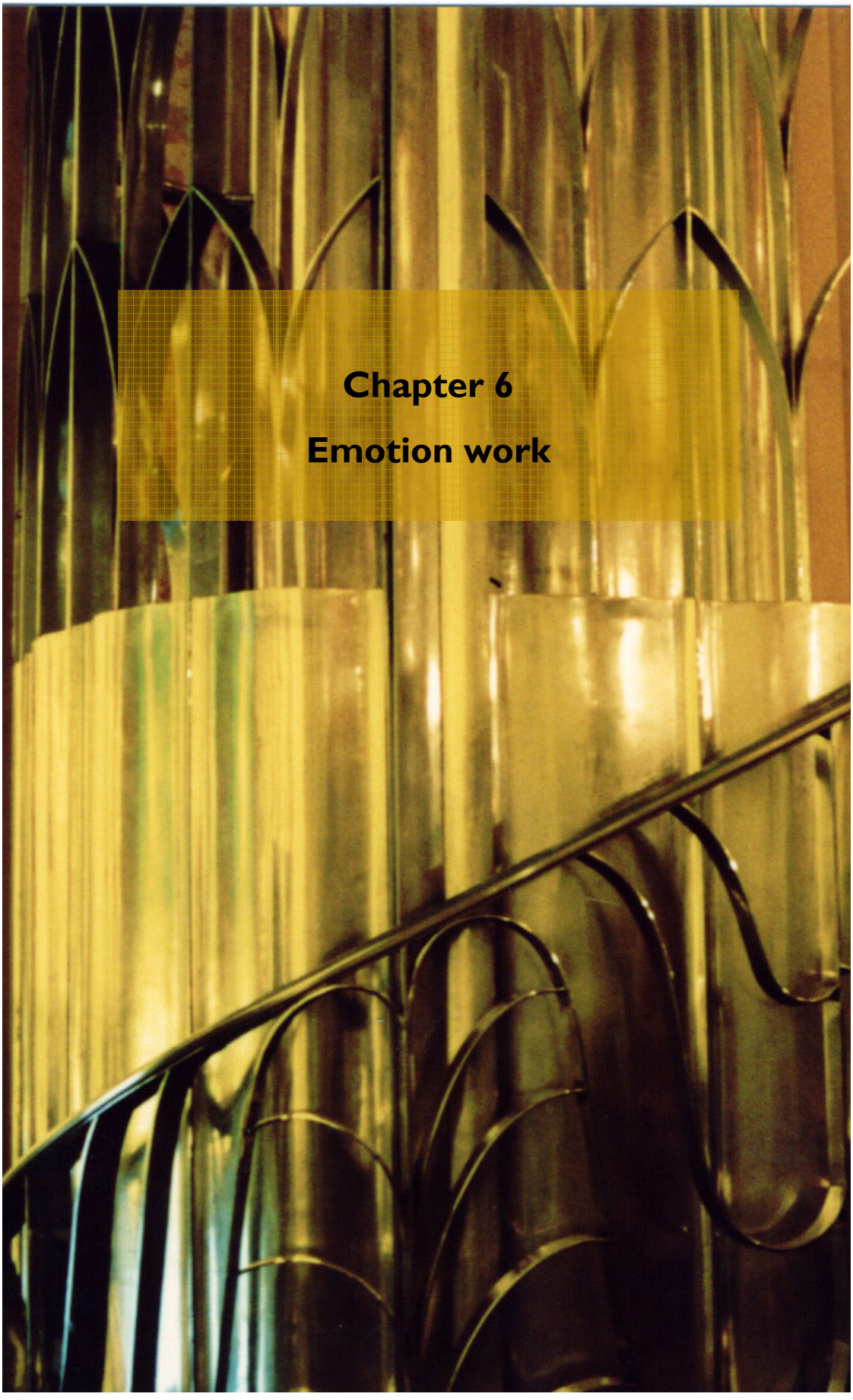

Chapter 6
Emotion work

***Le mystere des voix Bulgares**, Dragana I Slavei, accompanies this chapter. The music has a quality that is somewhat strange to our ear, much, I think as the conversation about emotions has been strange to the prevailing Western organisational discourse. It interrupts the pattern of the classical music I have included so far and I offer you a little orientation citing from the record cover:*

"The human voice raised in song is far more eloquent than when it speaks. From their knowledge of this profound verity, the Bulgarian people place the art of song at the pinnacle of artistic expression. Their genius in this field – fruit of a thousand year-long history of tears and suffering - draws its nourishment from roots that go back to another world: Byzantium. And even further back, the furthest tips of these roots are lost in the obscure and ancient civilization of the Thracians, a people famous in their time for musical prowess. Furthest of all, these roots go down to the river Trigadska, where Orpheus descended into the underworld in search of Eurydice. (…) The sonourous timbre (is) characteristic of the open, vibrato-free voices of young Bulgarian country girls. For it is from the villages, not from the schools of music, that the choirmasters of Sofia recruit the vocal cords needed for the a cappella choirs featured."

Frame

If my work in HPA had been somewhat of an emotional roller coaster, it was not until I joined ACL, an equally taxing experience for different reasons, that I began to inquire into emotions as a *valuable* aspect of organisational life (Fineman 2000; Meyerson 2000). Admittedly I started from a place of 'feeling burdened' by emotions, and from an inquiry into whether/how ACL attempted to "manage my heart" (Hochschild 1983). From there I took my inquiry into my consulting practice: "Was 'emotional labour' (o.c.) a concept applicable to consulting or was a different kind of emotion work involved? What did 'emotion work' entail in my practice? What effect did that have on me? What did the consulting literature have to say about emotions in consulting? As my inquiry continued, I have become interested in a broader perspective on the role and value of emotions in organisations, as I hope is demonstrated in the ***Reflections*** from 2004, on my Orpheus accounts.

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In this chapter I share some key moments in my inquiry into emotions in organisations. I have already mentioned that I see my consulting practice as inextricably linked with my role as a member of the ACL community, which is the subject and scene for the first two inquiry strands:

- A second (6.1.1 and 6.1.3) and first person (6.1.2) inquiry into the process of joining ACL and of joining CARPP6 (6.1.3)
- A second person inquiry with colleagues into emotional labour in consulting (6.2)
- A first and second person inquiry into emotions in my consulting practice (6.3)

I would like to offer a little background so that you may orient yourself in the timeline of this chapter.

In the previous chapter I have shared some of my inquiry processes into my work with clients. The first account was written in July 2000, 3 months after I had joined ACL. As I was developing my inquiry into my client work, I was conducting an inquiry with other new colleagues into the process of joining ACL, which became the inspiration for exploring emotion work in different facets of our role.

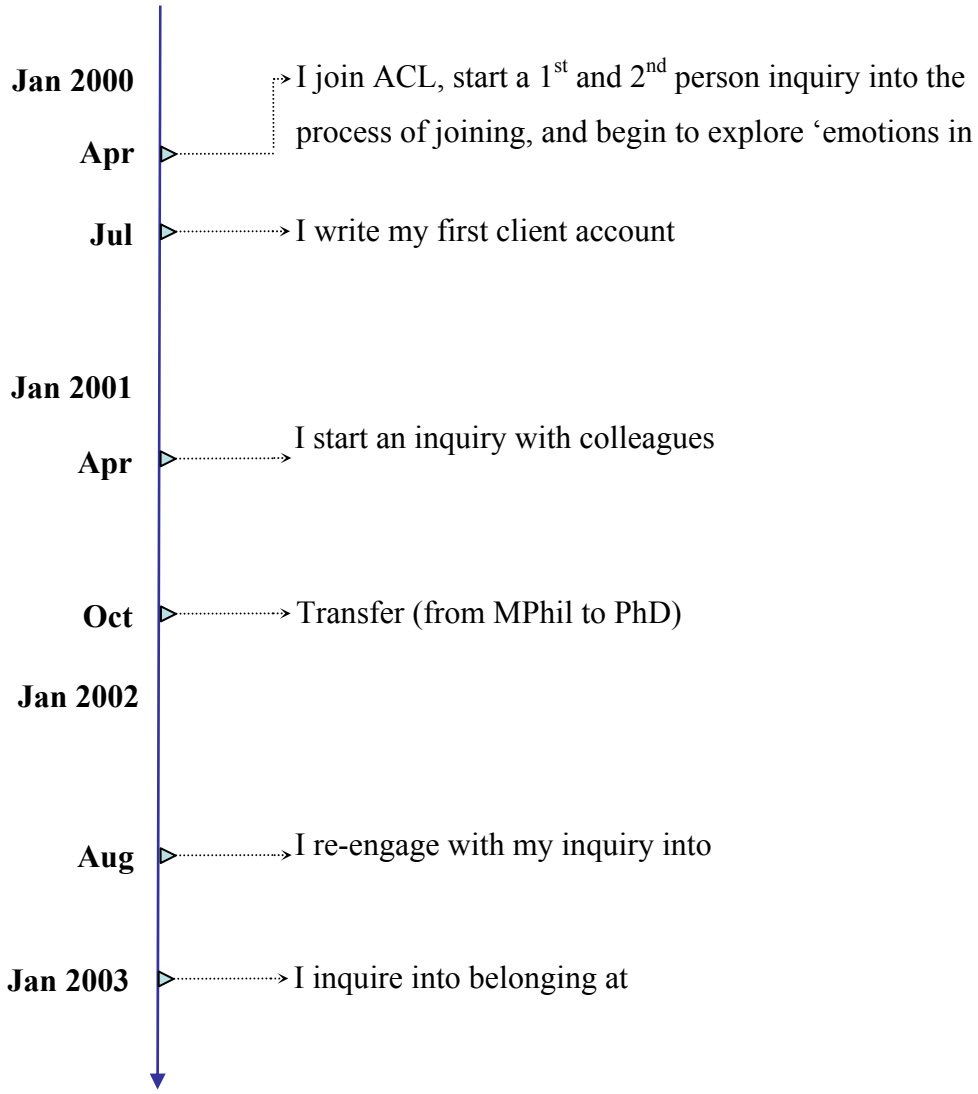


Fig. 6.1 Timeline of my inquiry processes discussed in this chapter

In 2003 I became the mentor to a new member of staff and engaged in another round of inquiry into joining ACL.
(See Fig. 6.1).

The process of joining is an important aspect of organizational life (Wenger 1998; Stacey 2003) and of my consulting practice. Although I do not 'join' a client organization, the process of entry raises similar issues around gaining acceptance, identity (how will I be constructed by the client) and establishing relationships (Campbell, Coldicott et al. 1994; Block 1999; Schein 1999). In the next section I discuss my experience of an inquiry into joining ACL.

6.1 Inquiring into joining ACL

Joining ACL proved to be harder than I had imagined. I was one of a cohort of seven new recruits, four of whom had joined earlier in the year. None of us had much experience of external consulting or acquiring business. We were encouraged to observe colleagues ('shadowing', as it was somewhat erroneously called) as a way of learning about the ACL approach to consulting. Unfortunately, business was slack that year so there very few opportunities. We were acutely aware of the burden we posed on the business (financially) and on colleagues (who were continually asked for 'shadowing' opportunities). The office layout, a long narrow space with many small office cubicles, each shared by up to three colleagues, made it difficult to establish connections with people. Having to cross the threshold of their semi-private space to talk to colleagues, one always also inevitably disturbed others in the office (Duffy 1997).

There were also more intractable reasons for making the joining process difficult. Many colleagues who joined under very different circumstances found it equally hard, despite the friendly nature of the small ACL community.

During my first week I discovered other new colleagues were struggling too. They told me things seemed to get harder and more frustrating as time went by. Keen to

make the most of my new role, and to make sense of why this organization seemed so difficult to connect with, I invited colleagues to join me in an inquiry. By Thursday of my first week we'd agreed our inquiry questions. I quote from the paper we produced, suggesting options for inquiry, which we shared with colleagues in ACL:

(10 April 2000)

(…)

- A collaborative inquiry by experienced ACL consultants into their experiences of working with clients with the new recruits in attendance (e.g. a fishbowl, or whatever form is deemed appropriate). Creating an opportunity for shared learning, for support and challenge for the experienced consultants, it would give us an idea of the nature of the processes and issues involved in working with clients.
- A collaborative inquiry by the new recruits into our 'joining Ashridge' experience.
- Treating our experience as a modelling opportunity. An ACL team could work with us as they would with clients, modelling how they would explore issues with clients, and supporting us in learning about our own structure needs, ability to deal with anxiety, etc.
- A mixed group (new and established staff) could inquire into the implications and challenges of a large group (25% of FTE) joining over a short period of time: what is that experience like for the existing team as well as for the new recruits and what are possible ways to deal with it constructively?

Nothing much came of the inquiries with experienced colleagues beyond informal conversations. Although they expressed an interest, we failed to get anything off the ground. Gaining new business and meeting clients was the top priority for everyone.

6.1.1 A second person inquiry

Amongst new colleagues we used any opportunity we could find to continue sense making process. The result of those conversations, and of a number of planned meetings, was a humorous paper, '**The Rough Guide to ACL'** (see Appendix 2),

Feeling and emotion

Fineman (1999) makes the following distinction between feeling and emotion: Feelings are a subjective experience that provide us with an experiential, personal readout on how we are doing, what we want, what we might do next. To feel means to be aware of a bodily state, or more diffuse psychological change. Feelings may be in part determined by early life experiences, the source of which we may be unaware. We may fall victim to our feelings or get stuck in feeling traps (e.g. feeling anxious about being anxious). We have feelings about our feelings, guided by social scripts or knowledge (e.g. I ought not to be upset by this).

Emotions are the personal displays of affected states, such as of joy, anger, shame. They acquire their meaning, their social currency, from the socio-cultural setting. A bodily sensation, such as a churning stomach, only becomes 'revulsion' when labelled and/or performed in a manner consistent with repulsive circumstances and behaviour. "(Bodily sensations) become felt emotions of disgust, pleasure, excitement or apprehension according to (a) prior learning about the type of sensation as being disgusting, pleasurable and so forth, and (b) the social/cultural protocols of what emotional body-display is appropriate (such as professional, non-insulting, face-saving) in the particular circumstances. In this manner embodiment, emotion and socio-cultural processes intertwine" (Fineman 2000 p.9)

which summarized, metaphorically, the reasons we had identified for our struggle to join. I share the main reasons and indicate in brackets the references in the 'Rough Guide':

- A lack of opportunity to be involved in client work and confusion about our role ('Working: Visas and red tape', 'Things to do' and 'Begging'). Following Larry Hirschhorn's workshop at Ashridge in July 2000, we used his framework to make sense of the anxiety the lack of work generated for us. Hirschhorn explained how the experience of making a contribution to the primary task of an organization is important for an employee's sense of well-being and related it to role definition. According to Hirschhorn well defined roles, which give people a sense of creating value for others, give them a sense of security; conversely, ill-defined roles which don't enable a sense of contribution, lead to anxiety and defensiveness (see (Hirschhorn 1999)).
- The lack of structure and established processes. Although we had all joined ACL because of its informal atmosphere, the seeming absence of agreed processes for most anything left us floundering: meetings seemingly had no clear agenda and timeliness appeared an alien concept (Time zones), the process for getting involved in client work seemed obtuse ('Things to do' and 'Begging'), the mentoring process haphazard.
- Issues of inclusion and understanding the unwritten rules ('What to take', 'Dress', 'Unseemly behaviour', 'Crime', 'Politics and the tribal system'). We seemed to bump up against rules by trespassing them, leading to more anxiety and frustration. It seemed to us that the only way to find out about 'how we go about things around here' was to be part of a network. As networks seemed to form around client work – which we were not (yet) involved in – we found ourselves in a vicious circle.

  We discovered feeling rules (Hochschild 1983). We received rule reminders from others by being asked to *account* for what we felt (o.c.) when those feelings were considered 'negative' (i.e. unease, lack of confidence, frustration, anger), but not in moments when we felt happy, hopeful or enthusiastic.
- The discrepancy between espoused values and values in use (Argyris 1993). We felt there was an espoused set of values (e.g. openness and inclusiveness) which was at odds with enacted values: don't be critical, don't ask difficult questions,

don't expect to *be* included. The latter was especially difficult, as none of us was in a position to include others - we had no client work in which to include people and our inquiring conversations about 'joining Ashridge' didn't seem to generate any interest beyond our small circle. During the recruitment process ACL had been presented to us as a community that welcomed diversity. Our Italian colleague (called Leonardo in the 'Rough guide') in particular complained about not feeling he could fit into what he experienced as a white, middle class, and very British culture. Leonardo left after a year; Pedro, from Brazil, left as I arrived, within two months of joining.

- ACL was, so we were told, a place of reflection and shared learning. If those were taking place in the form of client reviews, we did not know when and where, nor how to access them. The community didn't seem very keen to learn from our experience.

Reflections:

- Regarding feeling rules: Hochschild (o.c) refers to the psychiatric term "inappropriate affect", meaning the *absence of expected* affect. The underlying assumption is that there are rules according to which feelings may be judged appropriate for the situation. The reference to a construct from the world of ill mental health is noteworthy. Receiving messages about our 'inappropriate feelings' had a twofold effect: it made us feel even more *inadequate* than we already did and it made it harder to continue to voice our discomfort, for fear of being increasingly seen as inadequate. We found ways of coping with being asked to account for our feelings: regular check-ins with each other confirmed that we shared similar feelings and helped us to feel that there was sense (if not method) in our madness. It also helped us to remain persistent in voicing our feelings.
- Producing the 'Rough guide to ACL' was our attempt at voicing criticism in a way that we hoped could be heard. Distributed amongst ACL colleagues it caused hilarity as well as quite a stir. Together with our persistence in conversations, it eventually lead to an acknowledgement from colleagues that joining ACL could indeed be a difficult experience. It is now an openly acknowledged issue, and colleagues who joined recently (spring 2003) tell me that they have received repeated warnings to expect a difficult first few months, almost to the extent of

scaring one of them off – an unintended consequence of our hard efforts!

- The 'Rough guide' was perhaps most important to ourselves: the process of drafting it was a bonding and healing experience. The story we told about our experience and the different relationship it established with our colleagues created for us, to a certain extent at least, a different sense of identity in ACL (Rosenwald and Ochberg 1992), and helped us to reclaim some of our agency.
- Hirschhorn's assertion of the importance of contributing to the organization's primary task helped us to see our reaction as 'normal' rather than to construct it as a sign of being overly dependent, or immature. However, amateurish explorations of psychodynamic frameworks also had the potential risk of personalising our experience and underplaying the systemic elements of it (Menzies 1990; Mosse 1994; Atkins, Kellner et al. 1997; Fineman 2003). We were aware of that risk and it was a regular subject of our conversations. Writing the 'Rough guide' and making it available to colleagues was our way of reminding ourselves and others quite how important the impact of ACL's culture was on our experience.

6.1.2 My first person inquiry

In parallel with my second person inquiry I was conducting a first person inquiry. It took the form of:

- Diligently keeping a reflective diary and sharing some of it with my CARPP colleagues for feedback on my inquiry process, on my conduct and on my strategies for further action. Paying attention to the emotion work required of me and to feeling rules was one outcome of a CARPP meeting.
- Conversations with my mentor
- Individual conversations with 'established' (as opposed to fellow new recruits) colleagues
- Conversations with established colleagues about their consulting practice

Diary writing

My diary was a means to make sense of my experience, maintain a sense of agency, track any progress I felt I was making, and to develop strategies for future action. Some of the questions I held were:

- What do I need to flourish in this community?
- How am I constructing myself? How am I being constructed by others?
- What are my strategies for thriving? What is the effect?
- What is the gap between ACL's espoused values and enacted values? What is my gap?
- How can I establish connections with colleagues outside the context of client work?
- What is the emotion work required of me? What are the feeling rules in ACL?

Exploring the concept of 'feeling rules', I noticed I bumped up against my own rules as well as those of colleagues. In my diary I berated myself for being unhappy, feeling a burden and being difficult, exposing my feeling rule: I ought to be happy and grateful for the opportunity. According to Hochschild (o.c.) "private mumblings to ourselves" are a way in which we recognise a rule reminder. I quote from my diary:

29 August 2000

(…) I finally got the job I always wanted to do, in an organization I like for many different reasons: its approach to consulting, its clients, many of my colleagues, the beautiful setting. So I ought to feel elated, confident, pleased and happy. But I'm not. I ought to be over teething problems by now.

My personal feeling rules thus told me that:

- After 5 months I ought to be settled.
- Since I have my dream job, in my dream organization, I ought to feel good about my job, my employer and myself.

Another rule reminder takes the form of social sanctions: cajoling, teasing, scolding, shunning (Hochschild, o.c.). I experienced every one of them. The most painful sanctions were being scolded for being difficult (diary entry about Ingrid) and being shunned by colleagues (an entry from August 2000 describes my concern about colleagues starting to avoid me).

Conversations with my mentor

The following diary extract gives an indication of the nature of inquiry with my mentor:

30 May 2000

Met Paul today. He's very busy at the moment and I've had to be persistent. I went prepared with a set of questions:

- How are my persistent questions (especially about enacted versus espoused values (Argyris 1990) perceived in ACL?
- I feel increasingly insecure, having little opportunity to contribute to client work. How can I find other ways to make a contribution?
- Can we explore my role amongst the new consultants, and my concern that I'm assuming more responsibility for others' wellbeing than is helpful?

Paul confirmed that I'm at risk of being perceived to be 'difficult' by the leadership team. He also warned me to be cautious with giving critical feedback to some individuals. The best thing for me to do, he said, would be to get some credibility through successful client work first and *then* to start asking difficult questions. I explained my concern that once I was busy working with clients I'd be assimilated quickly in the system and no longer notice, or be too busy to explore the gap between what we practice and what we preach. I stated that if we invited clients to work with Argyris' (1990) framework of enacted versus espoused values we needed to experience that ourselves too. Paul agreed, but had no suggestions as to a way forward. He added that he appreciated the way I seemed to 'take a lead' in organising the new recruits (…). but dismissed my concern about reverting to a Rescuing role (Stewart and Joines 1987). (…)

What I felt:

- Fearful to hear what I had suspected: being at risk of acquiring the label 'DIFFICULT WOMAN'.
- Curious about potential gaps in my own espoused value (creating a place where people can flourish) and my behaviour. Torbert (Fisher and Torbert 1995) encourages us to balance advocacy with inquiry, framing and illustrating. I do pay attention to framing and illustrating,

but my questions are rather challenging – a kind of advocacy through the back door I suspect. Can I find a more appreciative approach (Barrett and McLean 2000), I wonder?

- Anxious. Despite assertions to the contrary, we'll only be valued here (e.g. as in enough to ask difficult questions) when we've done some successful client work. (…)
- Determined to make this work. To find client work somehow. To continue to hold my questions and to become more discerning about how I articulate them and with whom.

Individual conversations about ACL's culture

Reviewing notes from my first months in ACL, the challenging nature of my questions and the persistence of my challenge are palpable. Following an outburst from a member of the leadership team I wrote in my diary:

29 July 2000

Ingrid lost her temper with me today. We were reviewing a client intervention on the process consultation course. It was fascinating and we all agreed we'd learned a lot from it. So I had another go at asking whether we couldn't do those reviews more often and more systematically. To which Ingrid replied she was fed up with my 'moans' and nobody was going to stop me from reviewing my client work if that's what I wanted to do.

In my conversations with other colleagues I noticed irritation whenever I raised the subject of 'my difficult joining experience' or my anxiety about not making a contribution. I was, I felt, being at risk of constructing myself as challenging and difficult. The fact that I appeared to be seen as the 'leader of the difficult group' (from conversation with Paul) increased my concern.

Conversations with established colleagues about their consulting practice

I set about inquiring with established colleagues about their client work, their approach to consulting, and how they went about acquiring new work. It helped to establish connections more than to learn about consulting. In a diary extract, reflecting on my conversations I wrote the following:

I find it hard to write about those early days. In an attempt to clear my thoughts I change music, from Handel, to Purcell. A thought arises seemingly out of the blue, or perhaps out of the music. Writing something down I make a punctuation in time. As Kohler Riessmann puts it beautifully: "Meaning is fluid and contextual, not fixed and universal. All we have is talk and texts that represent reality partially, selectively, and imperfectly" (1993, p.15)
Am I concerned about misrepresenting ACL perhaps? In 2001 I experienced the extent to which my colleagues, including and especially the CEO, unconditionally and vigorously supported me through a conflict with a powerful client.

As an established member of the ACL community I feel valued and supported in my work with clients. I experience ACL as a safe haven from which to venture out into the world of client work. Perhaps that was one of the reasons (keeping the haven safe) that dissenting voices inside the community struggled to be heard. Were we perceived to make the safe haven unsafe by voicing dissent and criticism? I use the past tense, since now that Ingrid has become our new MD I have a sense that there is a shift in what can be voiced and by whom.

June 2000

I have a whole collection of tapes by now. People have been very accommodating to me and my tape recorder. Interestingly I have no inclination to listen to the tapes again, in contrast to my CARPP tapes. (…) Whatever the reason, people telling me *about* their work doesn't bring it to life for me, perhaps I ought to have asked for stories. Having said that, I've enjoyed the conversations. Colleagues tell me they find the opportunity to reflect on how they work and how they decide on how to intervene challenging and exciting. And many have volunteered to continue our conversation.

Reflections

- Hochschild's concept of feeling rules gave me a handle on the fact that I was expected to feel a certain way, both by myself and by others, and that failing to comply with those rules would inevitably lead to sanctions. However, the strategy I eventually developed appears to me to be neither surface nor deep acting (Hochschild 1983). Without pretending I was coping fine (acting) I personalised my story and stopped challenging ACL as having a responsibility to make the joining process easier (see below).
- I described myself as 'trying harder' (Watzlawick, Weakland et al. 1974), rightly so. At the same time there was also a denial of the problem going on in the community, a 'terrible simplification' (o.c.), in which the existence of a system problem was denied.
- I felt silenced, without knowing quite how that was happening. Shaw describes this process as follows:

  > "(…) within the rationale of an accepted systematic discourse, aspects of our experience become rationally invisible to us, the discourse itself does not afford us opportunities to draw attention in certain ways, and a certain kind of voice is literally unable to speak. This sense of being constrained in a prison that one is helping to sustain can affect all of us." (2001, p.97).

  By pushing at the boundaries of the accepted discourse I was at risk of failing to establish the relationships I needed to join client teams and thus of sustaining my prison. I searched for ways to voice my unease that would be acceptable to the ACL community. I started to talk about my concerns about not making a

contribution, not having enough work, not feeling I added value which resulted in colleagues being more prepared to listen (from my diary: "In good consulting style my colleagues want to hear more about how I end up feeling the way I do"). Thus I chose to change the way I related to colleagues in order to find a way for going on together with them:

> "Our relations are creative engagements in which we make our identities as we strive to influence conditions for going on together. 'I' cannot go on being the same 'me' without continuing to relate to 'you' in a certain way, and if that shifts we are both a little different" (Shaw 2001 p. 73 Quotation marks in the original).

- In my inquiry into colleagues' practice I found what appeared to be a gender difference. Many of my male colleagues tended to assert themselves in their stories, they talked about 'the impact they had' whilst many female colleagues focussed on relationships in the client organization and between themselves and the client (Miller 1986; Fletcher 1998).
- In the end my various early strategies delivered the results I was hoping for: I am now a well established member of the community, the issue of 'joining' was acknowledged and my inquiry into colleagues' practice helped me to establish relationships.

6.1.3 Another cycle of inquiry

In August 2002 Edgar was recruited as a new consultant in ACL and I was appointed as his mentor. In 2003 two more people, Juliette and Sarah, joined. Seeking to support Edgar well in my capacity of mentor, my inquiry into 'joining' became live again. It took the following shape:

- Sharing my writing (a substantial piece about joining, now summarized in this chapter - up to 6.1.3) with new colleagues for their feedback, and for comparison with their current experience, leading to further cycles of reflection (and re-crafting) and action.
- Making sense of our experiences in the context of (especially) Bowlby's Attachment Theory (1989) and Fletcher's research into relational practice at work (1999) (explored in chapter 7).

I may have had some difficulty in finding my place in CARPP6, nevertheless I valued my colleagues' support, as witnessed by the above image which I incorporated in an account written in February 2002, with the following address:

> "And, not in the least, (I felt nurtured by) the thought of you, my CARPP colleagues, your voices in my head, the memory of your presence. Thank you. A pillar to lean on. This image reminded me of you. I hope you like it. "

- Re-engaging the ACL leadership team in an inquiry about the joining process and exploring what we can do to improve the conditions for new colleagues (see 'future plans').
- Tracking my experience in 2003 of joining an established team of 12 ACL colleagues that delivers a Masters' programme (not elaborated upon here).
- An inquiry into 'belonging' at CARPP6.

In the process of sharing my notes from my inquiry during the summer of 2003, I conducted a parallel first person inquiry into my experience of joining and belonging in CARPP6. CARPP6 had been newly formed, bringing together the people remaining from CARPP4 and a new CARPP intake. I had found the experience unnerving, and still felt at the periphery of the group after nearly two years. I wrote an account which we discussed at our next CARPP meeting. I incorporated colleagues' feedback in a subsequent cycle of reflective writing. As a result of my inquiry I felt more at ease in our meetings and more able to discuss the impact of being at a different stage in the PhD process from other members of my group. Colleagues also told me they experienced me as positively different and more approachable as a result of sharing my account with them.

I return to my inquiry at ACL next.

Second person inquiry with new colleagues

I had regular, if informal, meetings with my new colleagues, exploring their experience and strategies to improve it. Juliette shared her PhD writing about her experience for my feedback. I shared my writing about 'joining', as well as with the 'Rough Guide to Ashridge'. I received the following feedback

- Both papers resonated with my new colleagues' experience and helped them to make sense of it
- Our conversations helped to establish a sense of connection
- The mentoring process is key in facilitating the joining process

Our mentoring relationship seemed to have made a significant difference between Edgar's experiences on the one hand, and those of the colleagues who joined at the

same time as I did and of Juliette, Sarah and myself on the other hand. Edgar described himself as less uncertain – although still anxious on occasions-, more confident in his ability to contribute. Unlike us, he felt connected. I quote from an email in which he describes how our mentoring relationship had facilitated his joining:

26/03/03

What worked so well in your mentoring, so far:

- a strong connection from the start, which made me feel very at ease
- a powerful relating, from the knowledge and personal experience that it is not easy to start in a new role at ACL (…)
- a willingness and courage to probe in times when I felt emotional and unsure of myself
- at the same time the offer of a warm, trusting peace and silence, and the absence of pressure or inappropriate probing in those moments
- practical help in finding fee earning work, and in getting to know the colleagues you value personally or expect I will connect with and enjoy working with
- taking time and quiet space for our mentoring conversations
- lots of emails and responses, which give me the feeling that there is an open connection between us, an ongoing conversation
- offering a safe and trusting opportunity to talk about individuals, and/or specific projects and teams.

From our conversations I also know the value Edgar attributed to my mentoring work in the six months between signing his contract and actually joining (introducing him to colleagues, finding client work for him, etc.). Juliette and Sarah too experienced mentoring as an important enabler. Colleagues who had not experienced joining ACL as particularly tough confirmed that early connections, someone taking them under their wing, or early engagement in client work which provided them with connections to team members, were all important in smoothing their entry into the organization (Wenger 1998).

As well as the desire and inability to make a contribution, the lack of connections, we found, was a major source of anxiety. Sandelands and Boudens (2000), drawing on three studies in which people were invited to talk about their work, found that what people wanted for meaning at work was not as much 'self-actualisation' (Maslow, 1954), or personal growth, as a sense of *connection to others*. Since connections in ACL are mainly established around client work, it was little wonder new members of staff were feeling left anxious. According to Bowlby (1989) anxiety triggers attachment behaviour, in adults as well as children. It is a *healthy* response, which has been devalued by the use of terms such as 'dependency' or 'regression'. Bowlby's framework helped us to make sense of the vicious circle we found ourselves in: the more anxious we felt upon joining, the more we needed connectivity, since that connectivity was lacking (as it is developed in ACL, especially initially, through shared client work), we felt increasingly anxious and in need of connection.

Attachment behaviour appeared to me important not just in the context of joining, but also as a recurring behavioural pattern throughout our consulting working life, since every client engagement tends to generate at least some level of anxiety. The value of relational practice in consulting was beginning to take shape in my mind.

Re-engaging the leadership team

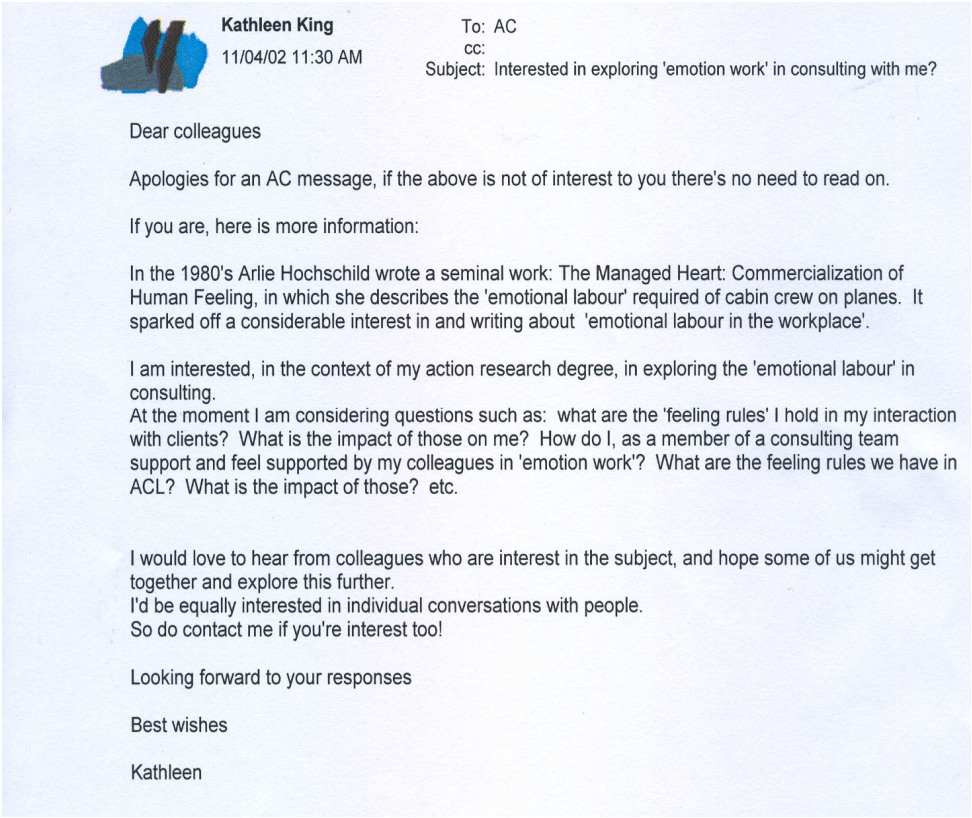
As a result of our inquiry we agreed I would share our findings with the leadership team and inquire into how we could improve the joining experience of our new colleagues. In our conversation I shared Bolwby's concept of attachment behaviour and the contribution it had made to reframe the feelings and behaviour of new colleagues, the importance of mentoring and of being included in client projects upon arrival in ACL. The actions agreed as a result are included below.

6.1.4 And now for action

Our inquiry led to a series of actions, all of which have been implemented (August 2004):

- My inquiry into my own joining process (2000) has been a key factor in the way I have conducted myself as Edgar's mentor. Rekindling an inquiry with new staff

When I am intrigued by a concept, a model or idea I tend to share it with everyone around me who's interested. This happened with Hochschild's concept of emotional labour. I remember the first time I mentioned it to a colleague, on a Monday morning over coffee. As more colleagues arrived a lively conversation unfolded. By the time we walked over to the meeting room, I had promised to bring Hochschild's book to the office and to continue our conversation. It is still on-going, almost 3 years later. Stacey (2001) and Shaw (2001) write engagingly about how novelty, learning and knowledge emerge in conversations in organizations. This Monday morning conversation over coffee is a striking example of that for me.



Kathleen King
11/04/02 11:30 AM

To: AC
cc:
Subject: Interested in exploring 'emotion work' in consulting with me?

Dear colleagues

Apologies for an AC message, if the above is not of interest to you there's no need to read on.

If you are, here is more information:

In the 1980's Arlie Hochschild wrote a seminal work: The Managed Heart: Commercialization of Human Feeling, in which she describes the 'emotional labour' required of cabin crew on planes. It sparked off a considerable interest in and writing about 'emotional labour in the workplace'.

I am interested, in the context of my action research degree, in exploring the 'emotional labour' in consulting.
At the moment I am considering questions such as: what are the 'feeling rules' I hold in my interaction with clients? What is the impact of those on me? How do I, as a member of a consulting team support and feel supported by my colleagues in 'emotion work'? What are the feeling rules we have in ACL? What is the impact of those? etc.

I would love to hear from colleagues who are interest in the subject, and hope some of us might get together and explore this further.
I'd be equally interested in individual conversations with people.
So do contact me if you're interest too!

Looking forward to your responses

Best wishes

Kathleen

link to: http://www.bath.ac.uk/carpp/publications/doc_theses_links/k_king.html

brought the process of joining back to the attention of the ACL community. One of my colleagues mentoring a new employee tells me that he too paid more attention to the arrival of his mentee than he would have done had it not been for the ongoing conversations in the ACL community.

- A review of the mentoring process and the support it can offer to new colleagues has taken place (see appendix 3).
- Regular internal meetings are taking place with the sole purpose of creating an opportunity for members of the ACL community reduce ambiguity for newcomers and for all of us to build stronger connections with each other.
- A considerable amount of attention is paid to engaging new colleagues in new or existing projects, enabling connections between new and existing colleagues.
- I have taken responsibility for connecting new members of staff into existing action learning sets (which are mandatory for all ACL staff).

6.2 Emotional labour in consulting, an inquiry with colleagues

Intrigued by Hochchild's work I started to pay attention to the emotion work involved in our consulting practice. I undertook a second person inquiry with colleagues, both informally and formally consisting of 3 group meetings and 2 meetings with individual colleagues (2002). Writing the first draft of this chapter I asked 3 colleagues involved in the initial inquiry for their current views (2003). .

In this section I aim to share with you the tentative conclusions from the 2nd person inquiry with colleagues (both formal and informal). I insert our comments from 2003, under the heading **June 2003** on the facing page. I will concentrate on the more formal meetings with colleagues at ACL, because they also capture the content of more informal conversations well.

The story

In April 2002 I sent all my ACL colleagues an email invitation to 'explore emotion work in consulting with me, explaining my interest and giving a little background to Hochschild's work (See adjacent page). The response was overwhelming, but getting

June 2003

- We found it hard to pin down how we know clients' emotional state. We interpreted responses, verbal (e.g. pursuing or changing the subject) and in body language and have a bodily sensation in response: in our stomach and our throat, tensing or relaxing, sweaty palms. Shelley described becoming aware of the hair in her neck as a symptom of violating feeling rules.
- How did we decide whether the above symptoms were a result of violating clients' feeling rules, our own, or a result of other factors (such as our discomfort with the topic, the client's behaviour, a sense of not being in control, etc.)? We agreed that we seemed to make 'meaning in the moment' of the reason for our comfort or discomfort and that feeling rules were one aspect of our sense making.

people together proved to be as difficult as ever. Ten people attended the first meeting (April 2002). Everyone expressed an interest to continue our conversation. Not everyone managed the May date, but some new people attended, so that we ended up covering some of the same ground. The same pattern was repeated in July. Everybody expressed a sustained interest, but we agreed that, because of the ever-changing attendance it was hard to develop our shared thinking. We decided to continue our conversations informally. I was both pleased with the extent to which people engaged with the topic and disappointed with our inability to keep a sustained inquiry going with a more or less stable group.

I followed up every meeting with an email summarizing our thoughts, copied to everyone else who had expressed an interest (as agreed at the meeting) and with the date of the next meeting when appropriate.

April 2002

I started by inviting colleagues to share the nature of their interest in the topic and explained Hochschild's work in some more depth. I offer a summary of our conversation.

- We all agreed that dealing with emotions, our own and those of clients, were an important part of our consulting work, but had different views about what that work entailed: most of us found it hard to portray emotions that were incongruent with how we felt (e.g. appearing calm and friendly when we feel inwardly seething). One colleague, on the contrary, stated she found showing her feelings harder than keeping a 'calm front'.
- We adopted the term 'emotional labour' for the work involved in 'displaying the appropriate emotion'.
- We all experienced 'feeling rules' with various origins: our own, those of colleagues and the ACL community, and those of our clients.
- Many of us shared feeling rules around (not) showing insecurity, anxiety, dependence. We expected ourselves to be mature, composed and in control of our feelings, if not the situation, at least to a certain extent.
- We agreed that ACL had feeling rules censoring critical feelings, or feelings of

June 2003

I related Albert's view to Mumby and Putnam's (1992) concept of bounded emotionality. Mumby and Putnam state that *ideally* emotions in organizations are identified with 'work feelings' rather than emotional labour. Work feelings emerge from the ongoing process of task and social activities, rather than from organizational control. We sent Albert a copy of Mumby and Putnam's article. He responded that the concepts of bounded emotionality and work feelings were much closer to how he experienced dealing with emotions than Hochschild's emotional labour.

'neediness and dependence'.

- Clients (individuals and organizations), we found, vary in what they expect. Two patterns emerged: either they seem to expect that we smoothly adjust to the dominant feeling rules in the system (ranging from aggressive self confidence, to meek compliance) or they expect the consultant to model an alternative pattern, e.g. remaining calm, pleasant and nice in an aggressive and confrontational client organization.
- Modeling a way of dealing with feelings that was different from the apparent pattern in the client organization (for instance by sharing them in an organization where people tended not to discuss feelings) could in some circumstances be a powerful intervention. Judging when that was appropriate, and how much to share and how to do it, required careful judgment and was often a source of anxiety in its own right.
- Navigating different feeling rules (Hochschild 1983) between different systems was in itself experienced as emotional labour. Figuring out the feeling rules in the system and then adjusting one's emotional display was especially difficult for people working with many different clients across different cultures.
- As we were about to conclude our meeting, Albert voiced his objection to the term 'emotional labour'. Being aware of one's feelings and working with them judiciously was a core part of the consulting process and of our role, and Hochschild's term, he thought unjustly singled out that aspect of our work as artificial and laborious.
- Following a brief discussion of Albert's view, we agreed that there was a difference, which we found hard to define and agreed to explore at our next meeting.

May 2002

The composition of the group was different: 5 previous participants were absent, 3 new people joined. We didn't return to the concept 'emotional labour' in any depth, but settled for using the term emotion work. The conversation centered instead on ACL, our home territory.

- Many of us experienced a considerable discrepancy between the espoused values around the acceptable display of emotion and the values in use (Argyris 1990).

June 2003

By now, our views on feeling rules and rule reminders in ACL differed for some of us. Alicia however stood firmly by her opinion from 2002: "Regarding display of feelings the ACL community preaches one thing and expects another". She didn't experience ACL as a 'safe space'. Shirley and I no longer thought of ACL as a homogenous community. Shirley was struggling in her job and appreciated the fact that she could openly talk about it, even if those conversations included some criticism of ACL. I agreed, and added that I thought she was heard because of the thoughtful way she voiced her views. I had similar experiences, but added that I had learned to avoid a few of my colleagues, because I had the impression they tended take matters very personal and did not respond well to criticism of the community. I also felt it was acceptable in ACL to choose the people one works with, and that I tended to choose colleagues who were able to cope with other's emotions, whatever their nature.

The espoused values appeared to be: 'We are relaxed around here, showing emotions is fine, you can be authentic'. However, most of us had experiences of bumping up against tacit rules, which we described as: "You can be authentic as long as that doesn't involve any critical feelings of ACL. Be self-reliant, be enthusiastic".

- How did we know that we were transgressing feeling rules? In other words: what were the rule reminders (Hochschild 1983) we experienced? People's response was similar to my own experience I have already described earlier in this chapter. They experienced being asked to *account* for what they felt and social sanctions: cajoling, teasing, scolding and shunning. Rule reminders left us feeling inadequate, or isolated, or in some cases, afraid. I quote Alicia: "I can't help but to take it personal, even if I know that we ought to be robust enough as a community to cope with difficult feelings. Isn't that what we encourage our clients to do?"
- All of us felt that feeling secure in ACL was important for our own sense of well being and to enable us to work well with clients. Alicia found it harder to cope with feelings of unresolved distress in ACL than with clients: "From a client you can walk away, from ACL you can't. In fact, I can cope well with really difficult stuff in my work with clients if I feel supported by my ACL colleagues." People told stories of working through difficult client issues with colleagues and feeling stronger and more able as a result of it. Conversely the absence of support from colleagues had left a "sensitive scar" for one of us.

We had to end our conversation there, but I raised the topic again at our next meeting.

July 2002.

On this occasion three people turned up for the first time, four colleagues had attended every meeting, and one person had been at the first meeting only. The topic of joining did not re-surface, instead we concentrated on emotion work in various aspects of our life, including our consulting practice.

We returned to Hochschild's (o.c.) concept of emotional labour (feelings being specified as part of the service we sell), trying to tease out whether we thought it was applicable to our consulting practice, and compared it with the emotion work required

June 2003

- We agreed that sharing personal information with clients did happen, and depended on the quality of the relationship. Nevertheless, we still felt that we let the sharing of personal information depend on an invitation to do so by the client, except in circumstances where we felt it could be helpful to the client.
- We made a distinction between sharing information (telling a personal story) and telling the client how we felt, following the same rule: we shared feelings if the client asked, or if we decided it was an appropriate intervention. A renewed conversation about feeling rules ensued: on the whole we were more prone to sharing what is generally labelled as positive feelings: enthusiasm, excitement, satisfaction. We all agreed we were cautious and purposeful with sharing feelings of frustration, stuckness, disappointment or anger.

We re-entered the conversation about 'emotional labour' and whether it was a concept applicable to consulting. Agreeing with what was said in our 2002 meetings, we still felt there was a difference between Hochschild's concept and our consulting experience: in consulting, we thought, we establish a relationship, however unsatisfactory that may be, with the client, in which no specific emotion is prescribed, unlike in the roles described by Hochschild. In that respect, we thought, consulting is closer to Mumby and Putnam's (1992) concept of 'work feelings' and 'bounded emotionality': we don't just act out, but make – if we are able – choices about what emotional 'display' is appropriate in a situation. In that respect we found ourselves 'acting' in our home lives too: e.g. feigning indifference when we are angry with a child or a neighbour. Emotion work, we decided was perhaps the most appropriate term: it was the term we had started to use in ACL both in relation to our private lives and to our practice, it did not have the "blanket prescription" connotation of Hochshild's (o.c.) emotional labour, and it gave a sense of the work involved in handling the spontaneously occurring feelings in the context of work (Mumby and Putnam's (o.c.) 'work feelings').

in every relationship.

- Like Hochschild (1993), we made a distinction between emotion work with clients, with colleagues, and with friends and family. Our engagements with clients, we felt, was close to Hochschild's concept of emotional labour. In our work with clients we often experienced emotion work as 'organizationally controlled' (by the client and/or by ACL) and instrumental. With colleagues it depended on our relationship. We felt we did not have to act (Hochschild 1983) with colleagues we experienced as friends, but could be spontaneous. It was similar, we thought, to the way we related to friends outside work and to our family. Although it could feel like hard work on occasions (Daniel described an incident with his eleven year old daughter) relatedness and mutual understanding were at the heart of our emotional efforts. With other colleagues the concept of emotional labour seemed to hold: we would 'act' in order to respect the organisationally prescribed feeling rules.
- Feeling rules concerned displaying positive emotions such as feeling positive, optimistic, contented or not displaying negative emotions such as anger, anxiety, and distress. On a few occasions they concerned not displaying positive emotions: such as not showing one's personal happiness or elation in front of a colleague or client who was going through a difficult time. This brought us back to Hochschild's concept of 'inappropriate affect'.
- The use of the terms 'negative' and 'positive' in connection with emotion generated a conversation about the judgements we make, in our culture (participants were British, Swedish, Belgian, South African and Israeli), about some emotions being more desirable than others, rather than accepting all emotions as natural responses to a particular situation.
- One person felt he had learned to 'switch off feelings' after leaving the client. A conversation ensued about the impact of suppressed emotions in the long run. Many of us felt it was important to process emotions soon after they had occurred, in order to avoid long term undesirable mental and physical effects. The 'switching off' of our feelings was in itself emotional labour, we decided. We returned to the importance of belonging to a community in which we felt safe to process feelings related to our client work, rather than having to burden friends or family with

them. All of the people present felt they could do that with at least some ACL colleagues.

- Returning to 'emotional labour' we saw the relationship with colleagues as different from that with clients. We constructed our relationship with clients as a 'servant' relationship, in the sense that "we are there to serve the needs of our clients". In parallel clients' expectations of their relationship with us and the way they construct us, we thought, differed in nature from expert, to extra pair of hands, to process consultant (Schein 1999) but it was based on the expectation that we would fulfil a need. From colleagues we expected support and reciprocity (and a salary from the organization).
- Most of us experienced the need to 'stay in control of our feelings' and to keep feelings, not related to the client, to ourselves, e.g not showing distress about a sick child at home. To that extent, and because of the careful choices we exercise around sharing feelings, many of us felt the concept of emotional labour was valid in our consulting practice.

We closed the meeting acknowledging the journey we had travelled together and expressing our appreciation for the support we had so freely given and received. I quote Alicia: "This has been really valuable for me. I wish we would do more of this. I felt I could share how I really felt, also towards ACL, without being judged because of it. I feel more confident as a result."

Reflections

- The changing composition of the group made it difficult to develop our thinking beyond the initial sense of recognition of the complex nature of emotions in our consulting practice and the nature of feeling rules and rule reminders. I did not see the difficulty of getting people together as an indication of a lack of interest. The organic way in which we organize around clients, rather than working in fixed teams, has many advantages. The difficulty of getting the same group of people together is one of the draw-backs.
- I am aware that our small group, about 16 people in total, are not representative of ACL. Most of us were already interested in 'emotions' in our practice in some way. Not everyone in ACL would agree that the quality of our relationship in

ACL is important for the quality of their work. Some of my colleagues are quite happy to work alone and invest little energy in building relationships with colleagues. One colleague expressed bemusement with my interest in emotion work.

- In our discussions we implicitly took a 'process consulting' (Schein 1999) perspective. Colleagues who have come from an 'expert consulting' background tell me that they are clear about the extent to which they experienced emotions as proscribed and instrumental in expert consulting. I quote: "I was expected, at all times, to appear confident, in control and sure of myself, even if I was internally shaking" (Higgins 2003, personal communication).
- Authors who articulate a 'process consultation' perspective (Casey, Roberts et al. 1992; Block 1999; Schein 1999), and psychoanalytically informed consultants (see chapter 1) (Kets de Vries and associates 1991; Obholzer 1994; Atkins, Kellner et al. 1997) consider emotions an important aspect of the consulting process. They take an instrumental view of emotions, encouraging consultants to notice their feelings and the emotions of the client and to treat them as an important source of information. Schein elaborates on the dangers of not being aware of one's feelings: "It is essential for consultants to be able to know what they are feeling, both to avoid bias in responding and to use those feelings as a diagnostic indicator of what may be happening in the client relationship" (Schein 1999, p. 89). Thus awareness of one's feelings is important, according to Schein, in order to avoid our reasoning being flawed: "Being able to reason logically is, of course essential. But (…) if the data we operate on is misperceived, or our feelings distorted it, then our analysis and judgments will be flawed" (o.c., p. 89). Rationality, he continues, is at best limited, but consultants need at least try to minimize the distortions. Thus Schein adopts a 'bounded rationality' (Simon 1957) perspective, in which the premium on rationality sets up a body-mind dualism and emotions are treated as a handicapped appendage to reason and as a means to achieve organizational ends (Mumby and Putnam 1992). Feminist authors, in contrast, view rationality as not a purely cognitive condition, but as a social phenomenon, in which emotions play an integral role. Emotions, they argue, ground legitimate rational responses to organizational behaviour (Jaggar 1989; Mumby and Putnam o.c.).
- Block (1999) advises consultants not only be aware of their feelings, but to share

them with the client, to be authentic. Clients, he argues, do not use consultants on a purely rational basis. Their first question is whether they can trust the client. Authentic behaviour on behalf of the consultant generates that trust, according to Block, it is "(…) the most powerful thing you can do" (o.c., p. 37). He does not elaborate what the construct means, beyond "putting into words what you are experiencing" (idem). In our inquiry, and in current (2004) conversations with participants on the Ashridge Masters in Organization Consulting, we found ourselves considerably more circumspect about whether to share what we were experiencing and how to go about it. Ashforth and Tomiuk (2000), make a distinction between *surface* authenticity, concerned with behaviour in a given encounter, and *deep* authenticity, concerned with identity. Surface authenticity occurs when one's emotional expression reflects one's current emotional experience. Deep authenticity occurs when one's emotional expression is consistent with the display rules of a specific identity that one has internalized as a reflection of self, regardless of whether the expression genuinely reflects one's current feelings. Although we did not use the term authenticity in our inquiry, many of our questions about feeling rules and appropriate affect (Hochschild 1983) were concerned with surface versus deep authenticity: e.g. not showing the distress one was feeling about a sick child because we considered it inappropriate in the context of the consulting intervention (deep authenticity), versus sharing some of our distress with the client (surface authenticity). The two different constructs of authenticity set up a different set of feeling rules, as we discovered in our conversations.

- Taking an instrumental approach to emotions (to be used as valuable information or to be shared in order to cement the relationship with the client) the above authors do not pay attention to the effect on the consultant of dealing with feelings that result from the interaction with the client. The impression I get is one of a heroic individual: aware of her feelings, able to manage them in and after the moment, in a rational fashion and seemingly all by herself. In our conversations, on the contrary, we agreed that the quality of our relationships with colleagues, and the emotional support they offered, was a key factor in the quality of our client work. Some psychoanalytically informed consultants (Bolton and Roberts 1994; Atkins, Kellner et al. 1997) do mention the consultants' need for support, but

mostly suggest individual supervision by an expert, and express doubts about the potential of peer support (Bolton and Roberts o.c.) (see chapter 2).

- As a result of our inquiry some colleagues and I have continued to reflect on the nature of emotion work in our consulting practice. Having a vocabulary to name what is conspicuous by its absence in the consulting literature, as far as we could tell, has helped us to *notice* emotion work, and value it as real work.
  In the midst of our inquiry in ACL, three colleagues and myself were involved in the last, and most difficult phase of our work with Orpheus. All of my colleagues in the team participated in our inquiry. We agreed it had an impact on the attention we brought to the emotion work involved.

I will continue to use the term 'emotion work' in this chapter to describe what I experience as the enactment of 'bounded emotionality' (Mumby and Putnam 1992) (see chapter 2). It involves:

- Being aware of and paying attention to my own feelings as they emerge spontaneously in my interactions with clients and colleagues
- Paying attention to others' feelings
- Being respectful of the emotional constraints of the community I am engaged with and doing what I can to contribute to the flourishing of that community and of myself
- Exercising relational feeling rules (feeling rules which I use to interpret and adapt to organizational contexts and relationships (o.c.))

6.3 Emotion work in my consulting practice with Orpheus

In this section I aim to show you my inquiry into emotion work in the context of working with Orpheus, a difficult and emotionally taxing experience. In the previous chapter I have described the nature of the work and my inquiries, and I have shown you some extracts of my accounts. Here I focus on:

- the emotion work in our engagement with Orpheus
- the emotion work in the consulting team
- the contribution of our emotion work to our resilience and well-being

I have selected extracts from the accounts that illustrate the above, and kept some of the comments from the first drafts of this chapter. The ***Reflections*** date from 2004, and bring a broader perspective on emotions as an intrinsic aspect of consulting work, rather than to focus narrowly on emotion work.

Setting the scene

I would like to remind you briefly of context. Following an engagement with the directors of Orpheus we embarked on a programme for senior managers which consisted of an individual coaching session with every one of the participants, reviewing the outcome of a psychometric assessment, followed by a two day group event, during which we ran 3 sets of 3 simultaneous workshops. The last afternoon was reserved for feeding back some of the participants' learning and the organizational implications to the CEO and some of the directors.

I was client director, leading a team of three colleagues.

As before, I use the original account text, in violet. 'Times Roman' is the font is used for the story line, 'Clearface Gothic light' for reflections and comments, although the distinction with the story may be blurred on occasions.

6.3.1 Orpheus Phase 2

The following extracts are taken from my account of individual feedback sessions with senior managers in phase 2. Each session lasted about 3 hours. I typically reviewed the client's 360° feedback with them, and then put their results in the context of the psychometric instruments we had used.

As I met clients a number of issues arose, which I discussed and reflected on in the account and summarise here:

- One client started our meeting stating he was very busy and doubted this was a good use of his time. He'd had some very negative feedback from colleagues, and appeared completely defended against it. I felt exhausted by the end of our meeting.
- Another client had a bad experience in the past with 360°feedback and "had no

intention to repeat the disaster". Respecting her fear and in the hope of creating a safe enough environment I decided to take an appreciative approach, which according to her feedback, seemed to have the desired effect.

- I felt ambivalent about the value of those one-to-one meetings. I wanted to make a valuable contribution and experienced the necessity of accepting on occasions that I might not be able to do so in this work. Managing that feeling, whilst staying present in the moment one aspect of the emotion work with this client.

The following extract of my meeting with Martine shows some of the emotion work required in the course of the engagement and how literature informed my practice and my reflections

Martine introduced herself as "tough as old boots". I was curious about her reason for doing so within the first minutes of our conversation. What did she need to be tough for? Why tell me? So that I would not fudge the critical feedback? Was she anxious about this meeting?
Under the tough exterior I experienced a warm, caring and sensitive person, and I found myself intrigued by the discrepancy with her description of herself. I mentioned "Storied Lives" (Rosenwald and Ochberg 1992) to her ("I'm just reading this interesting book…"), and the importance the authors put on the stories we tell about ourselves in the formation of our identity. I asked whether she could allow me to hold a different view of her (warm and caring as opposed to hard and tough). A deeply personal conversation ensued, exploring the value that presenting herself as 'tough' might have for her. From our conversation I understood that she had been telling herself she was tough, because it helped her to cope with repeated incidents of sexual harassment by one of her colleagues and that she was letting me know that she was able to cope, thus creating a safe enough space to raise the issue.

Her story reawakened memories of personal experiences and generated anxiety about my responsibility - and its boundaries- in this situation, a need to support her, anger with the perpetrator (Kevin in this account), as well as sadness for him.

The following extracts show

- my personal distress in the moment, and after our meeting (1)
- how I looked after myself seeking support from colleagues in our subsequent team meeting (2)
- how finding a nurturing space with colleagues in itself required emotion work (3)
- my use of conceptual frameworks in my reflections (3).

(1) Meeting Martine

I really struggled in that meeting to contain my feelings. I wanted to support Martine and stay in the moment, rather than being drawn back into personal memories. At the same time I wanted to treat my emotional response as valid, and valuable information about what was happening for Martine. I expressed my sadness and my anger, I hope in a way that indicated my support and understanding. I am glad, with hindsight, that I openly admitted I did not know what to do with this information and asked for the opportunity to talk about it with my colleagues. (…).

It was a difficult situation, and it is still difficult writing about it, weeks later. (…)

At the same time I have been surprised by my ability to hold a certain distance and not worry incessantly about a situation I do not have under control. I experience this as progress. I know that I would have found this more difficult in the past.

(2) The preparatory team meeting

(…)

I raised the issue of Kevin harassing some of his colleagues, as well as my uncertainty about how to deal with Kevin at the event. I struggled somewhat with the reaction from my male colleagues, who invited me "not to get too drawn into this thing". Donald said he could understand my concern for the well-being of our clients, but that I should not let myself be overwhelmed by the memory of my own experiences. It sounded supportive in a 'pull your socks up dear' kind of way. I replied that I believed my own experience was important, because it gave me information about the situation and what it feels like for the people involved. I did not want to be overwhelmed by my memories, but wanted to use them as valid information. Sandra supported me: perhaps there was not much we could do for the

moment, but we should not underestimate or minimise the seriousness of the situation, and its potential effect on me. I felt grateful for her support and said so.

(3)

As I pay more attention to my own needs, I find it easier to stand up for them. Bolton and Roberts (1994) explain that consultants can be affected by the toxins in the client system and need support systems of their own to contain their anxiety and make sense of their experiences. I heard Donald's comment as a hint that I might be taking on some of the anxiety of our client system. I experienced the tone of Donald's comment as somewhat of a 'discount' (in TA terms) of my need for support. I did reflect on his contribution, carefully, before replying and found I could do it calmly and without being defensive. Bohm (1996, p.20) invites us to suspend our assumptions before we react:

> "Normally when you are angry you start to react outwardly, and you may just say something nasty. Now suppose I try to suspend that reaction. Not only will I not insult that person outwardly, but I will suspend the insult that I make *inside* of me. Even if I don't insult somebody outwardly, I am insulting him inside. So I will suspend that too. I hold it back, I reflect it back. You may also think of it as suspended in front of you so that you can look at it - sort of reflected back as if you were in front of a mirror. In this way I can see things that I wouldn't have seen if I had simply carried out that anger, or if I had suppressed it and said: "I'm not angry" or "I shouldn't be angry".

Bohm's invitation to hold an emotion suspended in front of me resonates with my practice of mindfulness (Beck 1989). It does not come easy, but the brief moment of reflecting on what's happening, what's going on for me, the inferences I tend to make (Argyris and Schon 1996), on what I seek to do, helps me to stay resourceful. It is then easier to be more assertive in asking for what I need, and do it in a way that is less likely to invite defensive or aggressive responses from others.

It strikes me – as I mentioned in a previous account (working with a charity) – how I need to cycle through learning again and again. I discovered Argyris' work in the 1990's and was very impressed by it then. I have only now become aware how his writing about defences against learning (Argyris 1991), and his ladder of inference, have strong similarities with what Bohm writes in the context of 'dialogue' and with Torbert's (1991 b p. 223) reflection in action:

> "How to cultivate an ongoing, facilitative, enlightening subsidiary awareness of how one is in action is key to continual quality improvement, both personally and organizationally, and is itself an inquiry and a practice for a lifetime."

Bohm shows what can happen when participants in a dialogue share this reflective approach and are willing to share their assumptions and the outcome of the reflection in the moment with others in order to come to 'dialogue'.

Reflections

- In the meeting with Martine (1) I struggled with different emotions: delight at the connection we established, sadness and anger for her predicament and at remembering my own experiences, confusion, powerlessness, anxiety about not knowing what to do. From Hochschild's perspective (1983), one could say I was 'surface acting', keeping composed whilst being aware I was inwardly shaking. Ashford and colleagues (Ashforth and Tomiuk 2000) might add I acted from a place of deep authenticity (as I was behaving in accordance to my rules of 'myself as consultant'). However, openly sharing with Martine what I was feeling, including my uncertainty about what to do next, seems to me more in line with what Meyerson (2000) has called 'honouring emotions', which she advocates transforms the nature of social interactions. Martine and I did establish a connection in that meeting that lasted well beyond our limited engagement, and which I noted with delight. The difference then, I think, lies in whether emotions are 'managed' instrumentally or relationally (Mumby and Putnam 1992).
- Reflecting on what triggered me to stray from the already full agenda, talking about constructed identities and life stories instead, I realised it was a curiosity triggered by Martine's statement ("tough as old boots") in the first instance, and subsequently by the discrepancy of it with my experience of her. I had a feeling that the statement was important and acted upon my intuition. Fineman (2003) points out that we make decisions on the basis of emotions, rather than vice versa, as is more commonly assumed. Is this perhaps one of the (many) reasons why the application of others' 'consulting recipes' does not work? When I am busy thinking about the model, I forget to notice what I am feeling, and fail to act upon the latter.
- Feminist authors (Miller and Stiver 1997; Meyerson 2000; Hartling 2003) have

pointed out how connections heal. Bringing the issue of harassment to the team meeting was not only a matter of 'agreeing a way forward' for me, but also, and perhaps more importantly so, a means of processing my distress and anxiety, what Bowlby (1989) would call healthy attachment behaviour. I notice that, in response to Donald's well-intended comment, I disappeared that aspect and chose to frame my behaviour in a task orientation instead: "It gives me information…"

The rest of the account describes the two-day event and my reflections on it. It shows in detail the considerable emotion work involved in working with difficult clients, both in the engagement with the client, and in holding the team in a good place. I have tried to select the most salient extracts from the account, which unfortunately does mean that some of the subtlety of the in-the-moment supporting work with colleagues is lost.

The event was a challenging occasions for a number of reasons. I will give a summary of the story before showing some extracts of the account, referenced in brackets.

- I felt the weight of my role as client director, and felt somewhat unsure about what that meant specifically. The extract shows my explicit intention of 'looking after my colleagues' (1)
- Kevin was one of the delegates at the event. I felt uneasy around him and keen to keep an eye on his whereabouts. He took part in my first workshop. In the learning review he was vociferous in explaining he had learned nothing at all. I felt defensive, partly because of the aggressive quality of his feedback, partly because of what I knew about him.
- In the spirit of looking after myself and my team I asked my team members for a quick debrief before lunch on the first day. Everyone, except me, reported a fruitful morning. Donald was not very sympathetic to my predicament (2) and regretted his intervention subsequently. Noticing his worried look subsequently, I approached him, in order to ensure we both felt in a good place (3).
- As the first day progressed, participants were constructing Orpheus as the 'worst possible place to work', and scape-goating absent colleagues. It raised my levels

of anxiety and concern about our ability to contain this group. I was keen to have a good debrief with the consulting team and felt uncomfortable with what I had experienced as a superficial meeting (4).

- After dinner I was accosted by two of the clients. They aggressively challenged me (including organising the physical space so that I couldn't leave without either of them getting up from their chair) about the value of our contribution and the extent to which we were prepared to challenge the executive committee. I held my ground, not getting drawn into a spiral of attack-defence, but at an emotional cost, having a restless night and feeling shaky the next morning (5).
- Two colleagues turned up late for our early morning briefing, leaving very little time for me to compose myself with their support.
- We closed the event with a learning review in the presence of the executive board members.

I concluded the account with a reflection on emotional work (6).

(1) My sense of responsibility as client director

(…) As client director I was responsible for the co-ordination, and therefore - in my mind - for the well being of the team. (…)

I wonder whether colleagues feel a similar sense of responsibility when they take up the role of client director. I know from experience that some of them do, at least in front of clients. On the other hand, I have on at least two occasions, found myself 'looking after' my client director colleague, supporting and encouraging them rather than expecting them to support me, as one of their team members. There are no clear guidelines about the role of client director in ACL. The unwritten rule is the responsibility one carries for the well being of the client(s) and the success of the work. It reminds me of the difficulty I had, as a new member of staff, coping with the external focus of the organization, an appropriate focus, for sure, but sometimes I wonder whether that can be at the cost of looking after one another internally. One's role in the team and the responsibility of caring for colleagues is certainly much vaguer. I am feeling my way through this. It seems important to pay attention to my team members and to how we all felt about working with this client.

(2) An exchange with Donald, reconnecting, and my subsequent reflections

Before we joined the participants for lunch I asked for a short debrief with my team members. I explained my difficult moment with Kevin, acknowledged my concern about my personal bias and asked for support. Donald responded quite briskly that he was concerned we'd get caught in the clients' process: "giving Kevin the power of holding our attention in a negative way". I agreed that I wanted to remain choiceful in my dealings with Kevin (and the situation we found ourselves in). I was not looking for lengthy discussions, I just needed some emotional support and 'a hug'. Donald understood, immediately. He apologised, (no apology needed as far as I was concerned) and we agreed we'd regularly check in with each other, and give the necessary support, whatever that might be for anyone of us.

(3)

I did a quick check-in with Donald in the afternoon, since he seemed preoccupied. He explained he was still feeling bad about his reaction to me before lunch. I was surprised, and pleased I had noticed his unease. I was bearing no grudge whatsoever and thanked him sincerely for pointing out what was a real risk, and for his apology. We talked about the 'emotional labour of consulting' and the importance of having a place with colleagues where we could be sincere. We agreed that we had both learned from the lunch time interaction and from the quick check in.

What I learned from that 'check in':

I had considered the episode closed and was surprised that it had sparked a 'negative self-evaluation off for D., although I might have reacted similarly in his place. D and I have had conversations about how I can judge myself harshly in the past, obviously that didn't stop him from doing the same on occasions.

I learned something about the value of inquiring into minor signals such as a frown, unusual behaviour (quietness in this case) and the importance of timeliness: do it there and then, if at all possible.

(4) Anxious reflections about the quality of our work

I felt tired, deflated, anxious. Resisting the temptation to go to the office and get distracted, I went for a brief walk, in the driving rain, to reflect on how I felt: might there be a connection with how the participants felt? Could we have done better work? Had we fallen into the splitting and projecting (Halton 1994) (not owning our anger and putting it onto the client) that we perceived to be going on in the client system? Could we have used the workshops better to invite participants to reflect on their own behaviour? Why did I seem more concerned than my colleagues? Why was it so difficult for us as a team to reflect together beyond a – for me – superficial level? Was I asking too much from colleagues, after a long and tiring day? Would an appreciative approach have worked better, concentrating on what was going well, rather then on problems? How could I have done that without fudging what I felt were important issues? Did I trust our ability as a team sufficiently to re-engage with the group the next morning, in whatever frame of mind we would find participants? Was I feeling a 'heavier' sense of responsibility as client director?

I needed a change of mental frame: hold my concerns, but don't let them overwhelm me. To re-charge my batteries and went for a quick swim before dinner.

(5) Argy-bargy with two clients and making sense of it all

It was a painful conversation. I was frequently interrupted, Martyn echoing the general drift of Kevin's challenges, with many references to 'the vast sums of money we were paid', and lots of 'pushing' for us to be the voice of this group with the executive team.

I re-stated my position a number of times, trying to convey a sense of understanding of their 'predicament' as well as a confidence that they had what it took to begin to resolve it. Eventually I managed to disentangle myself (having been literally cornered) and retreated for the night, looking forward with some desperation to meeting my team members in the morning.

I could not recall having experienced such a direct 'assault' from clients and felt disoriented by it. Maybe, as Guido said the next morning, I should have warded off Kevin's initial attack and invited him to bring his comments to the plenary meeting the next morning. I know I was concerned not

to get off to a start dominated by Kevin and by a hostile challenge to the team. My most generous interpretation of the interaction was that Kevin was voicing his sense of powerlessness. In that light I felt my response had been appropriate – not mothering, nor condemning, but genuinely offering support for Kevin and Martyn to take the initiative they felt was needed. Again, Bohm had stood me in good stead. Pausing, to surface my emotions and assumptions for myself, had helped me to stay out of what could have been a ping-pong game of blame exchange – I had felt truly disturbed in the course of the day by Robert's contributions and this would have been an opportunity to vent some of my frustration. I think I held my ground well – on the surface. But I know I did it at a cost (Hochschild 1983). I had a restless, fitful night and felt shaky the next morning.

Reflecting on this encounter I have searched some of the psychodynamic literature (Obholzer and Roberts 1994), (Hirschhorn 1999), because I have a sense of a multi-layered interaction in which some unconscious processes were playing a role. Some questions I asked myself were:
What had been projected onto me in the conversation? What/who was I representing for Kevin? Was I being manoeuvred into a 'big sister' role: "You go talk to dad"? Was Kevin aiming to establish a 'covert coalition'? Hirschhorn, (o.c.) explains how 'covert coalitions' control work-induced anxiety through relationships that are most often organised by the paradigms of family life:
"Most frequently these relationships echo the character of family life, but they do not do so arbitrarily or just in accordance with people's own family histories. Rather, people's propensities to take up family roles at work match the group's need to control task-induced anxieties" (p. 64).
Kevin did manage to establish a strong, be it negative connection with me (he is one of the participants I remember most vividly and feel strongest about). Had I, inadvertently, taken on a 'mother/big sister role' as client director? Was Kevin responding to this? I certainly had felt a sense of responsibility for the well-being of both clients and consultants during the day, and, as our brief team review had surfaced, I seemed to hold a stronger concern for this group (and for us consultants) than my colleagues. It may be far fetched (cfr. Guido's experience – Kevin had approached him too – but he had deflected the conversation, would indicate that I may be taking this concern a bridge too far…), but I experience it as an invitation to remain aware of the possibility of this dynamic in future events.

Was this possibly an example of 'splitting' (Halton 1994) ? Was Kevin projecting a sense of inadequacy onto me, so that he could feel good and strong (at least he'd tackled the consulting team)? Quite possibly. I certainly was left with a sense of inadequacy. Was Kevin acting into the role of the 'troublesome individual' (Obholzer and Roberts 1994) unconsciously assigned to him by the organisation? After all, I knew he was also causing trouble at work…

What was the meaning of the continuous challenge about our 'tall fees'? Hirschhorn (1999) gives an interesting example of a client who unexpectedly decides Larry is too expensive. Hirschhorn's interpretation is as follows: he had psychologically belittled the client by underestimating the extent of his concerns. This led the client to devalue his own reality, and in turn the question the amount of money he was prepared to spend on resolving it. Could it be that in my closing remarks I had inadvertently discounted the concern participants had about their organizational reality, which in turn led them to question our fees? I think it possible and it would explain to some extent the vigour and frequency with which the issue was raised. It is also an explanation I prefer to that of a purely mischievous (if not malicious) challenge, intended to unnerve me or make me angry.

This organization spends a considerable annual budget on financial and legal consultants, whose fees are similar to ours. Was there perhaps a message about the comparable value of our kind of work?

Psychodynamic literature helped me to think through this occurrence more deeply. It also made me feel a little better about the whole episode. I have wondered before about the extent to which taking a psychodynamic approach to reflecting may in itself be construed as defence against anxiety?

(6) Reflections on emotion work in consulting

Donald called me on my mobile on my way home to express his appreciation "for the way you have contributed to a generative space for the team, since I know that's the terminology you use in your research. I felt supported and cared for, and I appreciated the way you asked for what you needed, whilst not creating a burden for the team." It was a lovely start to a weekend, after what had been a difficult few days for me.

This client event has been taxing on many levels for me:

Managing my emotional state with the clients, especially around Kevin, who after a very negative and vociferous start, became more of a 'docile child wanting to please teacher' on the second day, a behaviour I found equally challenging to deal with.

Managing my ups and downs with the team, as we failed, in my view, to reflect in depth on our work and as I did on occasions, and didn't on others, get the emotional support I was after.

Whilst looking after myself, noticing how my team members were doing, and trying to create space for them to discuss their needs, as in the conversation with D.

Morris and Feldman (1996) argue that the more the job requires face-to-face interaction, the greater the emotional dissonance (the conflict between genuinely felt emotions and emotions required to be displayed) will be. This proposition implies that, away from the client, workers have more ways to express felt emotion without violating the organizational display norms. I sense that part of the 'hard effort' I needed to exert regarding emotion management was the need to 'manage my emotions' to a certain extent with colleagues – as illustrated by Donald's comments about not getting sucked into the client system. Therefore, the emotional work required of consultants can be increased, as well as decreased by team work.

The authors (o.c.) further claim that job autonomy will be negatively associated with emotional dissonance. In other words employees who have more autonomy over their expressive behaviour may be more likely to violate organizational display rules when those rules conflict with their own genuinely felt emotions. There is no rule book for emotion display in ACL. We are not told how and when to smile. My sense is that that can increase the burden. If I hide my displeasure I chose to do so, and I cannot hide behind the justification for myself that 'I have to'. So my draining experience is self-inflicted, and hence potentially even more distressing.

I found Morris and Feldman's proposition that frequency of emotional display will be positively associated with emotional exhaustion to be true for me. The inability to 'get away' from clients over the two days, especially in the evening, made the event particularly draining. It is something I want to pay attention to in the future, looking after myself by creating opportunities for quiet relaxation, away from the client when I feel the need to do so.

Their proposition that attentiveness to display rules will be positively associated with emotional exhaustion, seemed to be even more true when those rules are not explicit and internalised.

All of this to begins to make some sense of my emotional exhaustion at the end of the event.

I have aimed to show in this section:

- The considerable amount of emotion work involved in our work as consultants
- The burden feeling rules (both internalised and those of colleagues and clients) can generate, and the importance of paying attention to those rules, and on occasions to challenging them (as in my interaction with Donald about 'pulling my socks up')
- The importance of support from colleagues in sustaining myself in this work.
- In conversations with colleagues they too expressed their need for mutual support and recognition. In the short debrief colleagues commented on the value of:
    - My continued attention for checking in with everyone
    - Our conscious decisions around spending time together, rather than succumbing to the usual email and phone call distractions during breaks and hence
    - The opportunity to share stories. Sharing stories about successful work was felt to be equally important and valuable as sharing distress and anxiety.

My colleagues told me that those moments of shared reflection and my checking in regularly generated a sense of cohesion, of being in this together, not an obvious outcome of an event in which we were continually working with separate groups of clients.

Reflections

- In my repeated and extended reflection on the role of client director, I continually return to responsibility I feel for the well-being of my team members. Unawares, I was articulating an aspect of what Fletcher (Fletcher 1999) has called relational practice, and which is the subject of the next chapter in this thesis. It is not a part of the director role that all my colleagues would identify with, nor is it part of the current description of the role. I feel ambivalent about the latter. I see 'looking after the team' as an important aspect, and believe it would be worthwhile to recognise that more formally, to avoid it being disappeared. On the other hand, I

do not think prescribing a relational approach is the answer. Ongoing inquiring conversations about the nature of the role, and the impact both on the team's well-being and on the task, of a relational approach, might begin to acknowledge the nurturing as real work, and generate interesting thoughts about how to work well with individuals' style differences in the role.

- I have wondered to what extent Extroversion, as described by Myers and Briggs (1995), may influence individual differences in relational behaviour. According to the authors' research, seeking the presence of others is a natural stress response for people with an Extroversion preference. Introverted individuals, on the other hand, seek to withdraw. I do not doubt the importance of gendered socialisation patterns, but an awareness of individual preferences and the willingness to work with them, is an important aspect I think of what I have described as emotion work earlier in this chapter (also (Mumby and Putnam 1992)). That includes accommodating differences in need for and display of connecting behaviour.
- Marshall (1989) warns that communion (seeking contact, openness – further developed in the next chapter) may lead to lack of boundaries. I was struck by the ease with which Guido managed to avoid being drawn into a conversation with the clients on the first evening. I might have been wise to extract myself assertively too. At the same time I was aware of the potential disruption these two clients might cause in the course of the evening or the next morning, and my decision was at least as much informed by that concern as by a potential lack of assertion. I was 'going the extra mile' (Fletcher 1999) as it were, for the well-being of the project. Nevertheless the incident does surface the difficulty of finding a good balance between concern for the task and for others (the team and the participants) and taking care of oneself.
- I repeatedly asked questions about our ability to do this work well, somewhat to the surprise of my colleagues. During a conversation in August 2004, Sandra agreed we had been stretched to our limits. In the previous work with Orpheus I had in fact sought help from an experienced colleague, against the wish of one of the team members. I resistance I encountered was articulated in terms of 'an opportunity for us to develop' and 'not underestimating our and your ability'. Seeking help does not fit comfortably in the prevailing emphasis on autonomy and self-reliance in organisations (Fletcher 1998), and yet it can offer opportunities for

growth for all involved (Fletcher, o.c.). Deciding when to do so, especially against the team's wish, is not easy in my experience.

6.3.2 Orpheus Phase 3

In March 2002 we ran this programme for the next cohort of senior managers. It was, if anything, more taxing than any of the previous work we had done with this client. On this occasion we had a difficult issue to resolve in the consulting team, I had a difficult first morning at the event, and two of my colleagues were subjected to what I can only call abuse from some of the clients in their workshop on "Emotional Intelligence". It was an opportunity to explore the importance of nurturing relationships in the consulting team.

I will set the scene briefly and chose a few extracts from a very long and in depth account to illustrate the emotional work we engaged in to stay in a resourceful state as consultants and to work well with our clients.

Setting the scene

- Many of the clients involved in the next phase of the development programme were from the finance department, which was perceived by their colleagues as aggressive and source of much dissatisfaction around the organization.
- In my one-to-one reviews I had met some of the finance people. Although some of the meetings had been challenging, I had found myself warming to the individuals I had met and thought I had a more balanced picture of their role in the organization and the pressure they experienced. Later I discovered that they were under the impression that the consulting team was siding with the rest of the organization in apportioning much of the organization's distress to them.
- In the run up to the event we had a conflict in the consulting team around Guido, who wanted to meet another client during the first morning of the Orpheus event. An email exchange had ensued, initiated by Guido. Guido and Donald had had a difficult conversation, which had left Donald feeling quite bruised. I was keen to resolve the issue in our team meeting, so that we could work well together in what promised to be a difficult two-day event. I reflected on my handling of the

situation with my mentor, and had some tough feedback on my "flabby leadership" from him as a result.

- During the event Guido and Sandra came under a sustained assault during their workshop. Donald and I did our best to help them recover and we came through it stronger and more cohesive as a team.
- On the evening of the first day, our clients, in defiance of the invitation from the HR department, bought an exorbitant amount of the most expensive wines and generally behaved very badly.
- The second day went remarkably smoothly, considering. I discovered later that some of the participants had received some tough feedback from their colleagues on the previous evening and had been asked not to get in the way of others' learning.
- Participants were really engaged in the debrief with the board members on the second day, and willing to take some risk in voicing some critical views.

The occasion was an opportunity to learn about the value of supportive colleagues, as well as about organizations in distress. We came through this unscathed as a team. In our subsequent conversations we have reflected on the extent to which the mutual support and encouragement, and unconditional positive regard, helped us to continue to work well with this client and to grow as consultants.

In extracts from the account I share the following:

- The emotion work that went into resolving the issue about Guido attending another client meeting, and my reflections following our confrontation (1).
- The way in which we supported Sandra and Guido after their workshop and paid careful attention to our needs as a team (2)

Again, selecting small extracts from my account 'disappears' the many informal conversations, emails, and small gestures of support and encouragement that I believe are such a vital part of looking after each other in the team. I hope the chosen extracts give a flavour of that care nevertheless.

(1) Facing the conflict with Guido

In the account I described

- our process of checking in and sharing our impression that this would be difficult group to work with
- Donald explaining to Guido he still felt bruised from their conversation
- Guido stating that he considered the incident closed and was keen to get on with the agenda of the meeting
- My own repeated attempts to explain to Guido that I too was upset by his behaviour and wanted to address it

(…)

Eventually I asked Guido to look at me (he was sitting beside me, looking at Donald) and said: "Guido, I felt personally insulted by your email. I am not talking about Donald here, I am talking about myself. You tell us you don't hold it against Donald that he sent an email which you considered inappropriate, I want you to hear that I considered *your* email inappropriate and that I felt angry about it."

I got a response this time: "If that how you see it then we must talk this through". Guido could not see why I was upset and felt wronged by the tone of his email. I explained: "We are trying to accommodate you on this. I asked you to *speak* to us, you emailed instead and then get angry for Donald replying by email too. In your email you tell us that we're rigid, that we need to take a broader perspective - as you do - and that you don't need a tutorial. I felt I was given a lecture in your email, and one that was not appropriate."

I remember how I felt. It was hard to stay calm. I wanted to resolve the issue, not escalate it, but in the spirit of taking care of the team and myself I needed Guido to understand my feelings about the situation. (…)

Guido replied that I should have made the decision (whether he could attend a meeting with a different client) in the first place. If I had exerted appropriate leadership none of this mess would have happened. I was speechless and remained

silent as I thought about how to respond. In the end I asked Sandra and Donald for feedback: did they think Guido might have a point here? They didn't. They had throughout our work together, appreciated what they experienced as my 'distributed leadership'. They had felt responsible, engaged and involved in the decision making. This issue was no different. I said a heartfelt thank you and asked Guido if he maintained his view. He did… I asked for time to think. Eventually I said we'd have to accept our different views. I stated that my intention had been good, but perhaps it hadn't delivered the goods. I would reflect further on my leadership or lack thereof. I had heard Guido's frustration and thought he was now aware of mine. I asked what everyone needed for us to move on? We all wanted a short break.

Guido's reply to me, when it eventually came, made me feel more angry than I can remember feeling for a long time. Blood rushed to my head. We had been through a lot together in the past, with our disagreements, but this felt like a personal attack. I tried "suspend my feeling in front of me, so that I could have a look at it" (Bohm 1996, p.20), and wondered whether he had a point. I had not wanted to take the decision for the rest of the team. It was not in line with how we'd worked together before. It was a moment of truth. I had tried to lead in an inclusive way, how did others experience my approach? Hence my question to Sandra and Donald.

The incident has been a source of further reflection with colleagues. When I discussed it in my Action Learning set it raised interesting questions, beyond the immediate topic, such as:

- Can a member of the leadership team override the decision of a client director? (Something that had occurred in recent weeks)
- What is principled behaviour here?
- To what extent do our work patterns (every consultant being a member of a number of different teams) lead to these conflicts between different client engagements?
- Are there exceptions to the rule that a prior client engagement always takes priority? What would the nature of those exceptions be?

It also led to cycles of inquiry with my mentor about my leadership of consulting

teams.(…)

We agreed in the team, during and after the client work, that working through the conflict had been invaluable for our ability to work well together, and for our personal well-being.

Reflections

- According to Fedele (1993) an essential relational component for groups is the need for discussion of disconnection in the group. Discussing the feelings of disconnection paradoxically leads to new connection, she states, and can help group members to work with and accept a range of feelings. Fedele's research concerns women's groups, but I have noticed the same pattern in mixed gender groups, in client groups, and in ACL. Guido was at risk of becoming disconnected from the team. His reluctance to engage with the issue during the meeting caused me to voice my anger with him more forcefully than I had bargained for. Ultimately the discussion led to a greater cohesion of the team.
- I took Guido's challenge of my leadership style to heart, and found especially the conversations with my mentor challenging. He saw a potential paradox: whilst aspiring to a distributed leadership style, I was at risk of being overly 'parental, mothering' he argued. At the time (2002-2003) I agreed with him. Recently I have come to think of my aspired leadership style as relational, in which paying attention to the well-being of my team members and myself is a core activity, a purposeful strategy and 'real work' (Fletcher 1999).

(2) Guido and Sandra in need of support

(On the evening of the first day of the workshop)

As people filed out of the room I called the team together: "Would you like to talk about your afternoon?" Everyone was keen.

The room was quiet, with a beautiful view over the gardens and a setting sun. It felt peaceful, and somehow right to be surrounded by some of the thoughts people had pinned on the board, without having the people actually in the room. We decided to stay in the room and share a bottle of wine.

Guido and Sandra looked pale and exhausted. " Tell us what happened" I invited. "I

have never been subjected to such aggression in my life before" Sandra simply stated. Guido shook his head and said "Oh man". Silence. We stayed quietly together for a while. Then the story started to emerge, incoherently. People had contradicted everything Guido and Sandra said, challenged aggressively, questioned their knowledge and competence, asked for definitions of 'intelligence' of 'emotion' etc., raised their voices… It is difficult to describe the picture that emerged. Eventually Guido had said emotional intelligence was about being aware of your feelings and finding respectful ways of working with them (or words to that effect, it sounded reasonable enough) and had stated how he was feeling disturbed by the group's behaviour. Another abusive outburst. (…)

We compared patterns in the small group with what we had heard happened in Orpheus' stakeholder meetings. Eventually Donald, anxious to get some closure before he had to go, pointed out that we were spending much time speculating about what was going on in the client organization, and not quite getting round to thinking about what our needs were now. I think the three of us who'd had a hard time needed to talk it out of our system some more, but there was value in being clear that's what we were doing. Donald volunteered to stay with us, but we urged him to go home to his daughter. That seemed important too.

We all wanted a hug. And we needed some time to ourselves.

I felt protective of my colleagues and angry, and told them I felt "How dare they do that to my colleagues". Guido and Sandra were surprised, laughed and said it felt good to hear that.

We agreed not to join the clients for drinks in the bar, to sit together over dinner, and avoid talking business. (…)

It was hard to make sense of what had happened but our main interpretation was: "we've witnessed a parallel process (Krantz and Gilmore 1991), people have shown us what goes on in the organization". It did not necessarily help with finding ways of dealing with it.

[Nor did Richard Seel's advice (2001), which I dug out for this round of reflection: "Act to break the pattern; Pay particular attention to yourself; Avoid making life too easy for the group: … some difficulties encountered are important for growth too ". I think we did most of that, it didn't seem to make much difference.]

Writing this chapter, re-reading the account, I become aware that my accounts were also a way to connect with my CARPP group. CARPP, in its various configurations, has been a source of support and encouragement. In fact, in the middle of the above account I comment on the fact that my CARPP colleagues have supported me unconditionally over all those years, both in my work and in my research, and that every person ought to have recourse to such unconditional support in their life.

Another metaphor was that of 'adolescents rebelling against parents'. If that's how we had been constructed it felt important to us not to resort to 'Critical Parent' (Stewart and Joines 1987) behaviour, i.e. not to penalise or become overly controlling, but to try and respond as wisely as we could.
I noticed that I'd been upset by my experience in the morning but was positively angry about what had happened in the afternoon. If clients had not projected a 'Parent role' onto me, I was quickly constructing one for myself. I felt protective of my colleagues. It felt important to share that with them. At the same time I did not want to diminish their sense of autonomy. I think that, for a brief moment, we were at risk of constructing our clients as 'the enemy against which we were united' (basic assumption Fight-Flight (Bion 1959)), an inappropriate response but a good momentary antidote to rising feelings of 'inadequate parenthood'. In the end our conversation about 'how can we best contain this, create a space that's safe enough, where some people can still learn', seemed grown up and appropriate.

Group hugs often make me cringe, but the physical contact with my colleagues, as we put our arms around each other, was no empty gesture. We stood quite still for a little while and I felt held in that moment. It was richer and more powerful than any further words could have been. I am reminded of the sea in my Golden Gate bridge picture, its power that's different from the rigid steel structure of the bridge, its flow, its soothing sound.

In the account I further discuss my aspiration to continue to develop my awareness in the moment and my ability to contain my emotions. I comment on the extent to which the support of my colleagues helped me to do that, and on the value of writing reflective accounts for that purpose.

I do not have much to add which I have not articulated already in earlier reflections, except perhaps that the work with this client, the reflective process with colleagues, and my first person inquiry diary writing, were an important contribution to my curiosity about, and subsequent inquiry into the importance of a relational base with colleagues for my consulting practice. In the next chapter I explore the importance of that base, in the light of relational theory, and begin to address questions of the possibility of working relationally with clients.