a catch-all term truncated the process of noticing and naming the emotions experienced by interviewees and

how structures and context (profession, status, gender etc) may determine these experiences. For example, my preoccupation with anxiety led me to focus on what people doubted. I was therefore surprised by two interviewees expressing their pleasure in putting people right. Not for them worries about looking stupid. In retrospect, pleasure is indicative of a wider question about motivation. While acting from one's ethical beliefs was part of this, there is more to be discovered about why people initiate difficult interventions.

The language of anxiety is still assumed to be useful in the project's development context. Anxiety, like Archer's (2003) reflexivity, offers a useful language to help people put into words and explore what may be neglected or difficult experiences. The more able people are to reflect critically upon these experiences and to consider new ideas and assumptions, the more behavioural and emotional flexibility they may develop (Schein, 2004).

### **The effects of context should not be minimised**

The focus on anxiety reflects a bias for psychological explanations. While the focus on intra-psychic experiences is useful, they have to be contextualised. For example, the women interviewed spoke most about their self-doubt, often accompanied by self-deprecating comments. The tacit acceptance of such explanations, through a psychological explanation in the context of a development activity, risks replicating the very attitude some face as they consider a constructively awkward intervention.

The literature on empowerment and on Critical Realism reinforces the risks of an emphasis being placed on the personal emotional experience of practitioners. Such an emphasis can silence the effects of structure. The effects of structure have already been noted to be important in relation to community based leaders' greater reliance on self-authorisation (see page 90).

### **Self-authorisation can change context**

The initial theory argued that constructively awkward interventions can work because the power embedded in particular contexts is invoked and modified by 'thick' conversation. The interviews suggested that self-authorisation could work like this, reflecting Foucault's view that while power acts upon the subject, the subject is not passive (Halford and Leonard (2001). Self-authority could be used to secure attention and invoke a more conducive set of roles, rules and values, which could sustain a difficult conversation.

### **Example**

Helen was at risk of being marginalised in a Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) reviewing education outcomes. She used an alternative, valid reading of the data, forcibly expressed, which secured attention and the right to speak. She achieved her objective in a context initially conducive to the authority of the public sector leaders present. Any development intervention will

have to include thinking (and practice) about managing key experiences and their associated emotions in a constructive way.

Helen's self authorised behaviour is similar to that described by Moren and Blom (2003) in relation to a 'context mechanism'. They argued that professionals can shift out of a professional context, which may trigger resistant behaviours, to one more conducive to facilitating client insight. The social workers in Moren and Blom's study did this by limited self-disclosure.

The disclosure of personal information, while generative, is a skilful act because there are risks to be managed. Earlier trauma can be evoked and so forcibly expressed that others are alienated (e.g. Helen talked about 'prostituting her experience'). Exponents of particularly emotive interventions must also be ready to manage the consequences of being judged as lacking emotional literacy<sup>6</sup>.

## **An analytic capability is required**

The initial theory assumed that the skills required by the constructively awkward practitioner were similar to those required for confronting as defined by Heron (2001). While this remains a broad conclusion, evidence of an underpinning analytical capability has emerged from the interview data.

Interviewees were skilful in evaluating and describing their own behaviour during the interviews. While they did not have to be consciously competent, there was evidence that they were capable of doing this analytic work during an intervention. This suggests that an effective intervention is enabled by a capability to hold three dimensions in review.

The practitioner keeps their own behaviour under review. They ask themselves about what they are doing, how well they are doing this, what else they may need to do and why.

The practitioner notices how the context of their intervention helps to determine their practice. Keeping this effect under scrutiny helps in the behavioural monitoring and in deciding the potential of any context to sustain their intervention and the extent to which they can and should express personal information.

The practitioner recognises that as much as context determines the immediate behaviour of those involved in the intervention, it will also affect the evaluative criteria applied to such behaviour.

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<sup>6</sup> As Furedi notes we may be in the grip of a therapeutic culture which takes an 'unusual interest' in the 'management of people's internal life (2004, p.197). Some emotions are judged inappropriate. Paradoxically, in his view, there has been an evacuation of emotions from the private to the public domain and this facilitates their control. This means that the generative qualities of private emotions may dissipate undermining the self-authorisation mechanism.



The intention of this review work is to avoid simply acting out what is deemed appropriate conduct for people like them in any particular context.

### **Example**

For example, Jo's management of the surprising challenge launched during their everyday informal banter first thing in the morning. The CEO was very critical of the conduct of one of Jo's team and wanted Jo to punish her. Jo talked about shifting from relaxed engagement to being alert, noticing and controlling her anger. She resisted the slide into a hierarchical induced compliance and spoke congruently with her ethical values, in such a way that the CEO heard her counter-challenge and remained engaged. However, she remained anxious about her behaviour, as she believed she should have anticipated this questioning and responded more effectively.

Two elements evident in the interviewees' accounts underpin and are enabled by this capability.

### **Holding a boundary position**

Holding a boundary position role (e.g. Martin's disability advisor role) or conceptualising one's role as holding such a position (e.g. Mark as a black community activist), appeared to enable the analytic work noted above. Being on the boundary may sustain the generative effects of Cohen's denial (2001). The boundary position needs to be sustained by active review as it can be lost. It is a position characterised by being sufficiently engaged with others and the task in hand, to have sufficient credibility to access, and be heard to comment on, what is going on, and sufficiently reflexive to be aware of how what is going on is affecting one's own and others' thoughts and feelings.

### **Evaluation of context**

Evaluation of self and others is also linked to the decision to speak, an evaluation of the others' receptivity and the practitioners' authority to speak in a particular context. The accuracy of this assessment is important. Overestimate this authority and you might need to backtrack; underestimate and authority can leak away (as noted by New and Fleetwood, 2006). Being skilful in self-assessment may contribute to aligning purpose (*this is what must be said*) to the tactics of the interventions (*do I say it now or wait?*).

The next section summarises the theory described here, in the form of an opening statement to participants on a development programme. The aim is to test the possibility of translating this now reasonably complicated theory, into something that can make immediate sense to a group interested in developing their capacity for constructive awkwardness.

## 5.3 Theory into practice

This section has two parts. The first is the draft of an opening statement, the aim of which is to set out, in accessible language, a description of what people can expect based on the preceding theory. This narrative approach is based on Pawson's opening comments, which are based on his theory of how mentoring may work, to people thinking about taking up this role (2004, p85). The second section highlights a set of key slides to evidence the detailed application of the mid-range theory to my professional practice.

### An opening statement

*'Welcome. Being prepared to speak up and draw attention to uncomfortable truths is a necessary skill if oppression and false agreements and their consequences are to be avoided. The aim here is to offer you an opportunity to think about how you do challenge, facilitate others' challenge of you in your leadership role(s) and how you experiment with behaving differently. Why experiment? Because 'do the same, gets the same'.*

*'The programme provides an opportunity to review work situations, where, through a combination of time, place, people and issue, there is a risk of being silenced. Being silenced may result in an inadequate discussion of the implications of proposals, behaviours and their alternatives. A capacity for constructive awkwardness is useful in drawing attention to what is silent or avoided, in a way that enhances working relationships.*

*'Being constructively awkward can place you at risk. I have felt anxious when contemplating speaking up, because I can believe I have no right to say what I want to say; that I will look stupid because it's too obvious and someone in my position should know this; and people with power can sometimes react badly to being challenged. Being constructively awkward can also place you at risk of underestimating the possibilities. People and situations may be able to bear more critical questioning than we imagine and if we act on these untested assumptions we also silence ourselves.*

*'There are no grand explanations or theories about how to get constructive awkwardness right. What we have to work with is: a framework of ideas developed from conversations with a number of constructively awkward practitioners; the experiences in this room; and a developed educational approach that can help you critically examine some of the assumptions we all bring to 'doing' challenge.*

*'The programme presents ideas about the core elements of a constructively awkward intervention, which are: the importance of developing self-authority; being clear about one's ethical values; the role played by our internal voices in deliberating about how situations relate to us; and how context influences our ability to speak up. The programme asks some basic questions to help you evaluate how you manage challenge and how you might want to*

*behave differently. For example, to behave differently you may need to: think about what is going on when you feel silenced; what you react to; how you use your emotional response to events; and how you behave when you feel your authority draining away.*

*'Constructive awkwardness can be hard emotional labour. I spoke to a number of people about their experiences, and felt that sometimes they wished they could just stay quiet. They put themselves at risk because a voice in their head said that this behaviour, this person, this decision cannot pass - I have to speak up now.*

*'They were passionate about things being 'right' and they accepted that they could get it wrong and had to be able to apologise with grace, a neglected leadership capability. When they got it right, they helped people review the deep assumptions that determine behaviour and thinking. They made good conversations happen, where the focus was on exploration (why do you think that? what effects do you think that idea or behaviour has on others?) rather than a 'who knows what's best' conversation.*

*'Finally, the programme is a place in which to test new ways of behaving prior to behaving differently at work. While the programme replicates many aspects of work it lacks some of the risks, so its okay to experiment with constructively awkward behaviours and to ask for feedback on their effects'.*

## The presentation

The section highlights five of the slides from the set in Appendix C. The effect of presentations can be mixed. The aim is to offer a sufficiently robust theory to help people question some of the assumptions they may bring to speaking up and being challenging. Such an intervention reflects Schein's (2004) learning theory. People need to experience sufficient survival anxiety, in a context where their learning anxiety is moderated, in order to critically reflect on their behaviour and try new ones.

### Self-authority and context

- What's permissible around here?
- Bad leadership
- Passive followership
- Mixed messages in the system
- Our capacity for self-silencing

Speaking up and being silenced

11

This slide introduces the idea that while the focus of the development work is the individual, believing it is only about trying harder and doing better is to miss the effects of structure. Constructive awkwardness, challenge and argument are culturally determined.

The effects of context and a way of defining the scope of constructive awkwardness is the exploration of bad leadership and its link with passive followership. Such material usually evokes different effects and the risks of being silenced.

An element of context is explored through the espoused theory and theory in use, in relation to challenge. Many participants are affected by the ambivalence about challenge and sufficiently senior to recreate this ambivalence in relation to their reports and peers. Such an assumption introduces a conversation about leaders' responsibility for enabling challenge, questioning and reducing the risk of silencing.

## When am I silenced?

- What was going on around you?
- How did you feel?
- What were the effects of these feelings?
- How did you behave
- What would you have liked to have done?
- What did you learn about yourself, others & effects of context?

Speaking up and being silenced

18

This slide supports a conversation about the factors that silence. The focus is on personal experience and understanding how one may be more susceptible in different contexts. Examples from the interviews can offer examples and reinforce a basic argument that a focus on self is simplistic when not analysed in relation to the effects of structure embedded in a local context.

## Doing challenge

- What triggered your intervention?
- What was the context?
  - who was there?
  - what was your/their role?
- How did you feel?
  - what were the effects of these feelings?
- How did you behave
- What did you learn about yourself, others & effects of context?

Speaking up and being silenced

22

This slide introduces questions to help people theorize how they 'do' challenge, maintains attention on explanations based on structure and agency, and introduces a conversation to reinforce the responsibility participants have for enabling peers and juniors to do challenge. The slide also introduces wider theory about compliance, bad leadership and faulty decision making. The slide is also an opportunity to draw people's attention to the parallel process, the benefits of experimenting with new behaviours and giving and receiving feedback in the 'classroom'.

## What do I react to?

- What issues do I have to confront?
- What would I like to confront
- What interventions do I feel good about?
- What interventions do I wish I had done or done better?
- Where did I learn about doing challenge and confronting?

Speaking up and being silenced

25

This slide continues the exploration of personal theories about challenge. It introduces the role of ethics in leadership and followership and opens a debate about how these are to be enacted and the degree to which they authorise interventions. Asking people to categorise their interventions can help to analyse what was going on internally and in the environment that mediated outcomes. The final questions lead into the next slide. Asking people about what they want to do differently and where they learnt about doing challenge, can deepen their analysis of experience, particularly if participants are confident to introduce their own experience of each other in the form of feedback.

## Work based experiment

- What do you want to be different?
- What would it look like if you were effective?
- When will you behave differently?
- What resources will you need?
- What feedback will you need?
- How could you sabotage yourself?

Speaking up and being silenced

40

This slide introduces the 'so what' question about any development activity. If it cannot be applied in the workplace it is just 'hortatory' (Braithwaite, 2004, p.241). The slide uses a series of question to focus on a work based issue that requires confronting. The aim is to expand a person's constructively awkward capability and generate more data for critical review to develop further insight into how a person does challenge.

## 5.4 Conclusion

This chapter has reintegrated the learning from the literature and personal experience with the practitioner experience, to produce a mid-range theory.

The proposed theory is constituted by six elements. Constructive awkwardness is, as a range of interventions, differentiated by the origins of the authority to speak and who the primary beneficiary of the intervention is. The assumption of the 'good' of constructive awkwardness should be tested, before, during or after the intervention, in a conversation, public and reflexive, that supports Kramer's argumentation and an attitude of doubt. Constructive awkwardness has an emotional component some of which is reasonably labelled anxiety. This term is useful in exploring and thinking about how this anxiety is managed. However, the negative connotations of anxiety were balanced by the emergence of pleasure as a motivating factor. Exploring the effects of structure on agency suggested that community-based leaders needed to mobilise more self-authority to get heard than practitioners rooted in public sector organisations or professions. However, self-authorisation could renegotiate contexts to establish more conducive environments for conversation. Finally, a key behavioural/cognitive skill for practitioners may be to evaluate their own performance and to notice and consider how cues from the structure, replicated in conversation may need to be resisted.

# Chapter 6 - Conclusion

## Introduction

This project was, and continues to be, rooted in a professional practice question. How do I and others, who listen to public and third sector managers and clinicians in the context of leadership development activities, help people question, confront and challenge? That is, develop a capability for asking what may feel like awkward questions, which constructively challenge assumptions about what is going on and what may need to be done differently. This question was translated into the project's aim and objective. The aim was to find out what capabilities, values and experiences people might require in order to develop such a capability, so that I might develop a theory that was more than a detailed description of desired behaviours. The objective was to translate this theory into a development activity through which people could evaluate and develop their capacity for being constructively awkward. This chapter reviews what has been learnt and the implications of this learning for future work.

### **The structure of the chapter**

Section 1 summarises the main project outcomes and learning. Section 2 describes three applications of the project. Each subsection is headed by one or two propositions in italics, which are discussed. Each section concludes with a recommendation about how the propositions can be developed, applied and tested.

## 6.1 Project summary

### **Initial ideas were based on case material**

The case material cited in Chapter 1 set the scene about the practice question by describing the experience of a doctor and a partnership manager. The doctor acted as if he had to carry out a delicate operation with the wrong instruments. The manager struggled with the necessity of confronting her director in relation to his evaluation of her leadership of a multi-agency partnership, based on an unquestioned transactional culture. These connected stories described the 'challenge of the case' that the project was designed to face (Winnicott, 1965). The connection was the difficulty managers and clinicians can experience separating out the real and imagined consequence of challenging what may be going on. It was also my lack, as a leader of development activities, of having anything really useful to say about how to manage this dilemma. The criteria developed by Argyris (2000) for valid leadership advice were used to represent the standard for the project's development activities.

These examples of being silenced were contrasted with the powerful challenge initiated by a programme participant, who was faced with a similar context to the doctor and manager. He raised a question designed to explore the degree to which we, the



programme directors, were aware of the effect of our shared whiteness on black participants. The intervention was bold, clear, helpful and very confronting for the second day of a development programme. The intervention was also presumptuous (Heron, 2001). He did not seek permission, other than that which he gave himself. This self-authorisation appeared sufficient to question how we, the directors, might invoke our positional authority to determine the culture of the learning community we were establishing. At the beginning of the project this example was assumed to define the behaviour described as 'constructively awkward'.

The subsequent work of the project, based on the reviewed literature and the development of a theory grounded in the ten practitioners' experiences, demonstrated this assumption to be only partially correct. The constructively awkward intervention can be bold and confronting as well as subtle and tactical. The initial examples and reflections upon practice established relevant lines of enquiry with which to develop an initial theory of constructive awkwardness and focus the main literature review.

## **Ideas from the literature**

The constructively awkward intervention was located in a dilemma characterised by the capability for a willing compliance, described by Simon (1997), and the risks of dependency, characterised by Kellerman's (2004) investigation of bad leadership and passive followership. The dilemma can be managed with a capacity for and willingness to speak from a position of denial as described by Cohen (2001). It was argued by reference to evolutionary psychology that there are significant advantages to belonging and that the associated anxieties about being judged and expelled can silence questioning.

The experience and management of this dilemma is embedded in particular contexts, defined by structures and the rules, roles and values they embody. Constructive awkwardness was argued to have a political dimension, in that it seeks to question who has power and how it is being used to impose meaning. Boxer and Palmer's (1997) notion of a strategy ceiling was discussed to help define questions that were authorised and those that might be perceived as awkward. Foucault's conceptualisation of power offered a formulation, congruent with the aspiration of the constructively awkward practitioner, that would resist the regulatory effects of power. These effects are not causal; resistance is at least possible but carries risks. The risks were evidenced by the high level of bullying reported in the public sector, the treatment of whistle-blowers and Mingers' (2000) assertion that power systems can fight back when challenged.

The wider social/historical context of challenge and the effects of a passive followership were discussed. This literature, pertaining to bad and degenerate leadership was invoked to explore something that was problematic in the leadership literature. The literature reviewed purported to value and authorise radical

conversation and challenge. Despite this endorsement from leading leadership writers and public sector leadership frameworks, the actual experience of people working in the public sector was that such behaviour is not always welcomed. In the context of a transactional public sector culture, there is evidence of an ambivalent attitude to challenge (Grint, 2005; Blackler, 2006). The cause of this ambivalence was explored in terms of the pressure on managers to deliver compliance, the centralising force of new managerialism and the evolutionary benefits of moderating personal behaviour to stay within the group. However, the interview criteria and literature identified people who could be compliant to get things done and maintain a capacity for constructive challenge, so that questions about the for whom and why of any action were kept open to review. The project's aim was to understand how people did this.

The literature reviewed in relation to confronting, assertion and empowerment offered a useful description of the desired behaviours. The literature on bad leadership identified the effects of an authoritarian context and how an uncritical but effective compliance can be invoked. Evidence was presented to support the assertion that leaders should consider the possibility that their skills in aligning individuals to a common task, particularly in stressful contexts, also requires an analytic stance towards the 'good' that is embedded in any task and the methods used to achieve it. It was argued that effective leaders, like lawyers, clinicians and philosophers are capable of producing and colluding with degenerate outcomes. Therefore, what is required is an active followership and a capacity in leaders to facilitate such engagement. The literature on an active followership and the role of the 'fool' argued the necessity for this capability in relation to bad and degenerate leadership.

### **Practical guidance about challenge is missing**

What was noted to be missing from the reviewed literature (and my own practice) was guidance on how to express the capabilities embedded in the role of active follower and various leadership frameworks. It was assumed that such capabilities are hard to express given that the likely contexts are not necessarily facilitated by detailed description of required behaviours or the exhortation to 'confront!'. On the basis of this reasoning, the project was initiated and designed as a response to what was missing. That is, the development of practical guidance about how to 'do' challenge, which is concrete, contextualised and testable (Argyris, 2000).

The literature review concluded with a theory that was used to focus the methodology and interviews. This theory described constructive awkwardness as a self-authorized act, linked to the reflexive process described by Archer (2003). These private deliberations sensitised a person to what was important to them and this in turn supposed an explicit ethical framework. The resulting intervention seeks to articulate an uncomfortable truth and establish what was described as a 'thick' conversation. This

is a conversation that does not seek the instrumental end of agreement, but one that is located in the culture of enquiry and bounded disagreement (Khane, 2004; Appiah, 2006). The theory also noted that the desire to challenge could be subverted and that this can arise from an anxiety about being judged and result in self-silencing and self-policing (O'Grady, 2005; Jack, 1991).

While this theory probed below the empirical surface by proposing the role of a reflexive voice and an ethical framework, how these elements might be configured, in particular contexts, to enable and silence an intervention remained unclear. This lack of knowledge risked undermining the project's objective to produce effective development interventions. What was missing was an understanding of what different people actually did in a variety of contexts, when they felt they should speak out and how they thought and felt about these 'events'. The intention to capture the practitioner experience and integrate it with the emergent theory determined the project's methodology.

## **Project method**

Ten people were interviewed based on selection criteria developed from three significant experiences of constructive awkwardness. These, coupled with the then understanding of constructive awkwardness, reflected the range of interventions and contexts I was interested in. In particular, men and women who had a reputation for being challenging, with mixed professional backgrounds and experiences of working across the public and third sectors. Interviewees were asked to participate in recorded, semi-structured interviews, lasting for about an hour.

The interview data was analysed using grounded theory principles in the context of a Critical Realist ontology. Critical Realism offered the explanatory potential of generative mechanisms, argued as appropriate to the development of a mid-range theory. Mechanisms which are context specific can explain how observable behaviours happen and, as importantly, with a risky intervention like constructive awkwardness, how they might be subverted and silenced. Grounded theory provided a compatible, systematic guidance to the theory development. Rooting the project's development activity in the practitioner experience and Critical Realist ontology, increased the explanatory potential of the final theory, without affording such experience privileged epistemic status.

The risks associated with reflexivity and prior theorising were managed by employing ethnographic principles. The attention given to the threats to validity were evidenced by a parallel narrative, recorded in a data journal and referenced in the project. For example, there was an initial failure to notice the threats to validity posed by being white and an interpretative stance rooted in the Tavistock paradigm, that privileged psychological interpretations. There was also a failure to notice how gender could determine levels of self-authority and influence the tactics

used to initiate and sustain a challenge. Recognising these failures triggered a review of the interview selection criteria. For example, there was only one black interviewee and two people with an observable disability. While they shared similar levels of awareness, experience and skills with the other interviewees, the lack of attention to such variables limited the depth and scope of the resulting theory. The theory is therefore limited to professionalised contexts, reflecting a public sector culture and social care ethos.

The interviews were transcribed verbatim and then downloaded onto NVivo7 software to ensure descriptive validity. The transcripts were thematically coded to increasing levels of abstraction, following the four-stage process described by Straus and Corbin (1998). The following mid-range theory emerged from the data analysis synthesised with the initial theory, based on the literature review and reflection on experience.

### **The project theory outlined**

The explanatory task of the project was to deepen the understanding of the capabilities, values and experiences people might require in order to be constructively awkward. A self-authorisation mechanism was posited, the constituents of which were reflexivity, holding a boundary position and having an explicit value base. This theory was predicated on the work of Archer (2003) and the generative effect of communicative and meta-reflexivity. The evidence for this experience from the interviews was incomplete because the specific question with which to explore this was not consistently asked. The boundary position, associated with the role of the fool and Cohen's (2001) capacity for denial, was confirmed as a useful concept by the interview data and subsequent theorising.

Similarly, the generative effects of an explicit ethical framework were confirmed. The project theory offers an explanation of this effect, beyond the argument in the literature reviewed, that such a framework is a good thing to be in possession of and that one's behaviour in an organisational context should be congruent with it. The project theory suggests that the generative effect arises from the emotional component attached to formative events by which certain behaviours are valued or seen to be unacceptable. The ability to be emotive, even to the extent that it is perceived to adversely effect the interviewee and contravene notions of what is acceptable, was used by some to open and secure the opportunity to speak. That is, the intervention secured a more conducive context in which to speak and be heard, in accordance with the context mechanism theorised by Moren and Blom (2003).

## 6.2 Application of the project's theory

### Introduction

Three applications of the project theory and learning are proposed and summarised. The first relates to the project's key objective to change the way leadership development activities in the King's Fund respond to participants' experience. The second relates to the extension of the psychological contract, between an employee, or organisational consultant and their employer to include an explicit feeling dimension. The final recommendation is in relation to the project's conclusion that there is a distinctive community-based leadership theory to be discovered. Each recommendation includes a brief idea about how the propositions could be tested.

### 1. Leadership development activities

*The development and work-based application of a capability for constructive awkwardness is facilitated by a theory, rooted in Critical Realism, that explains how such interventions develop.*

An argument expressed in the project is that leadership development activities can describe, in great detail, the required behaviour but can lack guidance about how to express such behaviour. This lack of guidance was explained from a Critical Realist standpoint. That is, there is limited theorising about what may be going on below the empirical surface and insufficient attention to what managers and leaders are capable of doing (Tsoukas, 2000). The exploration of what managers and leaders are capable of doing, implies that how such interventions are self-authorised and managed, in particular contexts, may be important in delivering useful development activities.

The project outcome suggests that a Critical Realist ontology offers a valid means of constructing theories about what activates (or not) leadership and management behaviours. Such explanations, which draw upon insights from psychological, sociological and political explanations, can offer a rich, contextualised theory for practitioners to test. An outline development activity, rooted in critical reflective practice (Schein, 2004), is described in Appendix B.

### Recommendations

The underpinning theory in relation to self-authorisation needs to be further tested and developed with a range of people. This is envisaged as both an informal and formal process: informally, as part of the review and development of the leadership development activities I am involved in at the King's Fund; and formally, as a publication that presents the project's learning to a wider academic and practitioner audience.

An objective of this testing process is to address the lack in the project's theory. As noted previously, the effect of ethnicity, role, status, forms of membership (e.g. organisational and community), gender and the particular issue being taken up, needs to be identified.

In practice terms, my response to people who feel silenced is/will be different. I will ask about context; what and how they notice any effects upon their sense of their authority to act and about where they feel most authorised.

## **2. The psychological contract**

*The inclusion of an explicit feeling dimension to the psychological contract would make the concept more relevant to work that has a significant requirement for emotional labour.*

The project has developed a useful insight into a self-authorisation process. However, the focus on an intra-psychic explanation has obscured a deeper understanding of how structure and in particular rules about emotionality, can affect levels of authorisation. The psychological contract literature offers a way of understanding the effects of context in more detail. This is important because being able to effect context change, by the expression of feelings, was noted in Chapter 5 as an important capability of the constructively awkward practitioner. However, the psychological contract literature reviewed suggests that work is required to understand how one learns about which emotions (and their public expression as feelings) are required and acceptable in particular roles.

For example, Noon and Blyton (2007), in their discussion of the demand on employees to utilise their capacity for emotional engagement as a part of the service offered, do not explore the process or cost of the self-control that may be required. Guest (1999), while mentioning the socialisation process, by which people come to understand what is deemed appropriate behaviour, does not include a discussion about what feelings are acceptable in his definition of the contract continuum.

The work of Sinnason (1991) and Winnicott (1947) suggests that a capability for and the cost of separating out private and public feeling responses, increases in relation to the level of confrontation embedded in what is being said or done. They argue that this capability develops from an explicit questioning of self and others, in the context of an elaborate developmental theory, about how one learns to 'do' feelings. What is proposed in this project is that a similar level of transparency be developed in relation to how one learns from one's wider work context about 'doing' feelings.

It has been assumed in this project that clues about how to manage feelings in a public sector are reflected in the work of Goleman (2002, 1996). Value is placed on the categorisation,

containment, modification and the controlled expression of feelings. As has been shown, such an orthodoxy tends to privilege those in power (Macalpine and Marsh, 2005).

Simplistically, what is required is a an explicit, authorised conversation about that element of the psychological contract that relates to the regulation of the emotional life of employees and those engaged in work with institutions. Realistically this will not happen without a deeper understanding of how such learning takes place, what value is attached to different feelings and why, the sanctions that are imposed to enforce compliance and who benefits from the rules in place.

### **Recommendations**

The key recommendation arising from this project is to test the argument above in the presentation of the project's wider learning. In addition, programme participants should be asked about how they come to learn about what feelings and what levels of expression are appropriate in their organisation or community. That is, to explore the 'how' of this learning and the extent to which such boundaries are tested and with what effect. As New and Fleetwood (2007) suggest, we can underestimate the scope for behaving differently.

### **3. Community-based leadership**

*Community-based leaders are more dependent upon self-authorisation than their public sector colleagues.*

*The development of distinctive community-based leadership theory would reduce the risk of inappropriate criteria being applied to such leaders' performance, further undermining their authority to speak.*

A significant outcome of this project is the conclusion that community leaders and activists, acting outside of institutional settings, will rely more on a self-authorisation mechanism than their public sector colleagues. They are more likely to find themselves in uncondusive contexts. Such contexts require the use of emotions, often linked to difficult experiences, to build self-authority. This will confront practitioners with the concomitant risk of being perceived as 'too emotional', a risk that can activate the self-silencing mechanism identified in the project's theory. This reliance contrasts with those practitioners who can access a structural authority through their institutionally recognised professional roles. They do not need to put such emphasis on a self-conscious authorisation process, although they will also share the capacity for self-doubt.

This reasoning leads to a key conclusion. If a broad distinction can be drawn between community and institutionally based practitioners on the basis of how their actions are authorised, simply applying leadership frameworks developed for the latter, risks applying 'wrong theory' to the former. This conclusion

reflects the emancipatory objective of Critical Realism and critical management theorists. That is, to seek to question the assumptive basis of the evaluation criteria applied to leadership and followership. There is a need to define a leadership practice that is grounded in the experience of community-based practitioners, to check the validity and effects of the 'read across' of public sector assumptions and frameworks to see if there is a distinctive non-institutionally based leadership. The absence of such an enquiry risks compounding the silencing effects identified by Grint (2005) and Blackler (2006) as present in the public sector. This may result in distinctive voices, in relation to the public policy of personalisation discussed in Chapter 1, being marginalised.

### **Recommendations**

The recommendation in relation to the first proposition is to test its validity. What is proposed is a grounded theory set of case studies, explicitly differentiated by gender, ethnicity, age and areas of interest. The method would include semi-structured interviews and direct observation of participants operating in partnership activities. Such a study could add to the theory about constructive awkwardness by revealing more of the psychological and social mechanisms that enable and disable challenge in the context of partnerships, a structure deemed useful in the pursuit of the social policy of personalisation.

In relation to the second, a comparison is made between the leadership literature and experience of UK community-based leadership and that pertaining to a country where public sector discourse is less dominant (for example, South Africa<sup>7</sup>).

### **Final word**

The project set out to tackle a real work issue in relation to challenge and being silenced and my lack of useful things to say in relation to people's experience. My understanding and practice have been changed, to the extent that I now have a more adequate response to these issues. Inevitably, I have learnt about my own assumptions and behaviour and how this enables and limits my practice. I remain however, interested and excited in my own and others desire and reluctance to be constructively awkward.

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<sup>7</sup> I spent two weeks in South Africa in 2004 with 24 U.K. community leaders, hosted by a community project in a township near Cape Town. It became clear that a community-based leadership emergent from conflict was fundamentally different to that in the UK, in the way conflict was managed and expressed. Our hosts perceived us to be over anxious about disagreement, the consequence of hundreds of years of civil continuity.



# Appendix A

## **Participant information and consent form**

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide if you want to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. If anything is not clear and if you would like more information about this study please contact me.

My contact details are: 020 7307 2409 or 07774734134 or via e-mail [d.naylor@kingsfund.org.uk](mailto:d.naylor@kingsfund.org.uk) My work address is King's Fund, 11-13 Cavendish Square, London

### **Study title – What are the mechanisms that enable a leader to be constructively awkward?**

The aim of this study is to describe the behaviours of a leader who is willing and capable of challenging the way decisions are made and the ideas and beliefs that are expressed to support these decisions. And, do this in a way that maintains professional relationships. The aim of the study is to describe constructively awkward behaviour and the situations where it works well and less well.

You have been invited to take part in this study because you have a recognised leadership role. Specifically, because you have experience of working in complex situations where you may have challenged other peoples' thinking and decision making. Up to ten people will be invited to take part in this study.

### **Do I have to take part?**

No. It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

### **What will happen to me if I take part?**

You will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview lasting about an hour. The maximum length of the interview will be one and a half hours. The questions are designed to capture some basic information about you (e.g. work role, professional training and experiences, gender) and to explore your experience of the sort of leadership described above. With your agreement I will audio record the interview. I will transcribe the interviews and invite you to check this record for accuracy.

### **What do I have to do?**

If you agree to take part I will ask you about your experiences of your leadership. More specifically to reflect your skills, behaviours, thoughts, feelings and attitudes when you have questioned others strongly held beliefs and ideas.

### **What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

You may recall difficult experiences and feelings that you would prefer not to think about.

### **What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

There are no direct benefits, except those that arise from having an opportunity to reflect on your leadership experience. This is also an opportunity to contribute to developing understanding of this aspect of leadership experience.

### **Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?**

All information that is collected during the course of the interview will be kept strictly confidential. Any information about you which is used will have your name and address removed so that you cannot be recognised from it.

### **What will happen to the results of the research study?**

The results of this research will be used in two ways. The first is to inform the design and delivery of King's Fund leadership development programmes. The King's Fund is an independent, voluntary health care

organisation (for more information go to [www.kingsfund.org.uk](http://www.kingsfund.org.uk)). The second way is via journal articles in the professional press.

The results are likely to be used and/or published mid 2007. You will not be identified in any report/publication copies of what is published can be sent on request.

**Who has reviewed the study?**

This study has been approved by the Middlesex University Health Studies Ethics Sub-Committee and the Chief Executive of the King's Fund.

Thank you for taking the time to read this.

**CONSENT FORM**

**Title of Project:**

What are the mechanisms that enable a leader to be constructively awkward?

**Name of Researcher:**

David Naylor

My contact details are: 020 7308 2479 or 07774734134 or via e-mail [d.naylor@kingsfund.org.uk](mailto:d.naylor@kingsfund.org.uk)  
My work address is King's Fund, 11-13 Cavendish Square, London W1G 0AN

1. I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated .....for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions.

2. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving any reason.
3. I agree to take part in the above study.

Name of Person giving consent

Signature

Date

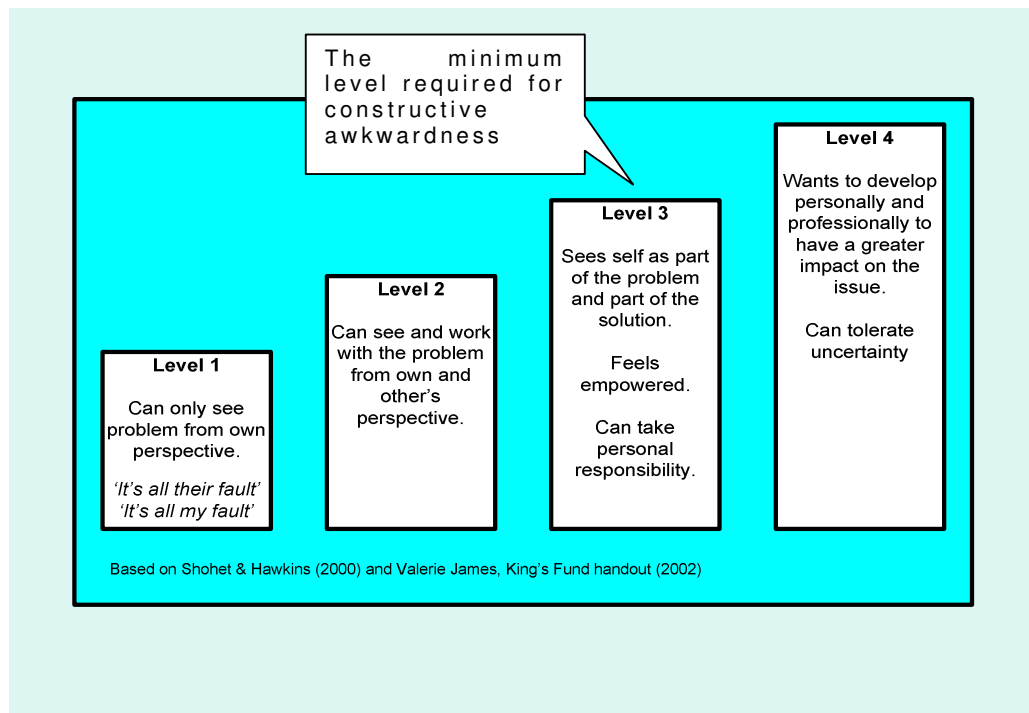
# Appendix B

Section 1 summarises the educational approach that underpins the application of the project's theory. Section 2 sets out an indicative set of slides to support a workshop intervention to help people think about the skills, capabilities, experiences and contexts relevant to exploring constructive awkwardness.

## 1. Educational approach

### A capacity for reflection is required

The development of a capability for constructive awkwardness is assumed to be nested in a capacity for self-reflection. As part of defining this capacity, the following diagram identifies four possible positions that people might operate from .



Level 1 is associated with limited insight into self and others and acting from this position leads to quick fixes. Level 2 is linked to an ability to hear multiple explanations about what is going on but action is undermined by a lack of self-authority. The person behaving at level 3 accepts they are part of what is problematic and that they can and should try and do something to improve things. Such thinking suggests the level of self-authorisation required to be constructively awkward. Level 4 is associated with the capacity to act and to reflect upon the assumptions that underpin such action, and where necessary develop new ones (James, 2002).

## **Defining a reflective practice**

The theoretical roots of this practice are in the work of Argyris (2000, 1991, 1977), Schein (2004) and Mezirow (1989). The connecting assumption is that learning takes place at three levels. We can review how we have done things with a view to improving how we enact more effectively existing assumptions and behaviours. Framing assumptions are not questioned. Argyris (1977) describes this as single-loop learning and Mezirow (1989) as instrumental. These assumptions can be subject to a critical analysis in terms of their effects and the development of new assumptions to underpin behaviour. This is what Argyris (1977) calls double-loop learning and Mezirow (1989) a critical self-reflection on assumptions (CSRA). The emphasis is on a

‘critical analysis of the psychological or cultural assumptions that are the specific reasons for one’s conceptual and psychological limitations, the constitutive processes or conditions of formations of one’s experience and beliefs’ (Mezirow, 1989p.193).

A third loop is proposed by Mezirow (1989). The focus here is to explore the origins of assumptions and how these help to determine what we are interested in and what may be excluded by this focus. This is learning at the level of ontological and epistemic assumptions: reflection that

‘...sets out to examine the assumptions and explore the causes (biographical, historical, cultural) the nature (including moral and ethical dimensions), and consequences (individual and inter-personal) of his or her frames of reference to ascertain why he or she is predisposed to learn in a certain way or to appropriate particular goals’ (Mezirow, 1989, p.195).

## **Example - linking client and reflection levels**

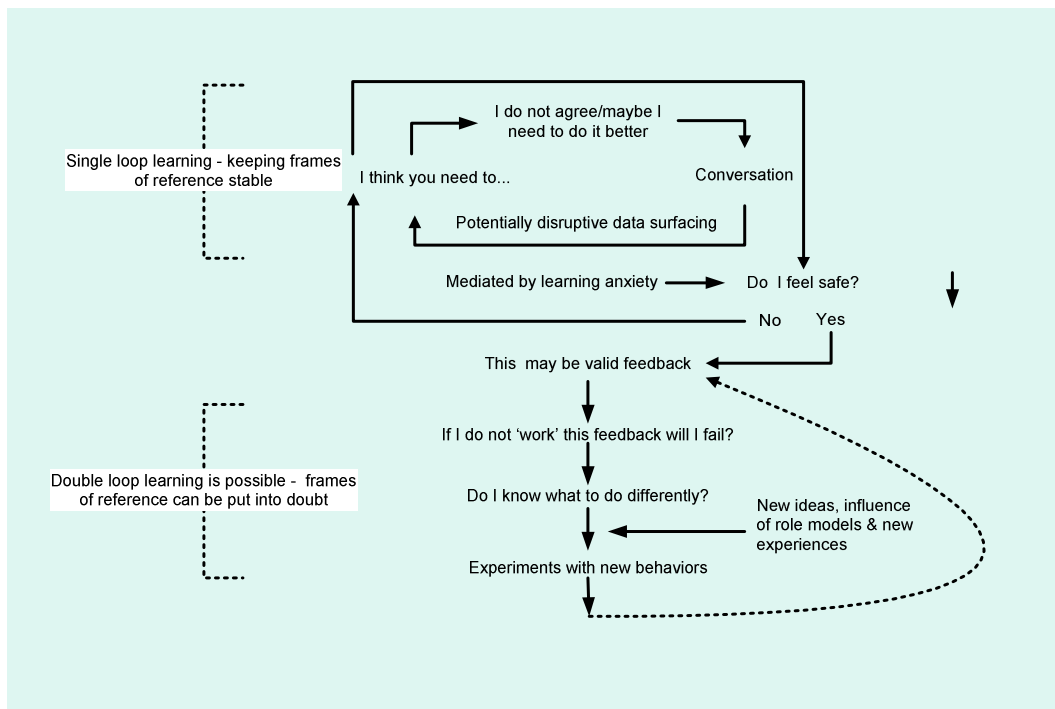
A senior manager on a development programme was discussing the poor evaluation of a session she had run on measuring performance. Her initial reaction was to oscillate between catastrophising her performance and attacking the audience for being so passive. She was operating as a level 1 client. She concluded that she needed to re-order the sides that constituted her educational intervention and create some time for questions. This was an example of single loop learning and moving to being a level 2 client. She assumed she just needed to tweak her presentation and try harder.

Her colleagues in the development activity confronted her failure to question what it might have been like for her audience when their senior manager walked into the room to talk about performance. This triggered her to think about what she represented to others and that her assumption that she had no effect on others was unlikely. This double loop learning, led her to question whether she was the best person to talk about this subject and how she might need to acknowledge the silencing she might trigger. She resolved to be more open and talk about her own struggles with being evaluated and judged.

Reviewing her revised intervention she still felt that people were not understanding how important performance measurement was and she noticed how irritated this made her and how this led her to being directive in the session. She noticed that she asked lots of questions, many of them closed. Her colleagues asked her to think about why evaluation was so important to her; and what were the origins of these assumptions in her past. As she explored the biographical origins and how she had felt the subject of intense parental scrutiny, she considered it was possible that she was, in certain contexts, replicating the scrutiny she knew to be silencing of creativity. She realised, that as a level 4 client, she had to learn to notice how she could silence others.

## Describing the process of learning

Schein (2004) offers a way of conceptualising the learning process by which assumptions can be reviewed. The move from single to double loop is mediated by what he terms 'learning' and 'survival' anxiety. Anxiety is defined by Emanuel (2000) as 'the response to some yet unrecognised factor, in the environment or in the self' (p.6). Learning anxiety is a response to feeling stupid and being concerned about how others may react. Such anxiety can block a curiosity about one's sense of ignorance, error and fallibility described by O'Brien (1987) as a key leadership competence. Survival anxiety relates to the anxiety we face when we know we must change to preserve our job, status, or life. Sufficient anxiety is required to trigger reflection and excessive amounts triggers retrenchment.



The example above suggest that feedback is an intervention that introduces new ideas and this may be particularly acceptable if the

person offering it is skilful and has status in the perception of the recipient.

### **Feedback and a parallel process**

Development programmes can confer the status of significant other on co-participants. The effects of a 'parallel process' can offer the data upon which to formulate feedback. The parallel process is defined by Blackler & Kennedy (2004).

The relationship between the directors and participants and between the participants as a peer group will recreate in a modified way the 'conflicts and contradictions of their jobs in the safe and containing environment provided by the course' (p.195). This re-creation has two dimensions differentiated by levels of awareness. At a conscious level the programme directors use their authority to get participants to do things, some of which will evoke anxiety and resistance. Participants and directors are free within the ground rules to question and challenge what is going on. The experience of doing this can be reflected upon and the outputs can be used to think about 'doing' constructive awkwardness.

The second dimension relates to the transference possibilities between participants. This means that behaviour, attitudes and feelings in the present may have their origins in earlier formative experiences (Klein, 1959). This recreation will be unconscious and its effects only revealed by feedback, and conscious deliberation on behaviour and its effects. The parallel process can be used to expose, explore the deeper assumptions (for example about doing challenge) and test new behaviours in a work-like environment, without the associated risks. This parallel process can be deliberately re-created by the use of Tavistock-based small groups and peer assessed learning.

### **Establishing a learning contract**

The senior manager in the previous example learns in part because of feedback and this presupposes some agreement that this is acceptable. This acceptability should not be taken for granted by programme directors, who will have their own assumptions about what is right. Gregory and Romm (2001) argue that if one's intention is to ask people to question the basis of their certainties, then those who ask should be explicit about their intentions and method.

'What is important in our view, is that the facilitator, in confronting others, is also willing to subject his or her own reflections to critical self-reflection, and to challenges from others as a part of the process of engagement in the discourse' (Gregory and Romm, 2001, p.457).

A way of being explicit is to establish and keep under review a learning contract. The following is an example of headings for discussion.



## **Discussion points when formulating the learning contract**

- The anxiety associated with the proposed reflective practice needs to be explained in terms of how one can feel. It can feel disturbing as old ways of thinking and behaving are questioned.
- The disturbance arises from learning and survival anxiety and the necessity of this experience needs to be justified.
- Make clear that participants will have to, as far as possible, agree to explore this method with limited evidence for effectiveness.
- Explain that the behaviour and content of facilitators' interventions are available for critical review and elaboration except where this elaboration is a way of not hearing the feedback continued within the intervention (i.e. staying with a helpful not-knowing.)
- A key tool is feedback based on a parallel process ( explain this and why it can be useful in learning, which requires practice and feedback).

There will be a gradual move into feedback with plenty of opportunities for practice in giving and receiving feedback.

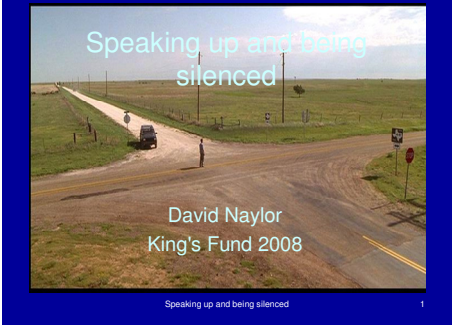

The structures within which feedback can take place (small and large groups, workshops, lectures, one-to-one sessions) need to be explained to help people anticipate what might happen where.

- People learn from each other. This means, in reality, that they use and need each other to represent behaviours and attitudes that are problematic in some way. Therefore how people want to manage the inevitable mistakes, hurts would need to be discussed.
- Define the role of the directors, which is to coach, to help develop skills, to hold the boundary on propriety and draw attention to, and intervene on, individual and group behaviours that may undermine the task of reflection and application. However, point out that such interventions tend to be during or after events.

## **Conclusion**



This appendix has set out the educational approach that underpins the application of the theory of constructive awkwardness. A level 3 client capability is required to support the critical evaluation of assumptions required to develop appropriate behaviours. Asking people to work at this level requires an explicit working through of a learning contract if the intervention is to be considered ethical.


## 2. An outline intervention

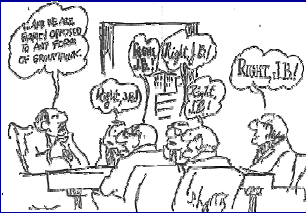

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|    | <p>The symbol of the crossroads invokes Hecate, the goddess of liminality. Introduces key idea that speaking up, saying what you want and need to say may bring uncertainty, real and imagined. It introduces the idea of choosing to behave differently (e.g. to speak out), because otherwise the assumption is if you do the same you get the same and the easiest element to change is own behaviour.</p> |
|   | <p>These three cartoons introduce a key idea. Culturally and personally we are prone to agree and it takes effort or significant provocation to speak up.</p>   |
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| Slide  | Notes   |
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| <p>Questions that frame the session</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What develops my authority? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How do I know?</li> <li>- What do I and others notice ?</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ What undermines my authority ? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- How do I know</li> <li>- What do I and others notice?</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ What behaviours, ideas &amp; assumptions do I feel I must challenge?</li> <li>▪ If I could say it, I would say...</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: right;"><small>Speaking up and being silenced 5</small></p>   | <p>Introduces the key idea that speaking up is linked to sufficient self-authority. This term best describes what is required to move from thinking/feeling that one wants to intervene and actually speaking and managing any subsequent conversation.</p> <p>Key assumption is that the more one knows about how one self-authorises in particular contexts the more conscious control one can exert.</p> |
| <p>Example 1</p> <p><i>'So for them, it's somebody coming in from another planet really and yet he's a white, male doctor from, at that time I was in Oxford, so they can't just dismiss him as ..... you know, it's not some nutter who's coming in with some weird alternative medicine and hocus-pocus who could just be .....you wouldn't even bother inviting, they wouldn't even have over the threshold'.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><small>Speaking up and being silenced 6</small></p>   | <p>Key educational principle is that ideas presented have to relate to people's experience (so they need to bring these to the fore) as this is the experience that is the focus of critical review.</p> <p>This example introduces role/position/boundary position as an element of self-authorisation. Begs the question about how practitioners who cannot draw on this authorising context fare.</p>    |
| <p>Example 2</p> <p><i>It means that I am left making a value judgement about whether or not to speak up in the face of too little information or confidence to make that very decision. I guess what I mean is that if I had enough info. and experience (in relation to those I'm with) I would not be having the conversation with myself about whether or not to speak up! ...I find it really frustrating and total illogical nonsense.</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><small>Speaking up and being silenced 7</small></p>   | <p>Introduces the role of reflexive conversations (meta and communicative) and their agential power. The assumption is that these powers are increased if these voices are given credibility.</p> <p>This is an example of learning anxiety and worrying about looking stupid.</p>  |
| <p>Example 3</p> <p><i>'A sense of I'm going to have to speak to this, it's out of control. I mean obviously all the physiological things, increasing of pulse rate, dry mouth, nervousness, anxiety...a heightened sense of drama, a sense of tension...a complete reckless abandonment of caring about the consequences. The 'hear I stand I can do no other'. It's a kind of, it might be a function of a kind of mad grandiosity. I don't always ..... it's not trying to achieve anything at this point, it's a discharge – a discharge of rage and fury in order that the opponents should know where they are wrong...'</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><small>Speaking up and being silenced 8</small></p> | <p>Introduces the role of emotions and the necessity to act ethically.</p> <p>Raises questions about the local and wider culture that define how emotions are to be understood and managed.</p> <p>Introduces the dilemma between self-control and losing control.</p>  |

| Slide  | Notes   |
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| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Example 4</b></p> <p><i>'It's about asking the questions that people are thinking but don't want to ask because of the culture. And I always feel that I'm outside and being outside, you can ask questions which may seem bloody obvious and probably are bloody obvious but people don't ask them, and it's sort of the Emperor's new clothes scenario...'</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><small>Speaking up and being silenced 9</small></p>  | <p>Introduces the role of the fool and the necessity of institutionalising doubt/argumentation (Kramer, 2007) in complex open systems.</p> <p><i>Systems that are prepared to act and are able to make sense of their experiences and are able to discredit their existing insights are better able to deal with dynamic complexity than others (Kramer, 2007, p.75).</i></p> <p><i>Definition of dynamic complexity: hard to determine, requires analysis, will not be fully reveal wigo, and demands action on incomplete data, and these action will have unpredictable effects which will also need managing.</i></p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Plan of the session</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Session 1 – ideas &amp; conversation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- what does the literature and our own experience tell us about self authorisation?</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Session 1 – framing questions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- review and development of initial answers</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Session 2 - ideas &amp; conversation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The Abilene paradox DVD</li> <li>- Conspiracy DVD</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Session 2 – framing questions <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- what are we learning?</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Application – developing a work based experiment</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><small>Speaking up and being silenced 10</small></p> | <p>Having introduced the main issues and ideas the structure of the session is described.</p> <p>Basic learning agreement is discussed and agreed.</p>  |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Self-authority and context</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What's permissible around here?</li> <li>▪ Bad leadership</li> <li>▪ Passive followership</li> <li>▪ Mixed messages in the system</li> <li>▪ Our capacity for self-silencing</li> <li>▪ Our capacity to lose control</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><small>Speaking up and being silenced 11</small></p>  | <p>This slide introduces connection between agency and structures. Personal authority is constrained and knowing how these rules/expectations are internalised and their effects one can begin to question our basic assumptions about how we as managers, leaders, women etc should behave.</p> <p>Slide makes a value explicit - sometimes we need to intervene and challenge wigo.</p>   |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>What's permissible around here?</b></p> <p>'Constructive conflict' (Roberto, 2005)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>enhance divergent thinking &amp; consensus</i></li> <li>▪ 'Challenge the process' (Kouzes &amp; Posner, 2003) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>have the courage of your convictions</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ 'Managed disagreement' (Druker, 2001) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>the adequate airing of assumptions</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ 'Constructive disobedience' (Boxer, 2003) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>question my practice and the service where it works against the interest of</i></li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><small>12</small></p>   | <p>Introduces the difference of the espoused and theory in use by Argyris (2000). Sets appropriate expectations of the consequences of being constructively awkward.</p> <p>Is this people's experience?</p>  |

| Slide  | Notes   |   |                 |  |                    |  |                          |   |                |   |                    |   |                       |  |  |
|--|---|---|-----------------|--|--------------------|--|--------------------------|---|----------------|---|--------------------|---|-----------------------|--|--|
| <p><b>NHS Leadership Qualities Framework</b></p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Self belief</td> <td> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Speaking up if this is needed. In doing so, their integrity and their motivation for service improvement will sustain them.</li> </ul> </td> </tr> <tr> <td>Self management</td> <td> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Being tenacious and resilient in the face of difficulty</li> </ul> </td> </tr> <tr> <td>Personal integrity</td> <td> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Insistence on openness and communication, motivated by values about inclusiveness and getting on with the job.</li> <li>Resilience that enables them to push harder, when necessary, in the interests of developing or improving the service</li> </ul> </td> </tr> <tr> <td>Intellectual flexibility</td> <td> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Being open to innovative thinking and encouraging creativity and experimentation in others too.</li> </ul> </td> </tr> <tr> <td>Bread scanning</td> <td> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Being persistent in getting key facts of a situation.</li> </ul> </td> </tr> <tr> <td>Holding to account</td> <td> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Creating a climate of support and accountability rather than a climate of blame.</li> <li>Being prepared to be held to account by others for what they have contracted you to do as the leader.</li> </ul> </td> </tr> <tr> <td>Collaborative working</td> <td> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understanding and being sensitive to diverse viewpoints.</li> </ul> </td> </tr> </table> <p style="text-align: right;"><small>Speaking up and being silenced 13</small></p> | Self belief   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Speaking up if this is needed. In doing so, their integrity and their motivation for service improvement will sustain them.</li> </ul> | Self management | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Being tenacious and resilient in the face of difficulty</li> </ul>  | Personal integrity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Insistence on openness and communication, motivated by values about inclusiveness and getting on with the job.</li> <li>Resilience that enables them to push harder, when necessary, in the interests of developing or improving the service</li> </ul> | Intellectual flexibility | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Being open to innovative thinking and encouraging creativity and experimentation in others too.</li> </ul> | Bread scanning | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Being persistent in getting key facts of a situation.</li> </ul> | Holding to account | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Creating a climate of support and accountability rather than a climate of blame.</li> <li>Being prepared to be held to account by others for what they have contracted you to do as the leader.</li> </ul> | Collaborative working | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understanding and being sensitive to diverse viewpoints.</li> </ul> | <p>Reinforces the message above.</p>   |
| Self belief  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Speaking up if this is needed. In doing so, their integrity and their motivation for service improvement will sustain them.</li> </ul>   |   |                 |  |                    |  |                          |   |                |   |                    |   |                       |  |  |
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| Collaborative working  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understanding and being sensitive to diverse viewpoints.</li> </ul>  |   |                 |  |                    |  |                          |   |                |   |                    |   |                       |  |  |
| <p><b>A Dilemma</b></p>  <p><i>Should followers follow the leader, or the dictates of their consciences? On the one hand, a strong argument can be made that to maintain order and get work done, followers should go along with the leader except in dire circumstances. On the other hand, followers are not sheep, nor should they necessarily be part of any herd</i></p> <p><small>(Kellerman, 2003, p.30).</small></p>  <p style="text-align: right;"><small>Speaking up and being silenced</small></p>  | <p>Introduces a basic dilemma embedded in current articulation of both transactional and transformational leadership.</p> <p>When have you had to act?</p> <p><b>Pictures:</b><br/> Rosa Parks riding a Montgomery, Ala., bus in December 1956, after the Supreme Court outlawed segregation on buses.</p> <p>My Lai massacre during the Vietnam War 16ht August 1968. 350 civilians. Chief Warrant Officer Hugh Thompson (door gunner Larry Colbourn -not shown)</p> |   |                 |  |                    |  |                          |   |                |   |                    |   |                       |  |  |
| <p><b>Defining bad leadership</b></p> <p><small>(Kellerman, 2004)</small></p> <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Incompetent</td> <td>Lacks the will or skill to deliver positive change.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Rigid</td> <td>May be competent but 'unable or unwilling to adapt to new ideas, new information, or changing times' (p.41). Needs followers who also adopt this position.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Intemperate</td> <td>Lack of self control 'aided and abetted by followers who are unwilling or unable effectively to intervene' (p42).</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Callous</td> <td>Indifferent to the needs of others and aided by followers.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Corrupt</td> <td>Self interest that is excessive, ahead of the public interest.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Insular</td> <td>Disregard of the outsider group for whom there is some responsibility.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Evil</td> <td>Physical and psychological harm as an instrument of power and leadership.</td> </tr> </table> <p style="text-align: right;"><small>Speaking up and being silenced 15</small></p>   | Incompetent   | Lacks the will or skill to deliver positive change.   | Rigid           | May be competent but 'unable or unwilling to adapt to new ideas, new information, or changing times' (p.41). Needs followers who also adopt this position. | Intemperate        | Lack of self control 'aided and abetted by followers who are unwilling or unable effectively to intervene' (p42).  | Callous                  | Indifferent to the needs of others and aided by followers.  | Corrupt        | Self interest that is excessive, ahead of the public interest.  | Insular            | Disregard of the outsider group for whom there is some responsibility.  | Evil                  | Physical and psychological harm as an instrument of power and leadership.                                  | <p>Introduces Kellerman's idea that possibility of bad leadership has not permeated leadership development. These leaders need followers, which raises a question about notion of followership - what is it to do this well?</p> <p>Test the assumption that this always refers to other people. Again, think about how individuals and structures engage to create the outcomes described here.</p> |
| Incompetent  | Lacks the will or skill to deliver positive change.   |   |                 |  |                    |  |                          |   |                |   |                    |   |                       |  |  |
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| Evil   | Physical and psychological harm as an instrument of power and leadership.   |   |                 |  |                    |  |                          |   |                |   |                    |   |                       |  |  |
| <p><b>Passive followership</b></p> <p><i>Most of the time I'm telling myself to shut up because I worry that what I'm about to say is either already blindingly obvious or extremely stupid. (It REALLY IS as basic as not wanting to look a plonker.) What does the fear of looking a plonker mean for me? It means that I am left making a value judgement about whether or not to speak up</i></p> <p style="text-align: right;"><small>Speaking up and being silenced 16</small></p>   | <p>Introduces ways we can silence ourselves and be silenced. Links to active (or not) followership.</p> <p>Problem of looking stupid and saying the obvious. Question: when have people thought something needed saying and remained silent?</p>  |   |                 |  |                    |  |                          |   |                |   |                    |   |                       |  |  |

| Slide   | Notes  |
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| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Being silenced</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Noticing what silences us: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Judging self by external standards</li> <li>– Putting the needs of others first</li> <li>– Inhibition of self expression</li> <li>– Splitting into a compliant public self and private emotional self</li> </ul> </li> </ul>  <p style="font-size: small;">(Jack, 1991)</p> <p style="font-size: x-small; text-align: center;">Speaking up and being silenced 17</p>   | <p>Jack's work helps to conceptualise silence. Assumption here is that if you cannot talk about experience you cannot review it.</p> <p>Introduces the question about whether gender, role and authority affect this risk.</p>   |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>When am I silenced?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What was going on around you?</li> <li>▪ How did you feel?</li> <li>▪ What were the effects of these feelings?</li> <li>▪ How did you behave?</li> <li>▪ What would you have liked to have done?</li> <li>▪ What did you learn about yourself, others &amp; effects of context?</li> </ul> <p style="font-size: x-small; text-align: center;">Speaking up and being silenced 18</p>  | <p>Focuses the issue raised so far on people's actual work-based experience.</p> <p>Questions answered working on your own and then in small groups, plus plenary session. Aim is to help people identify how their behaviour is affected by context, what is not being spoken about and what people might want to speak about (i.e. what they would like to be different).</p>                    |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Choosing silence</b></p> <p style="font-size: x-small; text-align: center;">(Van Dyrn, 2003)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Acquiescent silence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Nothing I can do here</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Defensive silence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>I'm scared</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Pro-social silence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>I'm protecting others</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Defensive voice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Blame others</i></li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ Acquiescent voice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- <i>Agreement based on resignation</i></li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p style="font-size: x-small; text-align: center;">Speaking up and being silenced 19</p> | <p>Introduces another dimension of silence, elements of which are linked to fear. An assumption based on Mingers (2000) is that when power is challenged it tends to fight back; feedback well intentioned can turn to criticism; and people will react when challenged however skilfully done. Test this assumption by asking people how they behave when challenged by juniors, peers, boss.</p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Speaking up has its risks</b></p> <p>'Every once in a while, Truth still pipes up in meetings. When this happens, more often than not, Truth is simply bent over an authoritative knee and soundly spanked into silence'.</p> <p style="font-size: x-small;">Su, P. (2006) Cultured to slip. Blog posting, June 14th. Available from: <a href="http://blogs.mq.edu.au/billissu/archive/2006/06/14/931438.aspx">http://blogs.mq.edu.au/billissu/archive/2006/06/14/931438.aspx</a> [Accessed 23rd June 2006]</p> <p style="font-size: x-small; text-align: center;">Speaking up and being silenced 20</p>  | <p>Reinforces message of push back when challenged. Blog quote about development of software and conflict between managers who set the deadlines and developers who knew that the deadline would not be met.</p>   |

| Slide  | Notes   |
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| <p data-bbox="321 279 623 310"><b>Speaking up has its risks</b></p> <p data-bbox="277 348 665 516">In the survey carried out by Woodman and Cook (2005) for the Chartered Management Institute, 39% of all managers reported being bullied in the past three years. Public sector managers were at most risk. Cooper and Faragher (2001) conclude in their large scale survey across public and private sector in the UK that 'workplace bullying is a major social problem' (p.457).</p> <p data-bbox="410 560 669 573">Speaking up and being silenced 21</p> | <p data-bbox="748 285 1373 344">There is evidence that we can struggle to manage challenge.</p> <p data-bbox="748 380 1373 501">Raises questions about how, why, when people in their role as senior managers can co-create contexts where this risk is high.</p>   |
| <p data-bbox="342 648 600 680"><b>Focusing the viewing</b></p> <ul data-bbox="277 701 651 909" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ How do participants silence themselves?</li> <li>▪ How are they silenced? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Context – local and social</li> <li>▪ Power</li> <li>▪ Group process</li> <li>▪ Disagreement</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ What connections can be made with your experience?</li> </ul> <p data-bbox="410 928 669 940">Speaking up and being silenced 26</p>  | <p data-bbox="748 653 1373 963">The next 3 introduce two DVDs. The <i>Abilene Paradox</i> describes Groupthink (Harvey, 1988). Useful in helping people think when they have been silenced. The <i>Conspiracy</i> DVD, based on Wannsee Conference, produced for World Holocaust Day. Serious viewing, raises impossibility of confronting some forms of power and how context can silence.</p>   |
| <p data-bbox="297 1018 581 1050"><b>Problems of agreement</b></p>  <p data-bbox="410 1297 669 1310">Speaking up and being silenced 27</p>   | <p data-bbox="748 1022 1373 1119"><i>The Abilene Paradox</i> (2<sup>nd</sup> edition). (CRM Learning [DVD] Available from: <a href="http://www.crmlearning.com/aboutcrm/">http://www.crmlearning.com/aboutcrm/</a>)</p>   |
| <p data-bbox="280 1390 561 1421"><b>Problems of agreement</b></p>  <p data-bbox="410 1654 669 1667">Speaking up and being silenced 28</p>   | <p data-bbox="748 1365 1373 1423"><i>Conspiracy</i> (2003) Directed by Frank Pierson. HBO.</p> <p data-bbox="748 1459 1373 1581">Historical reference: Roseman, M. (2003) The villa, the lake, the meeting. Wannsee and the final solution. London, Penguin.</p> <p data-bbox="748 1617 1373 1795">'Despite the euphemism of evacuation, the minutes unmistakably contain a plan for genocide - formulated in sober bureaucratic language, deliberated on in civilized surroundings in a once cosmopolitan suburb of Berlin. Serious intelligent men had conferred together and delved into the details of the half-Jew , the quarter Jew' (p.1).</p> |

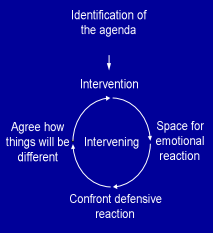
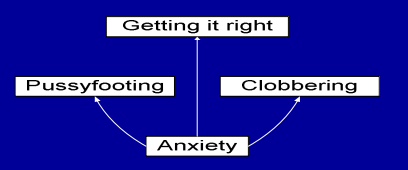
| Slide   | Notes   |
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| <p data-bbox="370 279 571 310"><b>Doing challenge</b></p> <ul data-bbox="277 323 656 562" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What triggered your intervention?</li> <li>▪ What was the context? <ul data-bbox="302 380 509 426" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- who was there?</li> <li>- what was your/their role?</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ How did you feel? <ul data-bbox="302 459 618 485" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- what were the effects of these feelings?</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ How did you behave</li> <li>▪ What did you learn about yourself, others &amp; effects of context?</li> </ul> <p data-bbox="410 562 670 575"><small>Speaking up and being silenced 22</small></p> | <p data-bbox="745 285 1373 407">Introduces idea of being constructively awkward. Offer some anonymised examples from the project to catalyse conversation.</p> <p data-bbox="745 443 1373 537">People spend time working on questions on their own and discuss in small groups followed by plenary.</p>   |
|  <p data-bbox="272 919 477 940">Ethical sensitivity</p>  | <p data-bbox="745 653 1373 968">Introduces idea that self-authorisation is partially built and sustained, sufficient to trigger and intervention, when values are challenged. The assumption is that the more explicit the values, the more sensitised people will be to why they feel challenged and this makes them harder to ignore when they are not actualised. That is, values when challenged can be generative.</p>                                   |
| <p data-bbox="354 1020 587 1052"><b>What do I react to?</b></p> <p data-bbox="293 1073 646 1262"><i>I'm a community based kind of character, I don't know why... I've grown up around large groups of black males, many of them not as fortunate as me in actually having developed some skills and knowledge and a bit of ability and understanding about the system. So I would feel I would be a sell out if I didn't do something to try and improve matters and improve life.</i></p> <p data-bbox="410 1297 670 1310"><small>Speaking up and being silenced 23</small></p>  | <p data-bbox="745 1020 1373 1272">Solomon<sup>8</sup> argues for no separation between personal ethics and those expressed in one's organisational life. McKie (2004) asks two questions. <i>What is being asked of me as I face this situation? What sort of organisation or community am I part of?</i> (p.140).</p> <p data-bbox="745 1304 1373 1398">Good organisational values emerge from the individuals in conversation with a receptive context.</p> |
| <p data-bbox="354 1430 587 1461"><b>What do I react to?</b></p> <ul data-bbox="277 1482 672 1661" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What issues do I have to confront?</li> <li>• What would I like to confront</li> <li>• What interventions do I feel good about?</li> <li>• What interventions do I wish I had done or done better?</li> <li>• Where did I learn about doing challenge and confronting?</li> </ul> <p data-bbox="410 1696 670 1709"><small>Speaking up and being silenced 25</small></p>  | <p data-bbox="745 1430 1373 1556">Exercise that asks people to think about what triggers their ethical sensitivities and their experience and skills in confronting.</p> <p data-bbox="745 1587 1373 1650">Important to link experience, good or bad, to effects of context.</p>  |

<sup>8</sup> 'People in business are ultimately responsible as individuals, but they are responsible as individuals in a corporate setting where their responsibilities are at least in part defined by their roles and duties in the company and, of course the 'bottom line'' (Solomon, 1997, p.208).




| Slide  | Notes  |
|--|--|
| <p data-bbox="282 281 665 310"><b>One dimensional view of power</b></p> <ul data-bbox="282 331 649 525" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ A has power over B to the extent that he can successfully get B to do something that B would not otherwise do <ul data-bbox="298 436 643 525" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To see who has power we simply observe behaviour/ decision-making processes and see who wins, who loses - those who have success are those who have power</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p data-bbox="412 558 672 575"><small>Speaking up and being silenced 29</small></p>   | <p data-bbox="750 281 1373 474">Next three slides constitute additional conceptual material. Lukes's (2004) conceptualisation offers language to help think about being led and managed and how one also leads and manages.</p> <p data-bbox="750 504 1373 659">Links to experience of oppressed groups being invisible. For example, O'Grady (2005) and internalising of oppressive structures leading to self-silencing.</p> |
| <p data-bbox="282 688 665 718"><b>Two dimensional view of power</b></p> <ul data-bbox="282 743 649 936" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Power has not one but two facets: <ul data-bbox="298 768 649 840" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➢ open conflict (first dimension)</li> <li>➢ closing of opportunities to express dissent - covert use of power</li> </ul> </li> <li>▪ No public airing of policy conflicts. "Non-decision-making" (the mobilisation of bias to close off the political agenda)</li> </ul> <p data-bbox="412 970 672 987"><small>Speaking up and being silenced 30</small></p>  | <p data-bbox="750 693 1373 1012">Also, silence as a manifestation of power (Macalpine and Marsh, 2005) They argue power is expressed through silence. This is silence as discourse, which authorises certain ways of talking and thinking. This boundary is maintained by self-policing as embarrassment or fear<sup>9</sup>. This make it much harder to question how language and practice conceal wigo.</p>                 |
| <p data-bbox="282 1060 665 1089"><b>Three dimensional power</b></p> <ul data-bbox="282 1115 691 1295" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ "A also exercises power over [B] by ... influencing, shaping or determining his very wants. Indeed, is it not the supreme exercise of power to get another or others to have the desires you want them to have - that is to secure their compliance by controlling their thoughts and desires?"</li> </ul> <p data-bbox="289 1304 389 1320"><small>(Lukes 1974, p.23)</small></p> <p data-bbox="412 1354 672 1371"><small>Speaking up and being silenced 31</small></p>   | <p data-bbox="750 1064 987 1094">Links to above.</p>   |
| <p data-bbox="282 1449 665 1478"><b>What some people find helpful</b></p> <ul data-bbox="282 1486 649 1717" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Build self-authorisation <ul data-bbox="298 1507 643 1717" style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Listen to reflexive voices</li> <li>- Assume you may not be wrong</li> <li>- Assume others think/feel as you do</li> <li>- Speak to any emotional response</li> <li>- Accept the pleasure of correcting wrong thinking</li> <li>- Be in denial of what is taken for granted</li> <li>- Be the best prepared in the room</li> <li>- Remember history</li> <li>- Remember who you admire</li> <li>- Know what your values are and bring them to work</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p data-bbox="412 1717 672 1734"><small>Speaking up and being silenced 32</small></p> | <p data-bbox="750 1453 1373 1768">Reflects current theory about constructive awkwardness. Opportunity to develop theory based on participant experience. This needs to be linked to the contexts represented in the data (gender, professional role, organisations, self-authorised). Self-authorised is example of context mechanism that can override some effects of other contexts.</p>                                    |

<sup>9</sup> 'discursively conceals what would be otherwise be so noticeable - the continued huge disjuncture in power/status/life chances between black and white people' (Macalpine and Marsh, 2006 p.443).

| Slide   | Notes  |
|---|--|
| <p>What some people find helpful</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understand how context and wider structures authorise and silence you</li> <li>Practice and review</li> <li>Learn to apologise with grace</li> </ul> <p>Speaking up and being silenced 33</p>   | <p>Apologies reference: Tucker et al (2006) Apologies and transformational leadership. <i>Journal of Business Ethics</i>, (63), pp.195-207.</p> <p>Empirical study, concluded that leaders who apologise and learn are seen as looking beyond self-interest and attending to relationships.<sup>10</sup> Study based on ice hockey referees and apologies to coaches.</p>  |
| <p>Leadership responsibilities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>'Thick' conversations</li> <li>Challenge is valued <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>congruent with espoused theory</li> <li>assumption of robustness</li> </ul> </li> <li>Model challenge</li> <li>Accept an offer apologies</li> <li>Support stories of challenge in the culture</li> </ul> <p>Speaking up and being silenced 34</p>   | <p>Returns to the theme of participants' responsibility for creating conducive contexts for challenge and argumentation.</p> <p>Opportunity to explore how people currently manage challenge and what effects they notice about their management.</p>  |
| <p>Punctuating the conversation<br/><small>(Based on Heron 2001)</small></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Feedback - this is how I experience you</li> <li>Direct questioning - why did you do that?</li> <li>Rattle and shake - what's the evidence for that?</li> <li>Correction and disagreement - no, its not like that.</li> <li>Focus on feelings - I know what you think but how do you feel?</li> <li>Controlled expression of own emotions - you really need to hear this and see how angry I feel</li> </ul>  <p>Speaking up and being silenced 35</p> | <p>Next two slides introduce skills aspect of constructive awkwardness. Heron (2000) sets out basic confronting agendas and the role of anxiety in mediating the quality of the intervention.</p> <p>Competence in this skill is linked to practice. The giving and receiving of feedback, around issues that matter (e.g. academic performance, behaviour in a small or large groups) is a useful education context in which to practice.</p> |
| <p>The Confronting Balancing Act</p>  <p>Speaking up and being silenced 36</p>   |  |

<sup>10</sup> Four categories: excuse (I did wrong but not my fault); Justification (accept responsibility but deny wrong doing); denial (nothing wrong and not me); and apology (I'm wrong, my responsibility, I'm sorry, not happen again)

| Slide  | Notes   |
|--|---|
|  | <p>The following three slides are additional material helping to contextualise constructive awkwardness in conversation.</p> <p>Offers a way of thinking about an activity that may be in the organisational woodwork.</p> <p>Introduces questions about what sorts of questions people encourage and what effects they notice.</p> |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Conversations are culturally determined</b></p> <p><i>If this is the aim, then the fact that we have all these opportunities for disagreement about values need not put us off. Understanding one another may be hard; it can certainly be interesting. But it does not require that we come to agreement.</i></p> <p><small>(Ginsburg, 2005 p.76)</small></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><small>Speaking up and being silenced 38</small></p>   |   |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Conversation</b></p>  <p><i>Empty right until people freed themselves of the feeling that they did not know how to express themselves properly' and they also needed to overcome 'the old ingrained dislike of being interrupted, which seemed like a mutilation.</i></p> <p><small>(Zadon, 1998, p.33)</small></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><small>Speaking up and being silenced 39</small></p> |   |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Work based experiment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What do you want to be different?</li> <li>▪ What would it look like if you were effective?</li> <li>▪ When will you behave differently?</li> <li>▪ What resources will you need?</li> <li>▪ What feedback will you need?</li> <li>▪ How could you sabotage yourself?</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;"><small>Speaking up and being silenced 40</small></p>  | <p>This offers a structured approach to doing differently back in the work place.</p>   |

| Category                              | Constituent code  |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| <b>1. Boundary position</b>           |   |
| <b>2. CA skills</b>                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Able to discriminating contexts (what I might change)</li> </ul> |
|                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Asking questions</li> </ul>                                      |
|                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Containing emotions</li> </ul>                                   |
|                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Lack of self censorship</li> </ul>                               |
|                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Negotiating the CA contract</li> </ul>                           |
|                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Outflanking</li> </ul>   |
|                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Planning</li> </ul>  |
|                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Reflective capability</li> </ul>                                 |
|                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Structuring</li> </ul>   |
| <b>3. Disabling factors</b>           |   |
|                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Self-doubt</li> </ul>  |
|                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Self-silencing</li> </ul>  |
| <b>4. Initiating the intervention</b> |   |
|                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Access to 'target'</li> </ul>                                    |
|                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Spontaneous</li> </ul>   |
|                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Work on the good</li> </ul>                                      |
| <b>5. Reflexive conversation</b>      |   |
|                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Asked directly about reflexive conversation</li> </ul>           |
| <b>6. Reparation</b>                  |   |
|                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Repair activities</li> </ul>                                     |
| <b>7. Self authorisation</b>          |   |
|                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Recognised as a leader</li> </ul>                                |
|                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Self authorisation</li> </ul>                                    |
| <b>8. Value base</b>                  |   |
|                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Being fair</li> </ul>  |
|                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Empathy</li> </ul>   |
|                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Holding to account</li> </ul>                                    |
|                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Lack of plurality in sense making</li> </ul>                     |
|                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Self criticism</li> </ul>  |
|                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Self esteem</li> </ul>   |
|                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Speaking up for self and others</li> </ul>                       |
|                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Values challenged</li> </ul>                                     |

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