
Organisational Transformation

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Organisational Transformation

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This paper is the result of a number of transformations which I have encountered in my work in conferences and activities which concentrated on learning by experience methodologies. These transformations are summed up in the behaviour coming from a change in understanding the meaning and use of various concepts. Among them can be listed: the shift from “individual” to “person”, of seeing how system and culture interact continuously, of knowing when to ignore boundaries, of discarding competition as the condition for growth and survival and replacing it with co-operation and by understanding about working in role leading to the ability to distinguish between power and authority.

Since 1963, when I was first introduced to the "Tavistock Method" of group relations, developed originally by Ken Rice, Harold Bridger, Eric Trist and Pierre Turquet at the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations, I have been trying to find concepts which made sense of my experience in organisational settings.

These theoretical concepts became key for describing "the unconscious structuring and conscious organisation of working groups"¹. Those of us who work in the study of organisations are too easily aware of the way concepts lose their freshness and shape and become meaningless jargon. As I worked my way progressively as member, staff and director through these learning by experience modes, it was essential to recall that they were *ideas-in-the-mind*, and their only valid use was their capacity to encapsulate the meaning and the feeling of actual experience. In this process, I was able to experience a number of transformations only through constant wrestling with the dynamic differences between concepts which just enabled me to avoid the fate decreed by the Zen master quoted by Gregory Bateson, "To become accustomed to anything is a terrible thing"².

The pressure to sustain the air of 'strangeness' about these ideas came from the work of myself and my colleagues as consultants to managers in business, government, church and voluntary bodies. For example, we needed concepts to use in Organisational Role Analysis with managers, a method of one-to-one consultation with a consultant away from their place of work. The task for managers was to become more aware of the constructs by which they were habitually construing their working environment and their role in it, by studying their own

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- 1 Barry Palmer 'Learning and the Group Experience' in Gordon Lawrence (ed.) *Exploring Individual and Organizational Boundaries*, Wiley, UK, 1979, pp169-192.
 - 2 Gregory Bateson, 'The Logical Categories of Learning and Communication' in *Steps to an Ecology of Mind*, Paladin Granada Publishing, London, 1973, pp250-279.

description of their actual working experience. However if my own use of constructs became second-hand to me by losing touch with my own felt experience, they would then be at best third-hand for the client and add no value at all to the manager' s understanding of his experience.

I have selected a number of these points of learning, but I recognise that presenting them here they are only likely to be perceived by the reader as "...the trial and error process through which the individual adapts to his environment, finding a new response or pattern of responses to a given situation or stimulus". This is Learning I of Gregory Bateson' s levels of learning theory. Most of what I need to say indicates my own experience of Level II: " a corrective change in the set of alternatives from which a choice is made, or a change of how the sequence of experience is punctuated", though on rare occasions I experienced what he described as Learning III, which is "... a change in the process of Learning II, a corrective change in the system of sets of alternatives from which choice is made". I hope that what follows will throw light on the denseness of these definitions and might put readers in touch with their own parallel experiences.

The following interacting theoretical concepts, by their similarities and differences, encapsulate a variety of my organisational experiences.

1 Person / Individual

Common social definitions of human beings are *individual* and *person*. Other ideas which cluster around these two also include: psyche, mind, ego, soul, and spirit. What concerns us here is the experience of someone who thinks of himself as person (or individual) and how that someone is experienced by others as a person (or individual).

To experience oneself as a person makes one aware of a sense of participation in a "wider field of the experience of others, a feeling of empathy, indwelling, participation, resonance. To experience oneself as an individual makes one aware of one' s own unique needs and interests, to be aware of one' s identity and private emotions like love, joy, satisfaction, fear, greed, anger".

John Heron would, however, consider that the theoretical person or personhood is an emergent state of being, and that the individual is one psychological mode of the emergent person. He defines person as "...the psyche in manifestation as an aware, developed being in whom all its modes are brought intentionally into play. A person in this sense is clearly an achievement"³. He proposes a "... basic polarity between an individuating function and a participatory one: the former makes for experience of individual distinctiveness, the latter for experience of unitive interaction with a whole field of being. These two poles do not exclude

3 John Heron, *Feeling and Personhood*, Sage, London, 1992.

each other; instead the two functions interact along a continuum in which one is more dominant at one end and the other at the other end".

He extends his theoretical model very widely to embrace the world in its various stages of social, historical and political development. My focus on the other hand is on our current ordinary experience of life, and organisational life in particular. I am in a constant process of 'reading' myself in my reactions to others, and I do this using the concepts of person and individual because they describe quite different sets of experiences which in turn have a dramatic effect on my own and others behaviour in organisations. For example, someone who is invited to become a manager may only see him/herself as *individual* and may not even want the post because it will involve inter-personal (sic) skills, the quality of being a *person*.

As an individual I am unique and self-contained. I may agree with others but they don't belong to me or I to them. The characteristic is to look inwards, to claim being self-made where my inner world is barricaded against intrusions from the context, a resentment against becoming dependent. For individuals therefore, institutions are frequently experienced as stifling, procrustean and deterministic. Under conditions of chaos and where people are bewildered, the individual can emerge as a free spirit, the self-motivated expert. Without realising it or wanting it, such a one can become an unconscious focus for others, at least for a while.

A person is someone who is a nodal point of a network of relations with others. To the degree that I am a person, I can represent others and recognise my influence on them and upon their behaviour and development, and in turn recognise their contribution to my own. I exemplify John Donne's concept of person, "No man is an Island entire of itself;... Every man is a piece of the Continent, a part of the main".⁴

Erving Goffman points out two modes of feeling about one's relations with others which to some degree illustrate the distinction between being a person and being an individual.⁵ The individual tries to avoid being 'committed' by circumstances. The young woman whose ill-considered behaviour has led to her giving birth, in Erving Goffman's terms, is *committed* to motherhood: a situation from which there is no way out. But a couple who cannot make a child and cannot become a father or mother may imagine themselves as if they were parents. In Goffman's terms they are *attached* to parenthood, even though they remain childless. Their attachment is a quality of being persons, compared with individual commitment. Goffman also identifies a third mode of relation calling it "*embracement*" which is a positive condition brought about by a person harmonising *attachment* with *commitment* to signify the wholeness of the person.

4 John Donne, *Devotions*, (1624), 17.

5 Erving Goffman, 'Role Distance' in *Goffman Where the Action Is*, Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, UK, 1969.

Both as person and as individual I can develop a sense of *identity*, but the word identity may be conceived differently, the person implying that identity relates to belonging, while the individual's identity relates to being.

What is important for managers is that they are in touch with their experience and thus able to sense the nature of their relations with others. The manager is likely to feel able to relate to those who are experienced as persons, while individuals may prove awkward. However such independent behaviour is what the manager needs at that time. In my experience individuals avoid being managers because it becomes boring and repetitious but embrace the possibility of running special projects where they work alone in the institution.

The same human being can change their way of thinking about themselves from being a member of a group, a corporate community, a church congregation, a football club; or being simply one of a crowd, a statistical unit, being "one of us", or not being one of anybody. This distinction between person and individual has much wider implications as we turn to consider other theoretical concepts.

2 Open Systems Thinking / Sustaining Systems Thinking

Systems thinking is about the construction of mental models in trying to make sense of a bewildering complexity of the patterning of activities, relations and feelings which are characteristic of daily living. To some of those patterns in which figure persons like father, mother, partner, children, a boundary can be drawn and we construct the idea of a family. The continuance of the family metaphor depends on how the people behave, their going out and their coming back, and the renewal of food and other life necessities. Likewise we construct metaphors of business, of churches, of government.

The constant question is to decide how to define where the boundary can be thought of, so as to construct the metaphor. So for example the Milan School of Family Therapy, in working with one child would draw the boundary around not only the 'immediate family' of parents and siblings, but include grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins who were part of the pattern of relations, considering that the family system was a whole with a total existence, not a collection of human beings⁶. This boundary can readily lead to the realisation of community as a system description, where the boundary will be drawn in the minds of people in very different ways.

Systems, if they are to be sustained, need renewal of energy to counter the entropy, the running down as predicted by the Second Law of Thermodynamics. To achieve this the system needs to be conceived defining a circular process or feedback mechanism by which the

6 Mara S. Palazzoli, Gianfranco Cecchin, Giuiana Prate, and Luigi Boscolo, *Paradox and Counterparadox*, Jason Aronson, 1978.

energy is constantly made available to the system. On this construction two different systems are conceptualised, depending upon how the boundary is located.

First, where there is a purpose in producing an artefact or service then a boundary will be drawn between the productive activities and between the specific people, systems or institutions which receive the outputs of these activities. The boundary measures the internal work done in transforming inputs (the people, energy, technology, materials) from the environment into outputs (product or service) into that environment. The boundary also indicates the outcomes, dependent upon how the specific people, system or institutions receive those outputs. Where the feedback is positive, then the outcomes will provide the energy in the form of inputs to enable the system to survive or grow. Where the feedback is negative, the information can be regenerative by causing the managers of the system to adapt their transformation process and outputs. The boundary marks out two phases of an ongoing cyclic process on which the future of the system is contingent. Open system thinking includes therefore, both the formal system and its context as one whole, a system/context continuum.

Second, where the emphasis is about ' being' as distinct from ' doing' , there will be no need to draw a boundary at all. From the point of view of the observer the picture is one of many different parts. The interaction between parts can be noted, but since all the parts are involved inevitably in a kind of dance, any sense of purpose is imposed by the observer and cannot be attributed to the parts themselves. This is the predicament, for example, of those seeking a ' cause' of global warming. The energy is too diffuse and cannot be comprehended except to say it is a function of the whole.

These two constructs of system have been named differently by social scientists and organisational analysts. Peter Checkland develops the idea of ' hard systems methodology and soft systems methodology.'⁷ I suggest that the former could be called ' open system' , to indicate that the system is open to continual interaction with its environment; the second could be called the ' sustaining system'(Maturana and Varela would term it autopoietic)⁸ a self-generating system. The open system model applies readily to business and other institutions like government, schools, prisons or hospitals. The second model applies to such example as to tribes, cultures and societies. Problems occur when different people have different ideas as to how the boundaries are drawn. They can then think of themselves as working in a business based on open systems thinking, but having an experience of being in a sustaining systems model. This becomes further complicated where the managers responsible for the performance of the business - open systems model - appear to ignore the feelings and beliefs reflecting sustaining systems thinking.

7 Peter Checkland, *Systems Thinking, Systems Practice*, Wiley UK, 1981.

8 Humberto R. Maturana and Fransico J. Varela, *Autopoiesis and Cognision, The Realization of the Living*, D. Reidel Publishing Company, BSPS, Vol 42, Holland 1980.

Open systems thinking is contingent upon somebody defining the purpose and understanding how to plan the resources, technologies and processes by which the model can be defined by the drawing of boundaries. Open systems thinking is about understanding 'reality'. The task remains for the initiators to communicate to the other persons involved what that purpose is, so that they can carry out those plans and achieve the required targets. If we think of a business as an example, a change in economic or technological conditions in the context requires the management to be prepared to redefine products and services which are necessary for the achievement of the purpose of the system. The success of the business is dependent upon the hierarchy of meaning so that the purposes of different people can be linked together constructively. To do this could be how an engineer can carry out his work for the purpose of the company while at the same time being conscious that the purpose he has for his family which requires that he earns a sufficient income. At a more corporate level, failure to recognise the hierarchy of meaning can be seen in members of the trades unions going on strike to challenge the manager's decision which adversely affects the workers' purposes.

A simple way to imagine sustaining systems thinking is to delete all the boundaries which have been imagined in a world of open systems thinking models. Sustaining systems thinking is about *being*, whose meaning derives from the nature of the relations in the mind of the observer, between each of the parts and between all the parts and the whole.

It is an 'holistic' approach, where each part is seen to exist in its own right - what Arthur Koestler called a 'holon' which "exhibit the polarity of part and whole in the hierarchic order of life". A metaphor for systemic thinking is the holographic plate into which three-dimensional pictures have been imprinted. The unusual feature is that a fragment of the plate will show the same picture as the whole plate: the whole is in the part - there is no division between part and whole. There is no division between inside and outside. As metaphorically shown in the Möbius strip where a ribbon of paper is twisted once and then glued at the ends to form one continuous surface which includes the erstwhile both sides.

If only we can understand it, any part of life can lead to the understanding of the whole. Sustaining systems thinking opens a new understanding of parts and whole. As Gregory Bateson puts it "the resolution of contraries reveals a world in which personal identity merges into all the processes of relationship in some vast ecology or aesthetics of cosmic interaction. That any identity can survive seems almost miraculous, but is saved from being swept away on oceanic feeling by the ability to focus in on the minutiae of life. Every detail of the universe is seen as proposing a view of the whole. These are the people for whom Blake wrote the famous advice in *Auguries of Innocence*.

To see the World in a Grain of Sand,
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,
And Eternity in an hour"⁹

9 Gregory Bateson, *op. cit.*, 1973.

In the study of systems thinking in learning-by-experience conferences, boundaries are offered by staff in the programme, but sustaining system interpretations are made which ignore them by considering the staff boundaries as a form of scaffolding - containing space rather than content. The interpretations generally focus on the participants' boundaries-in-the-mind which are expressed behaviourally as resistance to learning because of participants' reluctance to face reality. It is from such conferences that the conceptual tools providing the framework of this paper have been discovered, explored and tested over the years, with the support of colleagues and participants.

The social consequence of sustaining systems thinking is cultural awareness. The total material, mental and spiritual 'artefacts' constitute the social pattern of relations called 'culture' by sociologists, it is rich in metaphorical language. As social institutions, the business and service agencies necessarily reflect and are affected by the environment they work in. Sustainability both of the culture of the institution and of the environment, depends on how the institution is able to learn from and relate to the political, economic, technological and social conditions which are being experienced. The change from soviet socialism to western capitalism has sorely tested Eastern European governments, public institutions and private enterprises in handling these systemic complexities.

In furthering their goals, executives are prone to pay attention only to those elements in the environment which they consider important for their purposes. As they make products and provide services, however, institutions are open to the cultural context, and develop their own sub-cultures, which overlay the external social culture. It is managers' pre-judgment about culture which can blind them to factors which could transform the company in the future, if only they could see that. For example, the current culture in this country expresses the importance of human values and spirituality. A management intensely concentrating on profit and market share may treat these as peripheral and business constraints. Instead of trying to respond to them organisationally, allowing them to influence their policies and to contribute to their sustainability, management have drawn their boundaries in the wrong place.

3 Boundary / Manager

Bateson's definition of 'information as a difference that makes a difference'¹⁰ applies directly to *boundary*, when it is used as information in systems thinking. Von Bertalanffy's use of 'membrane' as the boundary between an organism and its fluid context makes clear in his work on systems that boundaries are permeable, not barriers¹¹. The task of any purposive system is to decide where to 'place' boundaries which denote the difference between the inside and the outside. This signifies that activities are started up and planned to achieve a purpose. A further management task is to decide the means and conditions, and clarify the intentions by

10 Gregory Bateson, *Mind and Nature, A Necessary Unity*, Wildwood House, London, 1979, p228.

11 Ludwig Von Bertalanffy, *General System Theory*, Hamandsworth: Penguin, London 1973.

which boundaries are crossed. Management's rationale is based on boundary defining and monitoring: Janus-like, managers themselves work on the institutional boundary, seeing both inside and outside. I would suggest that these two tasks constitute the world of management in being accountable for the performance. Management *is* the boundary. So wherever there is management, there is a boundary, and where there is no boundary, there is no management.

This line of thought can be confusing because of the popular use of boundary. For many it means, 'thus far and no further'. To cross it is to break the rules. Not only does this change boundary into 'barrier' with a high wall, but it also implies that managers are sentries and oppressive. Managers are taken to be there to make things happen or to stop things happening, and consequently it leads to the expectation that, unless managers instruct people to do things, they don't do them. Hence the grotesque term 'man management' which has appeared as part of organisational training jargon, an expression guaranteed to raise the spectre of compulsion and dictatorship, and which has in the past provided powerful ammunition for assault by trades unions.

Some countries have grown up with this attitude as part of their history. For example, I understand the Swedish language uses the word 'border' to include the idea of boundary. So when one of its largest companies wanted to stress the urgency for its staff to penetrate society in order to seize market opportunities, it instructed them to "ignore borders" - as if they could do so and still remain part of the company! In Denmark the democratic spirit has meant that the term 'manager' has been dropped from organisation-speak, and 'leader' has to cover both ideas where boundary is secondary to relations. There are other examples of usage outside the UK which show the importance of understanding boundary as a concept organisationally.

Boundary as a concept in-the-mind is not static, but dynamic; its value is always changing, every day. The vigilance of managers is needed to define and re-define it continuously, like a line drawn in the sand below the high tide water mark which needs to be redrawn twice a day.

The philosophy of 'bigger is better' relates to the importance of boundary. I suggest such a notion can be more a sign of weakness than of success. Some growth is monstrous, like a cancer, the larger it becomes the more lethal it gets. The problematic of growth is to manage the boundary so that those responsible for expanding the system accept their accountability for the sustainability of its total context in carrying out its own purposes economically, socially and ecologically. This will most certainly question the values underlying these purposes. One consequence is to recognise the rights of all the stakeholders: employees, customers, suppliers, contractors and local communities whose existence is critical, alongside shareholders and investors. 12

12 George Goyder advocates this approach as early as 1951 in *The Future of Private Enterprise*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1951, and developed it in *The Responsible Company*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1961 and *The Responsible Worker*, Hutchinson, London, 1975.

Globalisation of business interests opens new horizons for those responsible for companies whose units are scattered across different culture and countries. In the interests of market growth, suppliers, customers and competitors may agree to co-operate and set up informal interactive marketing and managerial structures and activities. The result is the formation of networks across several companies, where boundaries are disregarded as restricting and bureaucratising. Charles Hampden-Turner and Fons Tropaards have characterised this by contrasting the business methods of the Western countries with the "tiger" economies of the Far East. The authors distinguish what they call the *finite* game from the *infinite* game¹³. The finite win/lose game is based on competitive action to win market share, whereas the infinite win/win game is based on co-operation whose success leads to overall market growth. They advocate the extension of the infinite game in the West as the more effective way to stimulate economic success. Our reading of these two different approaches is that the finite game is based on defined systems with boundaries and roles, whereas the infinite game is based on trans-company personal networks. However the recent collapse of the Far East "tiger" economies shows the limitations of this game. The failure of these companies to manage their basic systems of boundaries and roles successfully shows that the infinite game cannot operate without the finite game. Boundaries are necessary for open systems thinking.

4 Person / Role

Social scientists have employed the *role concept* in different ways - in anthropology, psychology, socio-dynamics, *etc.* each with their own emphasis of meaning. We have developed the concept from our work in systems from a socio-psychological standpoint, so that it becomes a tool for those who think and work in purposive system thinking terms. Here, role is differentiated from person, position, job description and task, although it involves them all.

The purpose of role is to enable persons to engage in organisational work to achieve the aim of their particular system. Persons may be given a position, tasks, job and the use of resources but I suggest they cannot be "given" a role. What they *are* given is a system to work in, and the aim or purpose of that system. From such information a person then tries to discover how best they can engage with the organisation and its task, how to work with the culture and to establish working relations with colleagues. This can be understood as the person looking for his/her role in the system. There are two aspects to this - the inward discipline (psychological role) and the outward behaviour (sociological role). A person grows the 'role' in their minds as the means by which they determine their behaviour in the system. The newly appointed manager needs to search for the role, then incorporate the discipline, so that they can *take* the role. We speak of a *person-in-role* as a holistic notion when the person integrates him/herself into the *whole* which includes the system, its purpose, the context and the people.

13 Charles Hampden-Turner and Fons Tropaards, *Mastering the Infinite Game*, Capstone, Oxford, 1997.

From the outside, others in the same organisational system have expectations of how the person will or should behave. They have in their mind the *sociological role* of that person, but this is only one of many criteria which will affect how the person-in-role chooses to behave in their *psychological role*. Where people do not perceive the purpose of a system but only the behaviour of the person, despite his/her own perception that he is exercising authority, they will experience him as using power to further his own interests which could lead to his rejection by them. It becomes the task of a person in a leadership position to make clear to others the aim of their specific systems so that they can transform leadership charisma into being experienced by others as working with authority.

Because situations are always changing, role is dynamic and the person-in-role needs always to be alert to differences requiring flexibility and *skill*, *eg* the skill to use apparently adverse conditions to his advantage. Like the competent sailor coping with headwinds, unreliable currents, and strong seas which threaten to drive him off course, yet who still makes his destination. This compares with the person-in-role working in conditions of stress and not being seduced by the insistent expectations of others. Role is also an *art* where the values and culture of the system are assimilated and then reflected by the person-in-role as they express their emotional concern for the best interest of the system. Role as an *idea-in-the-mind* fits with other mental concepts like organisation and boundaries.

The energy for being in role is generated from within the person, in relation to external opportunities so that they can appreciate the variations which facilitate the transformation of their system which are needed to work to the requirements of their vision. This approach breaks through the constraints of bureaucracy. Where institutions are plagued by rules and procedures, it indicates that the persons concerned have the need to be controlled by the outward power of *rules*, rather than by the inward authority which is possible by *role*.

Transformation of the role may result when people discover that the role they have taken is dysfunctional with the needs of the system. For example, a software design company was managed jointly by three different functional managers who met and worked as a team, called the Senior Management Team (SMT). This team model was supported by higher management, but despite their efforts they were not being successful, they were too bogged down in details. On investigation, it was obvious they were each representing their own function, *eg* the Project Manager identified with his responsibilities, but not with the work of other functions. It was pointed out that they were working from their respective sub-system functional boundaries rather than from the company system boundary. But the fact was, that they were accountable as a team for the success of the design company. In the other words they were the general management of the enterprise. They had access to the role of *general manager* but they were restricting themselves to the role of *function manager*. They grasped this point and changed the "SMT" into the "GMT" (General Management Team) that same day. Their corporate work improved and they never looked back. It was striking that the term SMT was not used again by them and that in a very short time the company personnel converted readily to their new title.

This instance could be replicated in many management teams even when it is chaired by one executive to whom the other managers report. Meetings often consist of functional managers reporting on their own work, so it is no wonder that they complain they never deal with strategic issues. It is clear that in these cases, the senior executive had not invited nor expected them to join him on his outer boundary from where they could see the company as a whole. They behaved more like a group of individual managers than a team with a common goal.

In national life, the widespread loss of confidence in institutions indicates the effect on role of the blurring of system boundaries. These national institutions are being experienced by citizens and consumers increasingly as bureaucracies, an endless sequence of petty processes. People have lost their awareness of the institution as a whole system. Instead of institutions serving society as major stakeholder, they are seen as being exploited by their executives for their own interests. With no sense of the service which is conferred by meaningful institutions, boundaries are turned into bureaucratic barriers.

Consequently this state of affairs changes the balance between role and person. In the political trend towards proportional representation, the concept of *representation* through role is being replaced with the move towards the *delegation* of person. Politically, the status of Members of Parliament is reduced to speaking on behalf of like-minded voters. Those voters who failed to elect their chosen candidate do not consider they are represented in Parliament. Under the present constitution the role available to an MP is to represent *all* the constituents, irrespective of their political allegiance. The system in which they function is the entire constituency. With this conviction they can operate as person-in-role, instead of as someone delegated through a pressure group around which there are no formal boundaries: hence the in-fighting within parties between people who wear the same rosette. Technically speaking, a party may seem to be a system but behaviourally it acts like a clique concerned for its power. We will probably have to regard these new facts of life as normative for the future, whether we accept the consequent changes as progress or as regression.

Ecclesiastically this same problem applies to the selection of bishops of the Church of England as the 'established' church. On their ordination, bishops are asked to take authority for the 'cure of souls' of all the population in their diocese, whatever the spiritual state of the people themselves. In the recent confusion over a new appointment, an Anglican priest proposed that church congregations in a diocese should elect their bishops as is done in other Episcopal provinces outside England. If this were implemented in England it would radically alter the role of a bishop because it changes the boundaries of the diocese from including all the people to only the faithful within the diocesan area.

5 Authority and Power

A problematic in organisational life is the confusion between power and authority. Transformation requires energy, and if transformation is to be effective and not regress to the *status quo*, it requires the exercise of authority. Our view is that within people and structure there is latent energy. When this energy is being activated by someone who makes personal use of inanimate objects, and relations with others to achieve something for their own purposes whether these are good or not, they are using *power*. On the other hand, when the energy is mobilised by a person-in-role for the benefit of the system in which they work, then they are exercising *authority*.

A manager uses power when a member of staff does what they are told or expected to do because of their *relationship with the manager*, because they like him, have confidence in him or fear him for what he could do. In doing the job, they may be more aware of pleasing 'the boss' than finding satisfaction in the work and its completion. Under these conditions staff will be concerned to get on well with the manager, not because it is best for the business, but because it makes life easier. Discussion of mistakes, problems and weaknesses is strictly limited because it could lead to pain, arguments and anger, which then leads to breakdown in the relationship they want to preserve.

A manager exercises authority when a member of staff knows how their work contributes to achieving the aim of the system and does what they are expected to do because of their *relation to the task*. The manager's obligation is to brief staff so that staff can grasp the significance of what is to be done, know the extent and limits of the resources available to them and that they are reassured and confident that they have the requisite skills. That is, staff can take ownership of their own work within the system, and consequently have a sense of freedom in carrying it out. Their relationship with the manager is one of openness about admitting problems and mistakes, because unless the staff know the real situation the job will go wrong.

A person whose own purposes are in accordance with an implicit system but not aware of their own function in it may be taking a role without realising it. The parable in St Matthews' gospel Chapter 25 shows that in the way they were ministering to the poor and needy, certain people, according to Jesus, were functioning in role in the system of the Kingdom of God. Whatever their conscious intentions Jesus praised them for what they did. I suggest that here they were using authority, which was honoured by Jesus when in the parable He offered them seats in the Kingdom in glory alongside himself.

Role transforms power into authority. This introduces another function which conditions this transformation, that of authorisation. A person's actions can be 'authorised' by others only if they are considered as working within prescribed limits, limits (boundaries) which enable the actions to be understood as carrying out the aims of the authorising body by accepting accountability for their actions. Hence others also functioning within these limits experience freedom if they can take the role to exercise their own authority.

Therefore, within a system, a person-in-role can exercise authority, whereas a person in a network of relations without boundaries can only use power. If one party takes up a role in one system, and at the same time another party takes up a role in a different system, and the two parties do not share the same boundaries or systems, they will perceive each other as not being authorised. Hence only power relations can operate between them. This explains some of the ceaseless wrangling over some border disputes. The Northern Ireland peace process hangs upon all the stakeholders acknowledging the same boundaries as defined by the Mitchell agreement.

A similar predicament is expressed in *The Ring of the Niebelung* by Wagner, where Wotan the god, when his wife Frika rightly asserts that his chosen agent, Seigmund, cannot be allowed to consort with his sister Sieglinde laments,

' How can I create a man who will be free?' ,

a cry which reflects the dilemma of gods who inhabit a world of their own apart from that of their creatures. Authority and freedom are only possible if the parties involved share the same system (world). By contrast with Wotan, this is supremely exemplified for Christians who can experience freedom because God-in-Christ became one with the human race through the incarnation of Jesus. He shared the same human system and accepted the consequences of being a man who in the end was rejected by his own people.

In conclusion, in terms of this paper it enables us to conceive of the *church* as an example of *open systems thinking*, with all the concern about resources and communication in relation to the current post-modern context; and the *Kingdom of God* which exemplifies the *sustaining systems thinking* model, whose values become significant in giving meaning to society and its culture. The confusion of church people, including clergy, may be due to their inability to recognise these differences between the church and the Kingdom of God which these concepts illuminate. It is perhaps significant that revisions of the anglican liturgy have tended to focus baptism as being more concerned for entry into the church than as promising membership of the Kingdom of God.

Understanding the church requires the language of perceiving reality in open systems thinking; perceiving the Kingdom of God in sustaining systems thinking needs the language of metaphor. As Jesus said in his parables, "the Kingdom of Heaven is like...". The church as a whole can then be seen as the servant of God in enabling society to take on the characteristics of God' s Kingdom, of love, joy, freedom, justice, truth, righteousness, in pursuit of sustainability.