

**Organisational Role Analysis  
at  
The Grubb Institute of Behavioural Studies:  
Origins and development**

**by**

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## 1 Focusing on working experience: The model and its evolution

Group relations conferences have always been profound experiences for members and for staff which clearly affect how participants return to their organisations and begin to behave in new ways in the work place. The Grubb Institute has always been deeply concerned to understand how the principles on which conferences are designed relate to the everyday experience of work places - businesses, schools, churches, hospitals, youth clubs, prisons and probation and so on. Over the years Organisational Role Analysis has become the most powerful way we have developed, through which to address the issue directly.

The development began in 1968 when we launched the *Behaviour in the Working Environment* conference (BWE)<sup>1</sup>, an extended six month non-residential course, designed to give participants time to become familiar with previously unfamiliar ideas and to apply them whilst in continuing contact with staff and fellow members. The course opened with a full week's group relations conference including here-and-now events and a Consultation Group. Consultation Groups then met for 12 weeks. After 12 weeks the participants attended the second full conference week which was followed by a further 12 sessions of Consultation Groups.

In this Course we made a vitally important discovery.

We had been preoccupied with how participants could go about embedding their learning in their places of work. So, in the second phase of Consultation Groups, participants were invited to bring a colleague to the Group to work on a shared practical issue. It became clear from this that, in the context of the Consultation Group, those with no conference experience could get in touch with and work with their own working experience, giving them similar insight into unconscious processes in the workplace as those who had attended the

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<sup>1</sup> These ran from 1968 to 1973 when the contraction of the British economy following the oil crisis made the model more expensive than was affordable at the time.

conferences. This realisation led to the development in 1972 of what we called Organisational Role Analysis.<sup>2</sup>

***The Grubb Institute's approach to Organisational Role Analysis (ORA)***

ORA as The Grubb Institute practises it now provides a professional context for leaders and managers of institutions:

to examine and articulate their **current working experience**;

to analyse it in its organisational setting so as to sharpen up the **meaning** of that experience in terms of purpose, systems and boundaries;

to grasp opportunities to **find, make and take up their organisational roles** more effectively;

and thus to **transform** their contribution towards achieving the corporate aims of their institution.

***Client*** ORA is most suitable for those with executive or managerial responsibilities, leading and managing a system of activities, working from a position on the boundary between the system and its context. At the outset of the assignment, they may not be aware in these terms that this is what they are doing, but it is clear from our experience that those who work more through networks than in systems need another approach, which is not ORA.

***Time and location*** An ORA typically consists of eight two hour sessions, arranged to take place about two weeks apart, off site for the client. The consultant never meets the client on the client's home ground so that the only evidence available is what the client tells the consultant, uncluttered by the consultant's own separately generated impressions about the organisation.

***Consultant*** The consultant is trained by The Grubb Institute.

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<sup>2</sup> See B D Reed (1976) 'Organisational Role Analysis' in C L Cooper (ed) *Developing Social Skills in Managers*. London: Macmillan Press, pp 89-102. Other papers since that one have spelled out how we have developed this method and the concepts that have emerged from it. See also Alastair Mant (1976) 'How to Analyse Management' *Management Today*, October

**Object of Study** The focus of work is on the client's description of their relatedness to their working organisation drawn from their experience of their day to day working relations and the meaning they attach to them. Attention is paid to decisions and actions that the client takes and how they interpret the behaviour of others towards them and how these reveal systems held consciously and unconsciously in the client's mind. Whilst the evidence worked with overtly is drawn from the client's descriptions of situations and their feelings about them, a continual area to which the consultant attends is his (or her) own feelings and images engendered by the work. This is comparable to an analyst paying attention to transference and counter-transference in an analytic session.

**Extravision** Working on a one-to-one basis, even the most experienced consultant is always vulnerable to being captured by the material presented by the client. For this reason consultants build in extravision from a colleague.

## **2 Being in Role - Theoretical framework and its Development**

Today's practice of Organisational Role Analysis draws upon our conceptualisation of 'role', a concept for which ORA has provided a development crucible over the last 30 years, where it has been tested continuously against the lived experience of clients and consultants.

A 'role' in our thinking is a mental regulating principle, based on a person's lived experience of the complex interaction of feelings, ideas and motivations, aroused in working to the aim of a system (which is itself an internal object to the person), integrated consciously and unconsciously and expressed in purposive behaviour.

### ***Limitations of normal uses of the term 'role'***

Normal uses of the term role have limitations:

They are **prescriptive**. They suggest that a role is largely defined **for** us. This does not do justice to our everyday experience in the roles we have. No one can do a job adequately by adhering slavishly to a job description. Priorities need sorting, activities relating to new circumstances, decisions have to be taken in unforeseen conditions. None of this can be described in advance.

They tend to be **static**. They do not acknowledge that in taking a role one is always relating to a changing context, both within the organisation and in the environment on which it depends for its survival and growth.

Thinking about 'role' in these ways tends to draw a **hard and fast distinction between 'role' and 'person'**. In fact, great actors acknowledge that to be able to give a convincing portrayal, one must be able to discover something inside oneself that is in tune with the character one is portraying and with the issues opened up by the play.

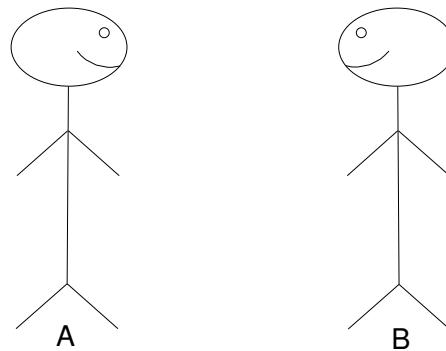
### ***Taking a role: a dynamic perspective***

To take a role implies being able to formulate or discover, however intuitively, a **regulating principle** inside oneself which enables one, as a person, to manage one's behaviour in relation to what needs to be done to further the purpose of the system within which the role is to be taken. So we speak of a **person-in-role**. While a person's inner world has some largely stable elements, much of what is contained there is in constant flux: understandings, insights, feelings, memories and recognitions continuously interact and affect each other. Similarly the external world is not rigid but also changes and shifts. Thus, taking a 'role' is **always dynamic**: it is never a fixed response.

This being the case, the possibility always exists for someone working in role to turn adverse conditions into positive ones. We frequently point out that a sailor handling a dinghy in difficult conditions is challenged by the head wind, the height of the waves, the adverse tide and currents if he is to get to his destination. The skill required by the trimming of the sails, the disposition of

body weight and the use of the rudder can use these forces to keep the boat moving in the planned general direction. And of course, this is true of everyone working within an organisation, which itself has implications.

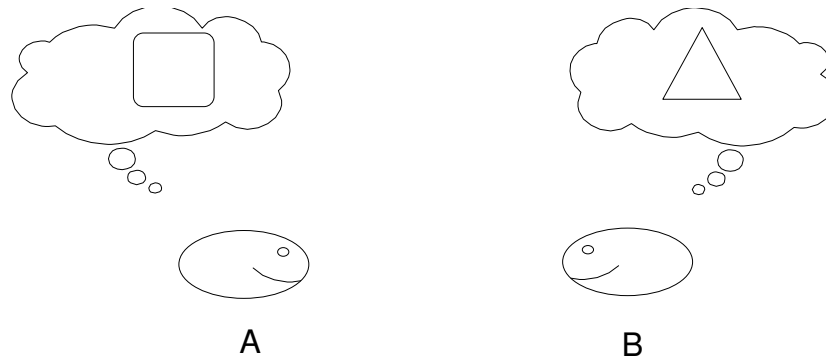
**Illustration:** We can illustrate the principle and those implications with a simple diagram of an everyday occurrence. Imagine two people with managerial responsibilities discussing an issue and coming to what they both think is an agreed course of action.



### Insert Figure 1

However, Manager B goes off and in good faith does something entirely different from what Manager A had expected. It is likely that such a thing has happened in most people's experience.

The problem is that each of them has in their minds a different picture of the (apparently same) organisation. A attributes certain values to what he says and what he hears from B. B does likewise, so they agree on the action, each believing they know what the other intends. But A interprets everything in terms of a 'square' organisation-in-the-mind, and B interprets the same words and actions in terms of a 'triangular' organisation-in-the-mind.



**Figure 2**

The difference between them can be attributed to the way they each experience their work, the values they bring to it and the feelings they have at the time of their meeting. Because they worked with unexplored differences, they had different institutions-in-the-mind. Since some of these were unconscious, they were unable to grasp how different they were and how these would affect their subsequent behaviour.

***‘Organisation-in-the-mind’ and ‘Institution-in-the-mind’***

This model has led the Institute to use definitions about these mental constructs. When people start to examine what they mean by ‘institution’ or ‘organisation’, they are trying to identify what they have ‘in-the-mind’ about them. The temptation is always to reify them as existing ‘out there’, but the reality is that they are constructs, and are held only in the mind. We can thus speak of ‘organisation-in-the-mind’ and ‘institution-in-the-mind’.<sup>3</sup>

**Organisation-in-the-mind** is a construct, focused around emotional experience of tasks, roles, purposes, boundaries rituals, accountability, competence, failure, success within the enterprise. Organisation-in-the-mind

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<sup>3</sup> See for example D G Armstrong (1997) The ‘Institution-in-the-mind’: reflections on the relevance of psychoanalysis to work with institutions *Free Associations*, 7/1 (No 41); 1-14 and W Carr (1999) Can we speak of spirituality in institutions J F Cobble and CM Elliott (eds) *The Hidden Spirit* CMR Press, Matthews NC, USA 109-117, E Shapiro & W Carr (1991) *Lost in Familiar Places: making new connections between individual and society*, Yale UP, New Haven USA ; BD Reed (1978) -*The Dynamics of Religion* - Darton, Longman and Todd, London UK p42

may be more or less conscious or unconscious but whatever it is, it calls for **management**.

**Institution-in-the-mind** also can be a more or less conscious or unconscious construct, focused around the emotional experience of ideals, values, hopes, beliefs, dreams, symbols, birth, life, death. It is not confined to the internal life of the institution but has resonance within the system from its context, by which it is deeply influenced. Institution-in-the-mind requires **leadership**.

We can say that organisation-in-the-mind can be understood as a metaphor of the body, and institution-in-the-mind as a metaphor of the spirit. Together they constitute a whole. A way of illustrating this would be to take the example of the nuclear family. ‘Nuclear’ describes the organisation-in-the-mind, and ‘family’ the institution-in-the-mind.

### ***Participating in systems***

Everyone who joins an organisation or group comes into a particular position. This position may have assigned duties and responsibilities attached to it. There may also be expectations about what is seen as appropriate behaviour (either overtly or covertly). Neither the position nor the expectations define the role, nor do they enable the post-holder to know how to manage his or her behaviour appropriately in the circumstances and situation he or she meets.

A role is fashioned or taken up:

- ♣ as a person **identifies the aim** of the system they belong to;
- ♣ relates their **own desire** to that aim
- ♣ **takes ownership** of the aim as a member of the system;
- ♣ **chooses the action** and personal behaviour which from their position best contributes to **achieving the system’s aim**

- ♣ Once the person takes the role, they can find themselves in a position to see that the **'taken for granted' aim of the system may need to change** and that by working in role they have **authority** to take action to enable that change to take place.

Since circumstances are always changing, both within the working unit or organisation and in the context or environment, a role in this sense is never static.

### **Role, System and Person**

**Role** is an idea in the mind. We cannot see a role but we all behave as persons - all the time. By observing someone we can deduce from how they behave what **system** they have in their mind and what they imagine is needed to contribute to the aim of that system. By 'system' we refer to the idea in the mind which construes human activities as taking place within a boundary which differentiates those activities from their context<sup>4</sup>. A system itself cannot be 'seen' though the territory (or space), the membership, the time and the results of activities may be tangible and concrete.

A **person** is not the same as an 'individual' in that an individual can be construed as being bounded by their own skin, while a 'person' is a nexus of relationships. This means that a person, without being diminished, may have many roles in the same system when it has several subgroups or subsystems, *eg* in a school a person may be responsible for teaching a subject (the subsystem of a class), have management responsibilities across the school (say, in the pastoral subsystem), and be responsible for the school play (a special cultural subsystem).

A **person** who is appointed to a position in an institution (**system**) and given a job description is assumed to have some of the ingredients for taking a role: the necessary capacities, a grasp of the purpose of the system and an appreciation of conditions *eg* resources and the state of the environment. They set out to

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<sup>4</sup> G. Bateson (1972) - *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* - Chandler, NY USA

integrate this knowledge and understanding, finding a way of working to achieve the system's purpose. Mentally the person is 'constructing' a set of self-disciplined behavioural patterns to achieve the desired goal of this human system of activities.

### **3      *The ORA Process described***

Since our initial work on Organisational Role Analysis in 1972 we have based our work on the theoretical experiential models of analysis described above. We use a series of working hypotheses to enable clients to have opportunities to work with the realities of their working environment in order to achieve the task which caused them to become our clients.

ORA clients look for practical, not therapeutic, outcomes and accept that they have to find ways of working in their business or institution so they can make a difference. So ORA sessions are not discussions around theories, but are always open up potential for grasping the reality - the truth of the situation - and enabling the client to be in good shape to go and take any necessary action, session by session.

We can now describe the process of an ORA step by step (individually), outlining the key phases and culture situations which the client experiences over the time of the ORA period.

#### ***Finding the role***

When we meet as a one-to-one working pair our opening is to invite the client to describe a current incident which points to their difficulties. Working on the realities of the 'here and now' of their workplace enables the client to express their feelings about what is happening there, so we at once begin to work on their inner world of ideas, objectives, satisfactions, disappointments, relationships and a whole plethora of activities and feelings that form the working context of the client.

The client frequently describes a series of linked activities without seeing the whole they represent. They describe networks without being able to identify the boundary holding these activities together in a context in a way which implies a clear direction. The consultant may have to tease out the client's working experience in different ways over and over in the following sessions before the client can begin to perceive the 'whole' they describe as co-ordinated and having an intrinsic meaning rather than simply being a number of parts which are more or less connected.

This process enables an internal image to surface in the mind of the client where they realise that the organisation structure of their institution/business is not 'out there' but a subjective mental **construct** which they can learn to describe and give shape to, as details become clearer and the relations between the enterprise and its context becomes sharper.

Drawing on the client's experience, the consultant develops working hypotheses which the client can then use to test realities both during the actual ORA session and back at the work-place. This process is one of the client learning to see their institution as a **system**, an organic series of activities, surrounded by a boundary which differentiates them from the environment. This is a mental image which enables the client to appreciate what the institution is for in reality, discerning what its goals and purpose are in its environment. Part of the significance of this understanding is that the client - especially those with leadership and management responsibilities - begins to become alert to the reality that their executive role is located at the boundary of the system, working to understand and take decisions and actions which influence the engagement of the system with its context.

This process provides a major clue as to the value of the ORA. The effort required by clients to grasp this idea of system is frequently considerable, but it is essential for any executive: those aware of their executive responsibilities soon appreciate that the purpose of the ORA is to enable them to take initiatives on behalf of the system to which they belong.

In other words - they begin to find a position from which to operate legally for the system's benefit as a priority, taking into account all the complexity of factors they encounter in the meantime. The client working on these issues in our terms is beginning to work 'in role'. The consultant's task is to enable the client to describe the system more and more clearly, to define the real results required by that system if it is to survive and grow, and to support the client in locating themselves on the boundary of the system in relation to other executives and operating questions, the deployment of human and other resources and the sense of being ready to take the risk of going into action.

This first phase of the ORA process is one of **finding** there is a place for a role in the mental picture of the system which the client is forming, re-forming and developing, a role which the client begins to believe in and which is proper for him. This disciplined approach acts as a regulating principle for the client in going into unknown territory where feelings challenge the client to take risks with what they are doing - with others as well as themselves.

### ***Making the role***

By this time several sessions are likely to have passed. The client gradually orders these working experiences so that they are ready to begin to have a wider understanding of the situation, seen in terms of the system in context. Maybe they have begun to summon up the courage to take action involving risks and it is this next phase of the ORA we begin to examine.

This phase is the one of **making** the role, having found that there is one to be made.

It is obvious that in defining the working system the client will become involved with sorting out many overlapping systems - personal, family, professional, financial, among others all of which have their own impact on the mind-set of the client. These issues arise in sorting out the external pressures as the means of 'making the role'.

***The person in the system*** In the course of the sessions so far the client will have been able to check their experience is that of being a **person** looking for a role, and not just an individual. The person embodies the qualities, aptitudes, character and competence of the client which is brought to good account in making the role.

***Psychological and sociological role*** As indicated previously, roles are not seen as such, the only thing others can 'see' is behaviour, from which they can deduce its appropriateness according to their own perspectives on the system/institution. The person finding the role may best come across it as an insight - when the system becomes defined with its boundaries and aim. Then the client wants to take action about the aim and can grasp what is necessary for him to discipline himself to achieve it. The two diverse perspectives (person and system) on the client's behaviour-in-role become increasingly important because they influence the client's thinking. The role as internalised by the client, developed and disciplined, adapted and responsive to the internal and external contexts as they interpret them is the **psychological** role. This expresses the desire of the person, which they bring to their responsibilities, providing them with the emotional energy which they can invest in the work of the system.

But role can also be seen from the point of those who experience the behaviour of the client as colleagues, subordinates or bosses. This is what we call the **sociological** role. Besides the positive experience of feeling supported in their view of what they are doing, clients also experience the possible shock of finding that others express critical and derogatory opinions about the client's behaviour. This can put pressure on him to conform to their sociological perspective, to become anxious, to refuse to take risks or step out of line. The consequence is the client can be compromised in how they work in their roles, their morale can be shaken. This explains why in the intimate one-to-one with the consultant, though the client decides to take an action back at work, actually he does nothing when faced with the awkward realities of the 'real' world of work and his colleagues.

Clients usually produce experiences of this kind and the consultant's task is to explore with the client how an adverse sociological role - however powerful - is only one of the external forces which divert the client's focus from his own inner sense of role and his understanding of the purpose of the system. We have given the example of the sailor in his boat, capitalising on the natural forces available to him, even the seemingly adverse ones.

The use of the concepts of psychological and sociological role have possibilities, that is to say they provide ways for the client to monitor how their intuition or desire is being expressed in the realities of their own behaviour and activities. To follow this through calls for patience and a clear focus on the part of both client and consultant as they come up with working hypotheses for the client to test in practice. Good working hypotheses, tested in the workplace enhance the client's understanding of themselves and develop how they use their personal qualities. It also furthers their understanding of the real nature and state of the system in which they take a role.

***Using Working Hypotheses*** Essential to enabling the client to make the role in their mind is the practice of developing working hypotheses. In ORA, working hypotheses are formulated by the client and consultant together to offer propositions for testing by the client. It enables the client to explore the meaning of the realities that confront them in their system, and to establish in their own minds what is the appropriate role-distance between themselves and others as they prepare to take action. A good working hypothesis reveals the points of leverage in the system which are available to the client and can suggest how to use them.

As we have said earlier, the client's view of the whole system is never fixed, it is dynamic and will be constantly revised. It is also subjective and relative, always influencing the client's behaviour. Sometimes a 'story' told in an early session gets repeated but as time has evolved, the meaning changes, revealing underlying patterns that were not apparent in the first telling. Over the eight sessions critical views of others can be explored in depth and may turn out to

be based on facts missed at first by the client (and perhaps the consultant). Using working hypotheses about resistances and opposition can finally reveal something that is valid but so far unrecognised by the client.

With so many cross currents of emotion and often with considerable vested interests at stake, there are bound to be signals that unknown, possibly unconscious, processes are also at work. The consultant can enable the client to address these happenings and to understand some of their meanings by raising the question “Why is this situation happening?” “Why is it necessary for John Doe or Richard Roe to be so uncompromising?” In this way the focus is taken away from John D and Richard R and access becomes available to the hidden forces of the institution, with which to explain their obscurities. So the energies that exist in the system can be released to the client enabling him to make his role in ways that enable the system to become fit for purpose in its context.

### ***Taking the role***

Having evolved a mental image of the system, its aim and boundaries, and formulated thoughts about the system’s functioning and about possible causes, the client is equipped to test his thinking by taking action which will in its turn influence the functioning of the system. To behave in role is to **take the role**. Because he is committed to testing a hypothesis which he believes in, the client is both fully committed to what he does but is also open to the possibility that there are factors and forces he has not fully taken into account. So he is ready to learn from what happens.

Over the three months or so of the ORA client’s view of the nature of themselves as persons and of the system and its aim can be subject to revision and quite new action - which is all part of the ongoing process of understanding and testing the analysis. Each session can contribute to furthering and deepening the client’s understanding as he becomes involved in an iterative process of re-finding, re-making and re-taking the role.

## 4 Lived examples

We can offer two brief examples of ORA in different settings. In one the client had to revise his view of the aim of the sub-system within the over-arching system with significant implications for his behaviour in role; in the second the two clients came to review how the function of their company was construed which affected their own working relations and that of the company system itself.

The first case study is of the chaplain in a mental hospital; the other involves the Managing Director and the Creative Director from the European Region of the same global company, who took their ORAs in parallel.

### *The Hospital Chaplain*

**Finding the role** The client was the head of the Chaplain's Department in a large, internationally known mental hospital. He came because he felt frustrated and marginalised in the hospital, exemplified by the fact that when he presented a Business Plan for his Department (unrequested) the Hospital Board refused even to discuss it. Through the ORA it steadily emerged that he was failing to take serious account of the real boundaries of the Chaplain's Department and the expectations of the hospital management, staff and patients. Having a therapeutic background himself (besides being an ordained priest) and doing several hours work a week as a therapist, it emerged that he was envious of the perceived status of the therapists and medics 'in their white coats': he was seeking to make the Chaplain's Department another kind of therapeutic provision, while denying his theological training and vocation as a priest. Significant evidence to the consultant was that he found himself filled up images from scripture and theological 'insights' into what was happening, while the client was only producing psychodynamic interpretations of what was going on in his work with groups of nurses and patients.

**Making the role** The consultant began to offer hypotheses based on his experience of the transference and the splitting that was taking place, sharing

these with the client. Having seen these as worth testing, first against other evidence generated from within the consultation and then - once he began to see the probability of the truth of the line of thought - in how he worked in the hospital, the client began to behave differently. This process at first revealed that he felt that his 'best therapeutic work' was actually done in the office marked 'Chaplain' rather than in the other more clinical settings in which he worked. It became evident that his own *psychological role* was that of a 'psychotherapist' and he was seeking to make the Chaplaincy system suitable to realise that desire. Those he met, however, were working with the *sociological role* of 'chaplain' and were looking for something else from him and were able to trust him more in that role more fully than they could when experiencing him as a therapist, even when he was unaware that that was what they were doing.

By formulating further hypotheses around the interaction between the sociological role held from the Board, to groups of nurses and patients, what was revealed was that they were looking for from the Chaplain's Department was a priest and spiritual resource to the hospital, not another seemingly 'amateur' therapist. This showed up the tensions between other's expectations of him from his own: they were less instrumental, more numinous and more open to new meanings. They were closer to what he had been trained as and what he was appointed to do.

***Taking the role*** He tested these hypotheses by rethinking his work in the Department with his several colleagues, especially in the Hospital Chapel where they devised new services which were more participatory and focused on the real experiences and problems in the life of the hospital. As a result attendance at services increased and included patients, nursing and medical staff and hospital managers. Other work was devised which served the spiritual hunger of people in the hospital. Evidence began to accumulate that the revitalised spiritual life in the hospital could contribute to the stabilisation and progress of some of the patients who used the Department's services (including one who had made national headlines before he was assigned to the

hospital and had proved particularly resistant to treatment to date). There was also evidence of the improvement of morale and effective functioning, especially amongst nursing staff, following a rash of suicides amongst the outpatients.

### ***The Creative Director and the Managing Director***

The Creative Director and the Managing Director had been working together for six months as the Senior Management Team of the European Region of a global agency. The company's business was helping pharmaceutical companies to market their products to the medical world. The two men were referred to The Grubb Institute by the Group Chairman/Chief Executive (GC/CE), because their relationship was deteriorating. The Creative Director was having outbursts of rage, using foul language and storming out of meetings, apparently enraged by such things as the loss of his parking space at a time of company retrenchment. Meanwhile the Managing Director was furious at the apparent collusion of his colleague with the behaviour of the members of the Creative Department who seemed to ignore company practice about working at home, failing to meet deadlines and booking leave without reference to pressures of meeting client commitments.

The impact of the tensions between the two was to suck others into polarised positions in the European office and was even in danger of splitting the global enterprise. Since the whole company was in a precarious financial state, this could not be allowed to continue. The two ORAs were conducted in parallel by the same consultant<sup>5</sup> after an initial joint meeting with the GC/CE and the consultant at which the aim of the assignment was negotiated. Besides the normal eight fortnightly sessions, two other joint meetings of the three of them with the consultant were planned in, one after four sessions of ORA and a further one at the end of the eighth session.

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5 *In other situations we have used separate consultants.*

***Finding the roles*** In the opening sessions the Creative Director expostulated about the way he felt demeaned and humiliated by his colleague. In his first sessions the Managing Director made it clear that he was only going through the motions of attending the ORA because the GC/CE had said he should, indeed he had tried to stop taking part but had been advised by the CE to stick with it till the mid-process joint session.

This brought to the surface negatively managed feelings of dependence by which both Executives were using the other to justify their own behaviour, with neither of them being able to find the executive systems which they had been charged to manage, because they had both abdicated their leadership and management to the GC/CE. It was also evident at the beginning of the joint meeting that the GC/CE was colluding with this in a range of ways. It was now that the two ORA clients began to find their different roles in the systems of the whole company. This was assisted by all three of them using drawings and exploring the different meanings of their images.

***Making the roles*** Through testing different working hypotheses, the two arrived at the joint session aware that the dominant psychological role each of them was taking was that of *employee* in relation to the GC/CE while he was seen as the *employer*. In the meeting the way this contributed to both of them experiencing a sense of rivalry and lack of co-operation which they were both causing each other became starkly evident. Once they began to face this, new ideas about the real company system and its purpose in its contexts began to emerge, and the two of them found themselves in positions to begin to make their roles within it.

This included defining appropriate system boundaries which were managed in ways that brought more discipline into the way their own behaviour was managed. They began to see the reality that the Creative Director had two roles: one leading the Creative Department and one as a corporate member of the Management Team and there was a natural tension between these two; the Managing Director meanwhile became conscious that part of his responsibility

was to ensure the integrity of the Regional boundary, rather than to behave sycophantically towards the Chairman. This challenged him to take action about the way the GC/CE had previously behaved, which until then had involved his intervening wherever he wanted across the European office since the Group Headquarters were in the same building. To provide him with an instrument that gave him authority in role he began to formulate a new statement of the European company's purpose - similar to Ken Rice's definition of primary task.

***Taking the roles*** In the next phase of the assignment both executives began to take their roles, the one establishing parameters of work which enabled the Creative staff to exercise their imagination and creativity with a sense of freedom, and the other working at developing a concept of the purpose of the European Region within the global company which included an analysis of why clients used the agency in Europe and also managing the relationship with Group Board staff.

These two reported back to each other and to the GC/CE in the final joint session which was led and managed by the Managing Director and which was designed around the new definition of the company's task in enabling client pharmaceutical company's sales and marketing staff creatively to manage their anxieties about marketing their product to the medical profession, whose values were significantly different from those of the drug companies.

The results of the work were of four kinds: the petty arguments between the two European executives disappeared and were replaced by appropriate work tensions between their different functions; the Group Chairman/Chief Executive came to recognise his part in the poverty of the present grasp by the staff of the overall idea of what the Group is as a whole and began work in collaboration with the European executives to remedy this, both in Europe and globally; the European Management Team was used to lead the transformation of the global company; and from a commercial point of view, the European operation has become the most profitable in the whole enterprise, with a

reduction in staff turnover and new imagination and imagination released amongst the Creative Department.

## 5 Systemic theory development

Since places of work are shared places, the internal objects for all those working together are constructed on the basis of experience of the interaction between different organisations-in-the-mind and different institutions-in-the-mind. To explore this experience requires more than a psychodynamic perspective: it requires a **systemic** perspective which draws on psychoanalytic thinking. This also goes beyond systems thinking. In system terms, the emotional experience of the individual relates to the shared experience of everybody in the system, which may be ordered in congruent ways by shared organisations-in-the-mind, generated by effective management of the enterprise. What the person experiences at any moment in time is experienced on behalf of the system and tells him/her things about the state of the system. The emotional experience is important information helping him to understand the realities of both images.

To think systemically draws us into the field of the dynamic interaction between systems in their wider context. Here institution-in-the-mind is relevant and questions arise about leadership. It causes us to think about the paradigms of the interactions between institutions, and about the unconscious functions they perform on behalf of society - what Bion called 'specialised work groups'.<sup>6</sup>

The church is one of Bion's 'specialised work groups' and The Grubb Institute has done work over the years on the dynamics that surround churches in a modern society, acting as an object that can - more or less successfully - working at handling society's dependent needs. Drawing on convergence between modern theological research and thinking from the human sciences, we are now exploring the present day experience of the systemic purpose of

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6 W R Bion (1961) - *Experiences in Groups* - Tavistock Publications, London UK p167

religious institutions in society today. This includes the potentially inclusive purpose of churches and other religious institutions such as mosques, synagogues and temples, and schools associated with them, considered at conscious and unconscious levels in societies.<sup>7</sup>

Bion also wrote about the armed forces as handling 'fight' and the aristocracy working on 'pairing' or hope on society's behalf. This thinking, though perhaps a little dated, gives some clues though we recognise that in societies that are changing fundamentally, more work is needed to uncover other paradigms of institutions. It is through deepening our understanding of the conscious and unconscious engagements across system boundaries which affect our understanding of 'institution-in-the-mind', that we will be able to understand more precisely what it is to take leadership and management roles on institutional boundaries. Psychoanalysis and work on family systems have enabled us to understand more about the dynamics that occur within organisations. But there is much more to be investigated and understood.

While Bion wrote about three 'classical' institutions in society, we have many institutions functioning nationally and internationally. We now in a position to develop more sophisticated paradigms of the functions that different institutions carry out consciously and unconsciously in society today. For example, businesses (of different types), schools, prisons, voluntary bodies and so on all offer opportunities where we might discover the underlying interactions between systems and which give colour and energy to their functioning. In an earlier paper, Jean Hutton offers thoughts about the different functions of different kinds of institutions - police, colleges, Christian voluntary organisations and public psychological services<sup>8</sup>. In a later paper with David Armstrong and John Bazalgette, she writes about special hospitals and the aviation industry<sup>9</sup>. Anton Obholzer also explores this in relation to

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7 *A first step in this is contained in the report of a study of church schools in England B Reed et al (2002) - **Becoming Fit for Purpose: Christian leadership of failing Church of England schools** - The Grubb Institute, London UK.*

8 *Jean Hutton (1997) 'Re-imagining the organisation of an Institution' in Eileen Smith (ed) - Integrity and Change: Mental health in the marketplace - Routledge, London UK*

9 *Jean Hutton, John Bazalgette and David Armstrong (1994) - 'What does Management Really Mean?' - in R Casemore et al (eds) - What Makes Consultancy Work - Understanding the Dynamics - South Bank University, London UK*

hospitals and education.<sup>10</sup> David Gutmann, in a paper presented to the first Group Relations Symposium at Keble College Oxford, opens up thinking in this direction, focusing on how institutions can both provide societal structures for managing anxiety creatively but can also be used as regressive defences against it.<sup>11</sup> Philip Kirk, in an as yet unpublished paper, makes the point that to work in role is to offer leadership from every position in an organisation, however apparently humble.<sup>12</sup>

Since the person takes the role as the 'person-in-role' in the system, the interaction between personal desire and institutional purpose in societal contexts is the potentially rich territory that opens up before us if we can identify more clearly these underlying paradigms. Work in ORA along these lines provides a methodology for entering new territory to harvest its potential new insights which can enhance our understanding of living and working in organisations and in society.

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10 Anton Obholzer (1994) - '*Managing Anxieties in Public Sector Organizations*' - in Anton Obholzer and Vega Roberts '*The unconscious at work: individual and organizational stress in the human services*' Routledge, London UK

11 D Gutmann (1989) '*The decline of traditional defences against anxiety*' in *Proceedings of the First International Symposium on Group Relations, Keble College Oxford* - A K Rice Institute, Washington DC, USA

12 Philip Kirk (2003) '*Voice and leadership: Achieving distributed leadership through organisational role leadership and organisational conversation*'. Unpublished paper, University of the West of England, UK