

"Beneath the Iceberg: A whole system co- inquiry into Equality, Diversity and Inclusive Organisational Practice (OD)



In April 2018, Jess Taylor and I were invited to host and lead a parallel track session at the annual ODN Europe conference. I was delighted that Jess invited me to co-facilitate this space with her.

This blog aims to provide you with some insight into my experience as an OD Practitioner at this annual conference.

Jess and I decided to create a space for anyone who wanted to dive deeper and inquire, reflect on or explore further how we, as OD practitioners, can bring the theory and practice of ED&I along with OD theory into our everyday practice. We therefore identified our workshop in street terms, between us, as a '*mashup*', an amalgamation of many things linked to OD, for example systems and leadership.

By understanding the interconnections between the 'me, we and wider systems in which we exist', we can begin to gain greater insight into strengthening inclusive practice, as well as being able to name some of things that get in our way. We were prepared to bring courage, compassion (lots), and laughter as we explored these fields together.



Jess Taylor and Beverley Powell

Scene setting

- Grounded theory
- Diagnostic



We began by setting up the space and ensuring that the space we were operating in felt safe for the participants. This strategy aligns to the work of Dr Mee Yang Cheung-Judge (2018), who argues that diagnostic OD involves an element of relationship and trust building.

- **Story telling – Self as an instrument**

The self as an instrument in the world of OD is a powerful tool to use. Using this skill can help support systems that are undergoing

transformational change. In the world of the NHS, many Boards now start meetings with a patient story to create more focus on core business, inform debate, shape discussions and raise awareness, according to The Health Foundation (2016).

We shaped the start of our conversation in the space by using the lily pond model and then opened the conversation by inviting the group, in pairs, to explore the notion of values and how values can be an asset or a deficit when diagnosing performance of systems. We then dived deeper into this line of enquiry via the theory of cultural paradigms. I presented the six paradigms of culture to the group, inviting the participants to reflect on how we can work to close the gap between empowered theory and actual theory. This approach supports the argument by Dr Mee Yang Cheung-Judge (2018) regarding OD, who argued that:

“If we have not touched culture we have not done our work”

I then invited the group, still in pairs, to explore this cultural paradigm model by Johnson and Scholes (1998) further, as a deeper line of enquiry.

OD exercise

The space was then opened with Jess and I sharing our own personal stories aligned to OD theory and principles, looking at why we were facilitating this space on this subject. Neither of us was familiar with any of the participants and so there was something about making oneself vulnerable, and at the same time gaining trust between everyone.

For the purposes of this space, Jess and I adopted a fish bowl exercise. The exercise was explained to the group and set up with Jess and I placing ourselves opposite each other in the centre of the space. The participants sat around listening in to our conversation. Our conversation was unscripted, and with no planning, as we started up an open and honest explanatory conversation between ourselves. After five minutes, I stepped out of my seat, leaving my seat vacant, and invited anyone from the group take up my seat and continue a conversation with Jess. This was not immediate, and this was ok. My vacant seat was then taken up and the conversation continued but between Jess and the participant from our space. After some time, Jess then vacated her seat inviting anyone to take up the seat and the conversation continued. This went on for some while as the group, now feeling comfortable and relaxed, took up different lines of enquiry as each person looked through OD from a different lens. This exercise is a very powerful OD engagement tool for engaging an individual, group, or community for possible use in quality-improvement work.



What I learnt

As a nationally qualified facilitator and post-graduate educator, creating this kind of learning space was a big departure from my normal, structured style of creating a space with a desired outcome, sharing the aims and learning objectives, and measuring success through measured outcomes. And this was ok.

As with all relationship building in any space within OD, I learned that trust is a top priority. Politics play a big role in many leadership roles and being an OD practitioner is no different, often operating in a pluralistic system containing self-interested groups and out groups. This could be different departments working to local objectives yet still working towards overall system objectives.

I learned that the matter of power and politics within OD - and through an ED&I lens - is still in operation but, as recognised by Dr Mee Yan Chung-Judge (2018), power and politics have several layers.

We closed down the space by inviting the group to share or reflect, adopting the approach by the great Nancy Kline (2010).

OD Facilitator: Jess Taylor

[Jess Taylor](#) Equality Academy's Jess Taylor brings a distinctive expertise in Organisational Development; a keen interest in the psychology, leadership and practise of systemic change within a feminist intersectional context; a passion for partnership, diversity and social justice, and 15 years' experience of developing, delivering and managing a range of experiential and practical consultancy interventions.

OD Facilitator: Beverley Powell

Beverley Powell is a UK certified Life Coach and a Diversity Manager for the NHS. She was nationally recognised in 2014 by the Health Service Journal (HSJ) as one of the top 50 BME Pioneers for her work around strategic inclusion within the National Health Service (NHS).

Beverley has also been recognised by NHS Employers 2014 for her work on strategically embedding diversity through the workforce and her work around the transgender agenda. For further information, see her LinkedIn profile.

References and image:

Images courtesy of FreeDigitalphotos.net

References

Brah, A. and Pheonix, A. (2004) Ain't I a Woman? Revisiting Intersectionality, *Journal of International Women's Studies*, 5(3): 75-86

Chidiac, M.A., & Denham-Vaughan, S. (2009) An Organisational Self: Applying the Concept of Self to Groups and Organisations. *British Gestalt Journal*, 18 (1): 42-49

Collins, P. H. (2008) *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge

Crenshaw, K. (1989) Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Anti-racist Politics, *The University of Chicago legal Forum*, 140:139-167

Farrands, B. (2012) A Gestalt Approach to Strategic Team Change, *OD Practitioner*, 44 (4): 18-23

Gunaratnam, Y. (2014). *Complicit No More Media diversified* [online], Available at: <http://mediadiversified.org/2014/03/08/complicit-no-more/>

Kandola, B. (2009) *The value of difference: Eliminating bias in organisations*. Oxford: Pearn Kandola

Cheung-Judge, Mee Yang (2018) LinkedIn article.

Mackewn, J. (1997) *Developing Gestalt Counselling*. London: Sage

Nevis, E. (1987) *Organisational Consulting: A Gestalt Approach*. New York: GISC Press

Schein, E.H. (2004) *Organisational culture and leadership*. 3rd edn. San Francisco: Jossey Bass

"Beneath the Iceberg: A whole system co- inquiry into Equality, Diversity and Inclusive Organisational Practice (OD)

Stacey, R. D. (2012) Tools and Techniques of Leadership and Management Meeting the challenge of complexity. Oxon: Routledge

Scholes, Johnson (1998) The cultural paradigm

Torbert, B. (2004) Action Inquiry: The Secret of Timely and Transforming Leadership. San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers Inc.

Mee Yan Cheung – Judge (2001) Self as an instrument

What the Best Mentors Do: A.K. Tijan. (HBR, 2017) <https://hbr.org/2017/02/what-the-best-mentors-do>

Line Management behaviour and stress at work: CIPD (2009)

Difficult conversations: Dickinson, A. (2004)

Strategies for cultural change: Bate, P. (1998)

Everyone needs a Mentor: 3rd. edition D. Clutterbuck (2003)

Critical race theory: Delgado, R.

https://uniteyouthdublin.files.wordpress.com/2015/01/richard_delgado_jean_stefancic_critical_race_thbookfi-org-1.pdf

More time to think: Kline, N. (2010)

The urgency of Intersectionality Crenshaw, K. (2006) <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=akOe5-UsQ2o>

The Social Leadership Handbook: 2nd edition Stodd, J.

Present and perfect: Somov, P. PH.D.

Prison service culture:

<https://www.crimeandjustice.org.uk/sites/crimeandjustice.org.uk/files/PSJ%20235%20January%202018.pdf>

Police culture: Macpherson: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2009/feb/23/race-lawrence>