

CHAPTER 6

(i) Building a New Organisation: Part One

“It is interesting – the way in which one has to balance life – because you have to know when to let go and when to pull back....There’s always some liminal (as opposed to subliminal) space in between which is harder to inhabit because it never feels as safe as moving from one extreme to another” (hooks, 1994)

Working with M

But leaving was not the end, it was a point of transition: within a few weeks of giving my notice at the MBA programme, someone (I still don’t know who: Jaworski (1996) would call this an example of ‘synchronicity’) sent me an advertisement cut out from a newspaper, through the university internal mail. A Project Manager was being sought to start up a new, radical business education venture. The advertisement said that the ideal candidate would have organising ability, relevant experience and philosophical understanding of the “new paradigm” of business. I had never before seen this language used outside my own small group of associates at the university, and the CARPP programme at Bath University, and that, in itself, attracted me to make an application. I was interviewed early in 1995, and after some negotiations about the scope of the task, was offered the job of Programme Director - initially as a two year fixed term contract, whilst the financial viability of the new project was assessed. I then negotiated a two-year leave from the university.

I was immensely excited: it was as though I could ‘jump’ from a work situation in which I felt I was inauthentic and working collusively, a lived contradiction, to one which promised to align much more closely with the values I affirmed.

Prior to getting this job I had seriously wondered how employable I could possibly be outside a university – and suddenly, as if conjured up, a job asking for many of the things I thought I could offer was mine! The reflective process that I had been engaged with had both brought me to the decision to leave the MBA, and helped me articulate my purposes and values in a way that I imagine helped me get the new job. I was on the move, and felt a great surge of released energy.

Extract, Journal Jan 1995:

I left the interview and drove up the motorway toward home, listening to music on the car stereo. And as I did so, I experienced a great wave of excitement mixed with fear - the feeling of standing on the edge of something with huge possibility, almost knowing you are going to jump, and fearing what the consequences might be.

As I drove, I remembered the day our second child was born. I started labour during the afternoon, when I was at home with our first son, then 18 months old. Realising that we were about to have our last few hours together before a new child changed our relationship forever - and being pretty sure that the labour would take its previous gentle course for a while yet - I took him out for a walk in the woods, on the edge of the city, a few miles from our home. It was mid-summer, a quiet weekday - and as he toddled about, cheerfully, amongst the trees, seeking sticks and ladybirds to play with, I remember feeling two very strong emotional pulls: regret for everything that I was about to disrupt, the exclusivity and intensity of our relationship which was coming to an end, and at the same time an excitement at what was

about to enter all our lives, the unstoppable process which was now underway.

I could feel some parallels: I had not yet been offered this job, this interview was only the first stage in a selection process, but my intuition told me that this day some connection had been made which was going to change things for me, that a real opportunity was going to open out from it. And at the same time I could feel the fear of taking it - fear of what that might do to my relationships with my children and my partner, wondering if I had a right to pursue something that might be all about uncertainty and instability, in terms of career direction as well as in terms of ideas, when the children's major need of me was for stability and accessibility. Could I really contemplate disrupting everyone's lives in order for me to achieve greater coherence between my values and my working environment? I was driving and crying. Not for the first time in my life I knew that I wanted everything, and really wondered if it could be done, what would give way, where the sacrifices were and who would have to make them.

The work I had done to this point had brought me to a position where I had new explanations for some of the difficulties I had experienced: I had raised my own gendered-awareness of what I had been doing. But I had also surfaced a paradox which would particularly apply to this new work, of creating from nothing a new business school: what is the nature of the practice that carries out a progressive/feminist project given an awareness of multiplicity, the conditionality of truth, shifting and multiple meanings? How do you 'do' irony as management practice informed by feminist values?

What does loosening a belief in Truth and the Real mean for building a new organisation? What might a “leadership” which is not based on certainty, look like?

The steering group for the new project had written a background document, stating the intention to create:

“An alternative education and research centre, dedicated to the promotion of spiritually and ecologically engaged business thinking and practice. The new school of business will put its values into practice by nurturing a global learning community which integrates a holistic perspective based on three principles:

- to **inform** students of the leading-edge theory and practice in spiritually and ecologically engaged business
- to **transform** student consciousness by offering meaningful learning experiences in nature and with other people
- to **reform** society’s institutions by teaching students how to create and manage social and ecological change in organisations”¹

Although this is not the language that the founding group would have used, the intention was to disrupt, as far as possible, the ‘regime of truth’ of business education: to articulate an alternative set of values and practice, and an educational process through which to do so.

From my perspective, this offered an opportunity to devise, develop a form of business discourse and educational practice that challenged the pervasive modernist masculinity of the conventional business model. I could see the possibility for creating something that was more-feminist, more-connected, more-ecological, more-holistic – although I did not know precisely what this was. It was also a project founded and actively sponsored by the country’s most prominent woman business leader, who openly expressed feminist views.

¹ Extract from the project “Values and Vision Statement”, written in May 1994

Building this, I felt, might be a form of feminist practice if I was thoughtful about what I did. I was bringing an awareness of the meta-communications that this institution-building process would carry – and asking myself how this might be done in a way that did not reinforce that which the project seemed to be trying to change. I would be paying attention to the micro-processes. Ideally, I thought, what is needed is to conduct this as a community of inquiry with my new colleagues – together discovering how it is we carry out our task.

The fledgling organisation was temporarily housed inside the company which had sponsored it. The company undertook to pay the salaries of the team for the first two years, with the intention that the project should devise an income stream and then move away. Shortly after appointing me the company took on two people on short contracts, to work on the project with me. As we had discussed following my interview, the original job of “project manager” was divided into separate functions of academic/course development (me), fund-raising and marketing (M, working on a half-time basis from his home in the Netherlands) and overall co-ordination and organisation-building (T, working on a half-time basis from his home in the USA). We were held together as a potential ‘team’ by C, a young woman who was already working for the company, had organised the interviews and appointments procedures, and who now acted as our full-time administrative co-ordinator.

I noticed our immediate gender hierarchy: two (male) consultants flying in and out; two (female) full-timers keeping the home fires burning (Calás and Smircich 1993) - although M and I were formally of equal status. T was the budget-holder, responsible for the project to the sponsors, manager of the team and primary point of contact between the company, the steering group, and the project itself. I had to work out 6 month’s notice at the university, during which time the rest of the team began to form, with me joining them for monthly project meetings at the sponsoring company. I was also contracted to work from my home, since the location of the project at the company headquarters, 150

miles from where I was living, was seen as temporary. We made verbal commitments at our team meetings to work together closely and to involve each other in all decisions.

My journal in May 1995, following a project meeting, reads:

M has sent me the text of the new brochure to comment on before it goes to press. He has asked me for "course outlines" to include, and I am only able to say to him that they do not as yet exist, and I cannot work on them seriously until I am working for the project. I feel very uncomfortable about the proposed text: it is making some very large claims, which I do not feel can be substantiated in the short or even medium term. Am I just too hesitant about this? Not prepared to be risky enough?

The brochure, written by M, identified the project as having four purposes:

- "a societal purpose: to start crafting the new kind of business education required for the greater role that business plays in society, through the development of a movement for socially responsible business education
- an educational purpose: to offer outstanding management training programmes which meet the need for responsible leadership, excellent organisational performance, sustained economic achievement, effective executive learning and greater personal corporate and social accountability
- a business purpose: to organise seminars, workshops, and conferences to help people in business and enterprise improve their effectiveness as they shape society's well-being
- a leadership purpose: to assist business leaders find ongoing paths for self-renewal and robust, well-balanced lives"

I looked at this text with a recognition of its discursive certainty. It seemed to me in no respect a 'problematizing' document, intended to disrupt and unsettle - and as far as I could tell from talking to M and T, was not intended ironically, as a 'front' into the business arena behind which the inquiry might take place. What should I do, I wondered, to address this? Was this just about crafting of words on paper? But I also realised that this text had been delivered to me in full for comment - there was no participative process in this. In order to intervene, I was required to argue from the edge, as it were. I said to M that I did not find it easy to engage in this - that this document did not reflect my position well, and I could not readily find textual changes which would do that. I heard myself being negative.

My journal of July 1995, three weeks after I began to work on the project full time, reads:

I have just got off the phone from M. In the midst of our conversation I had a **strong** sense of unease - I really wonder if we are engaged in the same project; his idea of how to go about this is so different from mine, built around the idea of bringing well-known (male) speakers and "names" in the management training field in to talk to audiences we have gathered. Our organisation would be a kind of broker. That is not the kind of educational process I am seeking to build.

How do we create a different process here? How can we talk about the assumptions we are bringing to this? How do I help him to listen to me, talk with me rather than talk at me? Am I listening to him? I feel defensive when I talk to him, as if I am failing to meet his expectations. Perhaps I am, but why do I mind? His energy is tremendous, but I hear him running away without me. I imagine he has written me off.

He said that he has a holiday with his family booked, but that he will interrupt it to come and talk to me, because this is more important. I told him not to, that he should take his holiday. I don't want us to create an organisation which puts its imperatives above those of spending precious time with your family and children. I don't want to reproduce that sort of work pattern.

By August, I was aware that the relationship between my two male colleagues and me had some serious difficulties, whilst my relationship with C moved towards mutual support. T and M seemed to me to be pursuing an agenda from which I was excluded, unless I engaged on their terms. It felt to me as if I needed to fight for my voice, to fight to be heard, and yet I wanted to collaborate creatively. A business plan was produced by M with no opportunity for me to contribute, again framing the project's purpose and activities in ways I could not recognise, and did not feel I could align myself with. I also had doubts about the financial projections it contained, which I wanted to discuss. In contrast to M's dynamism and energy, I found myself in the position of persistent objector, always raising criticisms.

We are in M's car, driving away from a meeting with our steering group in central London, which like many of the other meetings has been difficult, with many contrasting expectations surfacing. M and T are de-briefing the meeting, and talking as if the steering group are some sort of opposition to be out-manoeuvred. I decide to seize the opportunity of having both M and T 'captured' for an hour or so in the car, and say I want to talk about how we are working together. I say that I am feeling both confused by what we are trying to achieve, and excluded by the

processes I see going on around me. I say that I think one of the things the Steering Group is noticing is that we don't ourselves have a picture of the direction we are trying to take the project in, and that I think we need much more work on this between ourselves. I suspect we have different priorities as to how we build this organisation, I say, and that we should surface these and work with them. I also say that I think we need to work on how we all contribute to this, because at the moment I can't get hold of what my role is. T goes very quiet – he lends no help here – while M responds robustly, saying there is really no problem, that he is happy for us to talk more and he will copy me in on everything he is doing. It feels as if this conversation is pointless, nothing is happening in it. I know, in the midst of this, that I am not achieving what I want from this intervention, and I am scanning through the possibilities of what I might say next, here and now, to shift the dynamic of this relationship, which already feels so patterned.

Early in September we run our very first seminar, a three-day residential event entirely organised by and chaired by M, which is attended by around twenty senior overseas franchisees from our sponsoring company. He started organising this before I joined the project, and has retained hold of it. I am very uncomfortable because he is, in effect, doing my job and I, like T, am left as an observer. I think I probably should have tried to raise my level of involvement in the event, but there seemed no opening through which to do so. All the invited speakers are acquaintances or contacts of M's. I am also very uncomfortable with the interpersonal dynamic between M, T and me. It feels to me as if they are constantly conferring with each other, without me. I even get the sense that they stop talking when I approach them. I reason with myself that at least this event can act as

a pilot/tester for us, from which we can jointly learn. I would prefer its style to be far participative – although the visiting speakers all have interesting things to say.

Reflections, written in my journal at the course, read:

20 September

I think we are constantly caught between the tension of wanting to say, and learn, new things while being constrained by the tools we have. There is something about the means through which we communicate - the models, and practices - which conjure up in us habitual responses and behaviours. We construct it as the same, even though the message may hold the promise of difference. I wonder how it is possible to meet participants' expectations while exceeding those expectations in truly novel ways. I feel as if the 'expert' model of knowledge delivery will always contain its own contradiction if it is substantively concerned with empowerment and change, because it is a disempowering mode of communication. If I engage with this, I contribute to it.

The challenge must be to try and work through more innovative forms and knowledge-creation and communication.

So, a few months into the new job, I am feeling a mixture of things.

Journal extract Sept 30

I am seriously wondering if I should have accepted this job.

I have no positional authority here, I am not being offered it by my two colleagues, I am having to earn it, and it feels as if they have the upper hand, have got there first and have delineated the territory into which I have to input. I am experiencing a strange mixture of visibility, expectation hanging around me, and invisibility, as if nothing I say is really of worth to them. The experience I bring and the views that I have seem to have been framed by the as 'academic' and therefore of limited usefulness to 'business'.

I have tried to direct attention to this process, but I am not doing so effectively. T will not engage and M soothes me; I am being patronised. C is watching and noticing, and we talk about what is happening; she has her own discontents, which are not being addressed, she too feels patronised. I have said several times that my concern is with how we, as a young organisation, act in accordance with our values, rather than with the interpersonal rights and wrongs in themselves. I do not feel heard on this front, but I am not prepared to let this go because to do so would be to give away something very important about the project. Perhaps I should be expressing myself with more vehemence and anger? I am noticing that I seem to think that I am right and the others are wrong, not perceptive enough, not skilled enough?

And I can feel myself, as well as being angry, getting resistant, stubborn. I do believe I have something to bring here, and I will find a way to surface it - but clearly not easily.

And what holds me here is the possibility of what we could be doing - the excitement of the conceptual territory we are working in. I want very much to help this project be bigger than it might otherwise be, by developing new practice and discourse rather than fitting so-called new paradigm ideas into existing forms. Ironically I am being painted by T and M as less ambitious and outgoing than they are - and certainly less skilled - so the gulf of misunderstanding between us is large.

What can I do so that we don't build something that re-creates the double-binds I have become aware of? This needs effective action together, and we don't seem able to take it, in the midst of all this (maybe unimportant) interpersonal flack.

I decided not to give up. Unable to get the sort of engagement I was seeking from M, I went around him. I talked to two other people in the sponsoring company who were involved in the steering group for the project, and tried to explain what was concerning me in terms of the content of how we were handling our roles, rather than the process. I said that I felt we needed to achieve some clarification of our roles: that M needed to do the job he was hired to do, and leave me to do the one I was hired to do. In a way that was not naming the real issues, or only part of them. They in turn both talked to the chairman of the company, and when he talked to M. about focusing on fundraising and marketing in future, M. heard him, and agreed.

I asked a valued friend and ex-colleagues to talk this through with me, to help me make sense of what was going on, to explore my doubts about establishing some authority and

place in this team. I said I doubted my own use of my power – that perhaps I was not clear enough, and that this was “wrong” in some way. One of her comments was:

“ Maybe not, but look what you did! I’ve seen you do it before, as well. You did not give up, you stuck with it. You resisted his representation of you, and instead you showed your authority in action, mobilising the power of others to achieve what you wanted. He may expect you to show your power in a certain way - through confrontation with him perhaps, and he may interpret your refusal to engage in that way as lack of strength. But you have found a way not to do what you feared he was setting up, which was for you to work to an agenda set by him, and at the same time not to engage in conflict with him”².

I felt that what I needed to do is to work with M, and the others, in order for us to jointly create something we could not do alone. I wanted to find a means to do so without adopting ways of doing things, or pictures of myself, which mis-communicated my purposes, which mis-represented me. I see this as one expression of the much larger task which this project is setting itself, to disrupt the “normalising gaze” of business organisations, to enable new perspectives, connections, values to intrude. Holding another person’s difference, without denying it or letting it prevent you from moving or having voice, is an enactment of that. That was both a challenge for me, and for my colleagues.

I took my reflection and sense-making back to my day-to-day work with M, holding as important my need to not fulfil his expectations of me, and to accept his difference from me, whilst continuing to work closely with him. I felt I had little choice but to do this work if I wanted to retain a chance of affecting the outcome for our project. I was unable, however, to track this over an extended period, because the sponsoring company took the decision, after consulting C and me but not solely based on our opinions, not to renew either T or M’s contracts when they came up for renewal shortly afterwards.

² Extract from audio tape November 1995

Making (Some) Sense

There was no doubt that, from my perspective, both the process and substance of building a new organisation began in a disappointing way. I seem to have entered this process with the expectation that my awareness of action inquiry would equip me with the ability to create a collaborative organisation with my colleagues. I somehow imagined us all working in multiply inquiring ways with each other, enacting our espoused commitment to 'new paradigm' ways of working and together creating something we could not yet fully envisage.

Some of the gender issues in this story echoed past patterns for me, and triggered some of my resistance (Meyerson and Scully, 1995)

One of my concerns in my relationship with M (and by omission T, who was curiously shadowy and low-key in this process, even though he was formally the manager of both of us) was that he quickly seemed to form a picture of me, my position, my place, which I felt did not appropriately represent me, and in which I was offered no opportunity to engage, except from within that representation. The representation I was invited to work within felt to me something like – 'too academic, not authoritative, doesn't know enough about the 'real world' outside universities, not really able to engage with businesses in the language of business, too negative'³. From that place, I became stubborn, raising objections to what was happening and at the same time seeking alternative ways to influence the situation, and often trying to re-frame what I saw around me, and in so doing probably reinforcing the perception to which I was reacting. In effect I was just as determinedly pursuing my agenda as M was his, but I was doing it in a very different way – and ironically, given my espousal of ideas of collaborative inquiry in building this

³ This is not entirely fantasy. M and T jointly wrote a 'confidential' letter to our company sponsor about many things, one of which said that my vision for the organisation was too limited and that they did not think I had the ability to work with companies: she showed it to me later.

organisation, the way I worked as the months passed was masked, seeming to be acquiescence when it was not. I felt that the judgements that were made about me were gendered – that I was being expected to demonstrate my competence and authority in ways that did not work for me, that I was considered not ‘agentic’ enough (Marshall, 1983, 2000).

Clearly I was engaging in ‘hypocrisy’, in Gherardi’s terms (1995). Acting in this way, she suggests, “protects the explorer and the innovator by providing symbolic substitutes”. The person seems to be doing one thing while doing another, expressing façade commitment. I was not deliberately choosing to be duplicitous - I did not at any stage tell M that I agreed with and supported his way of working - but I was deliberately and actively resisting his representation of our joint project and of me, and trying to hold space for an alternative anyway, by at least trying to keep myself in the project.

Whilst in the midst of this relationship I recognised a pattern: I had been here before, struggling with misrepresentation by those who ‘represented’ me, in particular with the director of the MBA programme (see Chapter 5).

But there is another dimension to this in this case. I had to ask myself - does it matter if M mis-identifies me?

“Does it matter if I choose not work to bring his picture of me more in line with my picture of myself? Well, it matters if it stopped me - not me, the individual, but if it prevents certain things from happening: if those patterns are things that repeatedly, politically, organisationally channel activity in certain directions - towards restrictive hierarchy, towards the exclusion of non-’expert’ voices, for instance - and not in others, then it matters. I am noticing the patterning here, because I have encountered it before.”⁴

⁴ Extract from audio tape as above

One of the reasons that the personal mis-representation matters is that, as hooks (1994) says, it is not just personal: if our new organisation is engaged with creating a new paradigm of business, enacting different ways of being at the micro-level is part of the task – and denial of difference here is part of reproducing a denial of difference at the macro level. Hooks suggests it is possible to work in what she calls a ‘liminal’ space, in which the personal identity which you have been assigned is not accepted, but that engagement with the other, at the political level, can still take place. This involves an active process of balancing, making judgements about personal safety, threat, willingness to move out into contested spaces, working to handle the mis-applied identity.

There were other issues of representation going on here, which I saw as linked. As a new organisation we were engaged in the production of new discourse, language in the public arena, through publicity materials, speaking, our presentations of ourselves. In entering a new subject area – that of socially-responsible business – we were actively engaged in the delineation of that territory, in our practice and our words. McNay’s reading of Foucault suggests that the concept of discourse

“Opens a space for feminists to understand and intervene in the process through which meaning is produced, disseminated and transformed in relation to the changing configurations of modern power and domination” (1992: 115).

Being concerned about the messages contained in our publicity brochure, I felt, was part of this territory.

I felt very concerned about the tacit messages contained in the brochure for our new organisation. Its references are to ‘business leaders’ and to “the greater role business plays in society” as it “shapes society’s well-being”: it appeared to be offering opportunities for yet greater power to that small group of predominantly white men who currently run businesses. It offers no hints towards different power relationships, interconnection, participation, or change of any great significance. Looking at this text, I

had realised that my “philosophical understanding of the new paradigm of business” and those of T and M were very different. The more I tried to engage in discussion about what this might mean for our project, the more I seemed to play in to the attribution of myself as “too academic” and this discussion, therefore, as irrelevant to the job in hand.

Wheatley (1992) talks about the ‘fractal’ relationships uncovered in complexity science, which demonstrate “a deep relationship between individual activity and the whole” (1992: 146). I was seeing this connection in my daily practice, connecting the whole relational, gendered power-and-knowledge system to the dyad between M and me. I “knew” - propositionally through the theoretical perspectives offered me by feminist and postmodern writers, and experientially through my own feelings of unease, disempowerment and denial, that there was something I identified as important and worth struggling with in this relationship. I did not know what this meant I should do, other than try and stay in the territory.

Torbert’s (1986, 1991, 1995) perspective may also be of some relevance in attempting to make sense of this story. His typology of progressive ‘developmental stages’ suggests that only the later stages (post-Strategist) enable people to question the social structures within which they are located and to begin to work with “the dilemma of transforming relatively unjust settings into relatively just settings” (1991: 51). He cites action inquiry as the process through which such transformations are made – but the situation is complex, because acting as an inquirer from the perspective of an ‘Achiever’ and from the perspective of a ‘Strategist’ or later imply quite different sort of purposes, strategies, behaviour and outcomes.

It is possible to see in this account an expectation I carried of inquiry as a *‘tool’ through which I could make other people engage with me in the way I wanted them to*. Despite holding ideas of multiplicity and co-creation in my head, I wanted to move these relationships in a certain direction. I was certainly working with an aspiration that we

should be creating at least some aspects of what Torbert calls collaborative inquiry within our project, even though he and Fisher suggest most organisations first have to pass through several earlier and arduous developmental stages and that “we believe that no fully embodied exemplar of this stage of organizing has ever existed historically” (!) (1995: 197).

I had set out my purposes and hopes for this project to myself in my journal in this way:

- to develop within the territory of business education an educational practice which addresses the ways of thinking underlying the business story: which problematises that story, and which goes some way towards unseating “knowledge” about business in those who participate in our educational programmes
- to do so in a way that maximises inquiry in the systems with which I am engaged - mine and others
- to do so in a way that has “authority and credibility” in order to establish a foothold in a competitive educational market whilst simultaneously knowing that means participating in an authority-game - and knowing I must not believe my own game
- to do so in a way that respects the personhood and rights of individuals, and maximises the personal autonomy of colleagues, students, clients and myself - with awareness that this does not mean treating everyone in the same way
- to help build an organisational form that might analogically express these values. This will be difficult, because attention to the micro-processes of organisation runs the risk of seeming to be focused on

consistency and coherence, the very antithesis of multiplicity. Wanting to work with paradox and incoherence, to push against the strong analogic communication of organisational and educational forms towards one right way to be, to do, to know, to create. Using this opportunity, of creating, with others, a new organisation, and attempting through this to convey a different analogic message - and so trying to use my positional power to further a "feminist project"⁵.

But there of course are problems in devising a plan, even if it is a plan based on collaboration and what Torbert and Fisher call "the humble, venerable practice of inquiry" (1995:198) and then trying to *carry it out*. As an inquirer, this was my first grappling with the 'paradoxical leadership practice' (whatever that is...).

And so in this instance I recognised some of the elements of the situation, named them to myself with the help of friends, struggled, and engaged my resistance. It is possible to identify, in this account, me both being stubborn and resistant, and working with strategies of appeasement - even though I am aware of the gendering of appeasement, the fact that it plays into stereotyped pictures of how women behave, muting their own voice and seeming to agree with the more confidently expressed description of reality given by men around them. I am accepting this as a price I have to pay to stay in the field, although I also clearly feel annoyed that I am not afforded by my colleagues and have not managed to claim through my actions more clear, recognised and authorised territory in which to work.

⁵ Journal entry June 1995

(ii) An Appraisal Interview

After T and M both left the project, the chief executive of the sponsoring company asked J to join the project and take over the director's role vacated by T. J had been working as a management consultant to the company board, and had offered C and me significant and welcome opportunities to talk during the events surrounding T and M's departures. He discussed with both of us, separately and together, what it would be like for him to join us on a formal basis, and eventually did so at the start of 1996. For some months we worked at getting to know each other, building a shared picture of what the project was setting out to do, and trying out various initiatives to get an idea of how we were going to build it as a viable organisation independent of our sponsoring company. As a first step we established an office base in London, giving us a physical place in which to establish an identity. During this time, the three of us seemed to support each other well - although I worked from my home, we talked frequently and at length on the telephone, and met at least weekly.

J and I often commented to each other on the fact that we were in effect starting up a new organisation, inventing the rules and procedures as we went along with almost no infrastructure once we moved our office out of the company headquarters. We had a name - "postage stamp issues" - for those things that kept cropping up which meant the way something small was done was problematic and needed thinking about because it would invoke much bigger principles and procedures that lay behind it (you can't post a letter, because you have no stamps to hand, you have no petty cash system, no one has worked out whose job it is to buy the stamps or get repaid for them if they use their own, if someone goes to the post once, does that mean that person will always go - and so on). I enjoyed the somewhat ad-hoc nature of it all, although J found it frustrating at times - he had not experienced this kind of situation before, having worked in large organisations with well-established support systems and divisions of labour.

The first point at which I clearly recognised the differences between us occurred in January 1997:

J. asks me to join him in our interview room. I know he is going to talk to me about the appraisal he has just completed on me: as employees of our sponsoring company, we are required to participate in the appraisal procedures. Each person is appraised annually by their manager, and the results make a small difference in the amount of the individual's annual pay review.

I am really surprised that he has not discussed this with me, and offered the opportunity for us to complete the appraisal together – which I would have seen as a chance for us to build our relationship with each other, to review my work, to talk about what I could be doing differently. I would like the opportunity to have that sort of conversation with him, so I want to talk to him about this process, the way that he has done it. He begins by telling me that he has completed the appraisal and sent it off, and would like to tell me what he put in it. I am shocked and immediately feel a sense of being judged without having had any input, of him asserting his right, as my manager, to draw conclusions about my work which the system we are part of gives greater credibility to than my own conclusions. And yet I work a good deal away from the office and with people who J does not know, so I wonder what criteria he is using to

judge by. It feels a bit like a violation of our relationship. I respond that I would have much preferred us to have had a conversation about what was in the appraisal before it was completed, rather than after. I ask him why he has chosen to do it like that. He answers that he was simply doing what the company required of him, and that in any case he was under pressure to get the appraisals on me and C. completed, and did not have time to talk to me about mine. He is reacting defensively and at the same time I can see that, from his perspective, I am being defensive about the content of my appraisal, so I try and frame this as an inquiry into how we work together, rather than an argument about his management style or my work. I say that it would have been an opportunity for him to find out more about what I do, and for us to discuss the quality of it together, so that he could have better information.

He gives me a copy of the completed appraisal form, and starts talking me through the content. Under points for improvement, he says that he thinks I need to learn to negotiate harder and get a bit tougher with people: he says that he has experience of this from his previous job, and can work on this with me. I am hesitating. I, too, have a lot of experience of negotiation from my previous job, but I don't want to respond by joining a competition about which of us has done more negotiation. When I enter into a negotiation I am seeking a number of outcomes, which are usually balancing between the relationship involved and the

substantive issue: I am familiar with feminist writing on negotiation (Kolb 1992) which suggests women approach the exchange not from a win/lose perspective – but I judge that this conversation will become very polarised very quickly if I bring gender into our discussion. I decide not to. Instead, I say that I am usually negotiating with a range of outcomes in mind, and maybe it would help him understand what I was doing better if I shared those with him more: money wasn't usually, for me, the only criterion that mattered, but maybe we should talk about that. I know that bringing in as much income for our project is important, but so is sustaining key relationships through which we generate income. I say that I notice that there is a tendency to frame the territory of negotiation as either-hard-or-soft, but that I thought there were other places from which one could negotiate, and that I am interested in what that principled position, that isn't soft, looks like. I am deliberately trying to move this discussion, away from the one-right-way of doing things, towards connections between our project's values and our day-to-day practice.

He responds by asking if I am aware of the Blake and Morton managerial grid, that positions managers as concerned with outcomes or concerned with relationship (I am). He suspects, he says, that I put relationship above other things, and maybe I should try and balance that. I notice that he has gone back to an either/or framework, and that we are enacting

Fletcher's (1994a) distinction between a growth-through-individuation and growth-through-connection model, holding quite different ideas about what it is to work productively. I debate with myself about whether it would be useful to share this: would it help us work together? He is right that I hold relationships as important, as a way of doing my work, not as a way of being liked, which is what I hear from him in his suggestion that I am too "soft". I have been in this pattern before. I also notice his certainty about his own position: he is suggesting to me that I should be more like him, and that he can help me to do so. It does not feel like an inquiring space to me, he is not asking more about what I mean. What should I be saying here? Can I tell him that I don't want to be more like him? I don't think so, not in this space constructed as it is.

He then says, "but actually there is a lot that's good in your appraisal – you are very important for the values of the project, in some way you hold the values". I try and appreciate the affirmation in that comment – and at the same time I notice the irony: that in the context of a top-down linear appraisal process, I am being rewarded for holding the "values of the project", for doing the values-work, as it were, in a way that leaves the project director and the sponsoring company unaffected. Of course, I think, if I – we – were doing the values-work really well, we would not be having this conversation in this way. I am feeling angry now, but I am trying to concentrate on what is it I need to say, right here

and now, to realise the opportunity for this to be an exchange which changes the dynamic. It feels to me as if we are in different conceptual universes, and in this hierarchy, mine is being denied. I also feel disappointment because I had not experienced J. in that way before this, although C has told me that she has: my sense of colleague-ship with him had been strong. I do not know what to say to do justice to where I am. I say that I would like the three of us, within the project, to devise our own ways of doing things which express our values well, rather than taking procedures unquestioningly from our sponsors: I know as I say it that is is a pale version of what I would like to say. He says he thinks that is a good point, and after talking briefly about what happens next in terms of the appraisal and pay review procedures, we finish the discussion.

It was a very uncomfortable and unsatisfactory exchange. At the end, I am puzzling about my (in)effectiveness. Why is it that my awareness of some of the many things that were happening during it doesn't enable me to express myself better? What should I be doing to try and close the conceptual gap between us? How am I to act, when so many avenues of action seem closed off on principle: I don't want to act out my feelings, and become the "hysterical woman" when I am already being told I am "too soft"; I don't want to make myself vulnerable when I suddenly realise the managerial hierarchy which underpins our relationship; I don't want

to polarise and stop the possibility of communication, as I am criticising that process; I want to maintain the relationship as a way of achieving my purposes, even my relationship across this gap. It feels like being stuck in glue.⁶

(iii) A Crisis

Towards the end of my second year with the project, a very difficult situation developed. The relationship between J and C had deteriorated over the preceding year. There were a number of strands involved in this, but one was disagreement about the nature of C's job. She had initially joined the company on a temporary basis in order to work in its environmental department, having newly completed an MSc degree in environmental management. She had taken on administration of our project initially as a short term measure to help out, but had then got very involved in its establishment and was offered a job by the company as its administrative co-ordinator.

When J joined the project 6 months later, he said that he needed a secretary, and wanted her to fulfil that role, at least at times. She said that she had no secretarial skills and wouldn't want to acquire them. She was not currently working to a secretarial job description, and on the contrary she wanted to develop her role, away from routine administration, to do more promotional and academic support work. This situation gradually worsened, until J began to say that he felt C should no longer stay with the project, and that her job should be changed and someone with different skills recruited. C felt that J was undermining and disempowering her, and forcing her into a situation she could not handle. Both of them were talking to me about how difficult they found the

⁶ Although I scarcely noticed it at the time, his formal submission to the company rated me in the top band (excellent) and stated, among other things "Gill has a passionate conviction about our work that inspires us all. She is a constant source of new ideas". This is a piece of feedback I found it hard to hear amongst the 'noise' of my other concerns.

other, and at my instigation in response to C's request, we had several discussions as a team about this situation.

I began by being relatively neutral in this dispute, trying to act as a sounding-board for both my colleagues. But when it became clear to me that J was seriously intending to end C's job, I decided to try and actively intervene on C's behalf.

Whilst C was away - but with having discussed with her what I was going to do, I went to our office in London to talk to J:

I am carrying in to this meeting some strong feelings: of injustice, that J is able to use his managerial power over C to force her to do something detrimental to her: this is the antithesis of the way I believe our project should be conducted: it is a reproduction of the organisational forms I believe we should be moving away from. I want to be able to frame the discussion with J in those terms, so that we can think about the issues of principle implied in this organisational issue.

This situation represents a crushing of idealism for me, a point at which I have to accept that the collaborative nature of our team is illusory, and that J is working with quite a different model of appropriate practice than me: I want to explore with him what the implication of this are for the way we work together - I want him to know how much this concerns me and why, and that from my perspective this may be a defining moment in our relationship and my relationship to the project

I am feeling very strongly the importance of this conversation for C – that she is hoping I can help her save her job, that I *ought* to be able to help her, that she deserves and needs help. I am also aware of the gendered aspects of this situation: a senior male manager is exerting power over a junior female employee, and more than that, is defining the situation in such a way that her knowledge, capacity and contribution are denied.

This is very damaging for C's self-respect and self-image, an expression of a dominator style of management: I think it is unjust and oppressive behaviour. At the same time I am wary of the implication of me intervening in the process for C – will it help her or make things worse for her if I start naming the gender dynamic in this? (I have, however, talked with her at length about how this may be seen in gendered terms.)

I have thought hard about this conversation, as a piece of inquiring practice, drawing on Torbert's (1991) framework of framing, advocating, illustrating, and inquiring – working on how I might conduct it so as to open up possibilities and re-framings, and work with J to envisage a different outcome. Even knowing that all three of us have strong feelings about this situation, and are all upset and more or less defensive, I believe that I might be able to feed an alternative perspective into the scenario, in a way that gives J different choices – and that this is more likely to produce a good outcome for us all, than backing J into a corner

I begin the conversation – which is taking place at my request – by sharing a reflection with J that the relationship between him and me has changed significantly in recent weeks, because it is now clear to me that he sees himself primarily as our manager, concerned with control of the project and its members, rather than our collaborator or colleague. I say that this worries me, not just because of the hierarchy involved – at one level we know we are in a hierarchy, because we have contracts that bring us different levels of pay and require us to take different levels of organisational responsibility – but because of the implications for the purpose of our project. If we are truly concerned with devising a new way of doing business, we need to attempt to practise this ourselves, and that if we re-structure the jobs in our team in such a way that C is left without a role, against her will, we would not be doing that. J would be exercising explicit unilateral managerial power. I ask him if he feels leaving her without a job is helping to build the sort of organisation he wants. (I have framed, advocated and inquired: I am trying to set this as a discussion about the principles by which we work, rather than the interpersonal issues)

He says that he know this a very tough situation for all of us, but that he feels he has a responsibility to manage the resources of the project to the best effect. He does not feel anyone in our team is owed a job if they are unable to contribute appropriately. He has consulted with the human

resources department in our sponsoring company, and been advised that it is unwise to prolong an untenable position, and not good for the person concerned in the long run. As he is speaking, I am noticing the immense difference in our frames of reference: its as if we are talking two different languages. As in our previous conversation about appraisal, he is taking the “rules of the game” directly from the sponsoring company without testing them against our espoused values. I realise that I am wanting to ask him to both be more powerful and less powerful – more powerful in moving outside the modes of operation he is being handed down, and less powerful in exerting his managerial authority over C and over me. I am wanting him to use his power in a completely different way. I also want to challenge his right to define unilaterally what is “appropriate contribution” to our project. He is presenting himself as a reasonable and concerned manager, and I can feel the strength of that reasonable voice, inviting me to join him⁷. I am resisting it – identifying it as the voice of the paradigm I am working to change. But I am also holding to the idea that re–framing can make a difference here – so I, too, am striving to be ‘reasonable’.

The problem is, I say, that our sponsoring company is not one that manages to connect its values and practices very well, as he and I have discussed many times. For me, I continue, one of its worst feature is the

⁷ I can expand on the reasonable voice - see ‘Rational Argument’

lack of trust and respect it gives its employees. He says that he agrees, but that he feels that the respectful thing to do in C's case is to help her move on to something else in the best way we can, giving her time off to look for another job, using our contacts to help her and so on. But that pre-supposes, I say, that she is unable to contribute to the project – and how has that conclusion been reached? (I am gradually recognising the pointlessness of this conversation: I am simply participating in a framework established by our institutional setting: nothing I say or do in this room is going to shift this – we are just playing word-games. All I am doing in effect is letting J know that I am not a willing participant in this: but I am still a participant.) He says that he has been over the business-plan time and time again, trying to reach other conclusions, but keeps coming back to the fact that we need a fund-raiser, and can't pay for that unless we let C go.

I decide to have one last go at opening things up for J: I say that if we use the "normal" ways of proceeding, that is the sort of conclusion we will reach. But we do not aspire to be a "normal" kind of organisation, and we could try and ask completely different sorts of questions of ourselves. We could collectively decide to hold C's continuation with the project as value we would want to uphold, and from there look for other ways of meeting our financial targets. We could decide that it was unacceptable to us that C should be a casualty of our financial planning, and that we

would not make her so. We have choices, and can use our collective creativity differently. The conclusions we come to depend on the questions we ask. I am watching J – he is listening very closely to what I am saying. But is it making any difference, I wonder. I ask him – what is your reaction to what I have been saying? He says he will think further, and we will talk about it again when C gets back.

My journal for a couple of days later reads:

“Today we talked about C and the job - I don't think J wanted to, with all three of us there. He said that it was all very difficult, and he had listened to what both C and I had to say about it, and thought about it a lot, but he did not agree with us. I pushed back hard. So, I said, you are going to use your authority to over-rule us. That's my job, he said, that's what I get paid to do, we can collaborate when we can, but if we don't, my responsibility is to do what is best for the project. . I said that was his interpretation of his job, but it was not how it had to be, I wanted him not to keep returning to the particulars of the job description and the identified skills, because he had already framed those in a way where the outcome was inevitable. He said something - I don't remember the words - that suggested he took my and C's resistance to him exercising his authority as out of order, almost a hint of a disciplinary issue. For a brief moment in the room I think he saw himself in an untenable position, with two people to manage who did not give their consent to be managed. He said he felt ganged-up against. I was very angry and upset. I said that I found what this process had done to our way of

working together was the worst aspect of it all. He had listened to me, and had decided not to act on the things I had said, and there was nothing, apparently, I could do about that except accept it. We had not reached any sort of resolution from C's perspective, and however unacceptable we found this, we could do nothing. What sort of basis was that for us to work on a project like this? It was very tense, and very emotional. There was someone waiting to see him downstairs, and he went out. I was left feeling very angry, and so was C. She said well, that's it then, he is stuck in his position, and I am out of the project.

I don't know what to do, I feel very impotent, angry and inadequate. My ability to influence the outcome of these events comes down to whether I can change one individual - and apparently, I cannot. I sat on the train on the way home wondering how much to escalate this, and feeling the pain of this stinking situation. C says she will accept the inevitable, and agree to go without a fight, in order to make the next few months bearable. I understand her decision, but I know that that is precisely what J wants, us all to accept his decision, and be nice to one another. This is the way in which we reproduce our normality. It seems to me both wrong, and wholly unjust and unworthy behaviour towards C.

A Crisis: Other voices I am holding

“A Rational Argument”

Our project is poised at a crucial point, where the groundwork has been laid for us to expand. We have a clear business target – to be financially self-supporting by July 1999. Our sponsors will by then have invested a considerable sum in the project over four years, which is a massive injection of confidence and allows us a period in which to grow our capacity which few other new projects enjoy.

It is not yet clear how we will generate the income to sustain ourselves – probably through some combination of income from courses and seminars, some donations by “member” companies, possible some income from offering consultancy services, and possible some research grant money.

We have achieved a lot in our initial two years. We are gaining a reputation among key players working in the field of socially responsible business, and have demonstrated that we can gather and disseminate information about developments in this area, and can produce programmes of good academic quality. Our main task now is to raise our profile, and to try and systematically build on what we have begun. To do this we have to take on additional staff, whilst acknowledging that this increases the financial target we have to reach. Two of these posts are clear: we need a team secretary, who can handle the post, answer the telephone, keep the office running while the rest of us are out, and we need someone who can carry out research for us in support of the programmes we are running, trawl newspapers and journals, keep in touch with the researchers at the sponsor’s company, and prepare digests of what is going on in a fast-moving area.

The third post is more difficult. In discussions with a number of people who run charities, we have been told it would be beneficial to employ a fund-raiser, someone who can work on positioning the project in such a way that it will stand a good chance of attracting funding and who has experience of making successful applications for commercial sponsorship and charitable donations. We are not a charity in the sense that most NGOs are, because we provide educational services which will earn us income. But this is unlikely to earn us enough to cover our overheads and carry out research, so we still need to seek additional funds. We also need to raise our profile more generally – get ourselves mentioned in newspapers and magazines, so that the business community get some sense of what we are doing. Both these tasks require specific knowledge, of who to network with, what contacts to take particular care of, how to spot an opportunity and make effective use of it, how to portray ourselves to maximum effect. And any such initiatives need to be integrated into our overall activity, so that we are presenting ourselves consistently – they cannot be added on to our work by someone who does not know or understand what we are doing.

C has worked well with the project over the last two years, but since she does not want to do the secretarial work, and has not got the right background and experience to do the researcher's job, the only possibility for her continued employment is the fund-raiser/PR post. She is very committed to the project, and of course knows a lot about it, but her youth and lack of experience means that she is not able to act as an effective spokesperson for us, particularly among the business community, and she does not have the specialist knowledge we need. She does not seem to acknowledge that there are skills necessary for this sort of work which she does not have, and that is part of the problem. We have tried several times to list the skills we think are needed, and however we do it, she does not match up. It could only be damaging to her to put her in a position where she did not feel competent, and it would not be a responsible use of the limited resources we have. It is far better that we all acknowledge that, unfortunately, and painfully for all of us, this is the situation, and we have to part company. In the remaining few months of her contract she can carry out some project work she would enjoy, and we can do our best to help her move into another job which makes good use of what she has learned whilst working here.

“A Feminist Rant”

As I write this account, I am trying very hard to be reasonable to J’s position, to represent it fairly. Why? I am carrying a voice that is constantly saying to me - “but that is only your point of view, your opinion, and you might be wrong. ”. Its the rationalist voice within me that rejects the hysterical woman, the harridan, the harpies - and struggle so hard against losing my cool in public, because I cannot bear to be on the receiving end of patronising and patriarchal sympathy. But I still want to cry with rage and hurt about this process.

I want to claim the right to be unreasonable. Isn’t it my very reasonableness that gives away my power? I seem to operate on the basis that careful argument will win through, when I know very well, from painful experience, that it often does not, that it is used as a smoke screen for manipulation and injustice. I worked so hard through these exchanges to contain my own emotions, to give support to C, and to try and put my point of view clearly to J, so that he could take it on board. I was upset about it and he knew I was upset - but did I let him know how angry I was at what he had spoiled and broken? Underneath the relative civility of our exchanges, I believe he was frightened and lying. How can I write this ? I believe he was threatened by C, by her knowledge, her forthrightness, the challenge she offered him, and used a rational mask to expel her from his territory. I believe that men in organisational power positions find women like her, who speak for themselves, terrifying to be around. So she becomes defined as the uncontrollable ‘other’, who must be disempowered and marginalised, whose knowing is denigrated as inappropriate, based on inexperience, lacking credibility. Whereas women like me, who have learned to contain ourselves and have accepted so much of the disciplinary structure within which we work - we can ‘succeed’ better. I am angry, and frightened simultaneously at the risk of my expulsion and the depth of my collusion in these processes. What should I be doing? What are the skills that can take me powerfully forward from here?