

Appendices

Appendix 1

The article on the next two pages is based on a reflective account of my work with Strategic Solutions Partnership. I have referred to it in Chapter 1 “Living life as inquiry. An aspiration”, and in Chapter 5 “Inquiring into my work with clients”.

Two days in the life

The following story is about how Kathleen King engaged over two days with the Scottish office of a firm of lawyers. It is based on her reflective diary – a faithful companion on her travels around organisations.

The evening before

Well, here I am on a dark Sunday evening in Edinburgh. It's blowing a gale out there and the draught in my damp hotel room doesn't do anything for my mood or my confidence. "Lonely business, consulting," I mutter, as I install myself next to the radiator with my notes about tomorrow's engagement. I have been asked by the managing partner of Strategic Solutions Partnership, a law firm, to do some work with staff in the new Edinburgh office. This office was started by two bright, senior people, supported by some junior lawyers and an administrator, and the support of head office. Growing very rapidly, the office now numbers over twenty people. There are the usual teething problems: as larger and more complex projects are won (due to the international reputation of the Partnership) resources have become over-stretched and there have been some concerns about the quality of service on some of the projects. The management of the office is a source of some conflict. The two most senior people in the office have been vying for position power ever since Paul was appointed to Head of Administration, and Mary to the post of Director. The appointments have generated considerable confusion for staff and clients alike. My initial brief was to help people review the current management structure and responsibilities. Two weeks before I was due to go to Edinburgh Paul announced his resignation. My brief now is to help people find a new arrangement after Paul has left.

I have not met, nor spoken yet, to any of the people in the office, but I have a sense, from my conversations with the Managing Partner, of conflict and bad feeling as well as enthusiasm for the work, care about the clients and a willingness to make it work.

I have asked for meetings to be organised with all staff, individually with senior managers, and a focus group with junior staff in the office. I work my way through

my copious notes and try to memorise 'who's who'. It's as much as I can do for now.

It will be a busy schedule and I retire early to be in good shape. I close the day on a note of anticipation.

"Monday, Monday, so good to me"

I arrive in the office, chilled to the bone. I introduce myself to the people who are around at this early hour and go hunting for coffee making facilities before I settle down for my first conversation.

.....By 6.30 pm I have met six people: five senior lawyers and the senior administrator. I've been locked in a basement room for most of the day and have a head like a pumpkin.

I have spent most of the day listening carefully, trying to get a feel for the organisational reality as experienced by the people I have met and noticing the patterns that emerge. Most 'interviewees' seemed to think I was there because of Paul's resignation. "A kind of bereavement councillor," as one client put it. Not quite what I had in mind, but a better start, I thought, than the commonly held view of "the expert who comes to diagnose our problem and will tell us how to solve it". I framed my purpose along the following lines: "I'm here to explore the hopes and concerns you have about the current situation and the future, and to help you find solutions." I explained that I would feed back the information arising from my conversations, respecting individuals' confidentiality, to a meeting with senior staff, and asked for permission to take notes.

Well, here I am, glancing over my scribbles. Lots of food for thought and emerging patterns. I remind myself of the people behind the words and the flow of our conversation. Paul and Mary each embarked on their version of 'the good news show'. I sat, listened, affirmed and wondered "where do we go from here?" When I thought the moment was right I hinted that I was aware of a shadow side to their story: "I understand that the structure that was put in place was not always easy to operate within?"

I remember the effect of my question: a change in presence – from upright and matter of fact to shifty at first, then relaxing and subsequently fully engaging into a genuine conversation about the struggles each of them had experienced and their own part in the problems that had arisen.

Others had talked about feeling caught in the power struggle between Paul and Mary, not being allowed to contribute to the thinking about the future of the office, thriving on challenge but feeling constrained.

Many of the reflective notes, exploring the nature and as they are confidential. Changes have also been made

of a consultant

As ever, interpersonal dynamics featured prominently. The administrator was a gem: being on the periphery of the agro between lawyers, she brought a thoughtful perspective and I immediately warmed to her.

My mind is wandering to tomorrow afternoon: how can I create (or at least contribute to) a safe enough space for people to talk to each other, rather than to me, about what is really going on for them?

Off to dinner with the managing partner (Brian), the senior partner with responsibility for Scotland (Keith) and Mary. The day's not over yet! I refrain from anything more than general comments for the sake of confidentiality of the people I met today, too small in number not to be too easily identified, and focus on appreciating the commitment and eagerness of everyone to make this office really work. Much of this they know already, but they seem to value hearing it from somebody outside the firm.

I fall into bed, bone tired, but excited and full of hope that together we'll find a way forward.

Tuesday 8 am

I find a group of young lawyers huddled around the kitchen. Damian immediately approaches me: "Well, when do I get to talk to you?" Now, this is a promising start. "Right now," I say as I shake hands. We all huddle in the small meeting room, ten junior lawyers and myself. They're not backward in coming forward this group. I have trouble making sure everyone gets a chance to speak. Similar themes arise from my conversations of the previous day. But as I glance around the group I sense something troubling remains unspoken. I tell them that, but add that if my impression is correct, they are under no obligation to share it with me. Silence and meaningful glances around the room. I wait for what seems an eternity. Then Damian speaks up "Chris is a bully, we're terrified of him and we'd love it if he left." Well, that scenario is not likely, considering his level of seniority and expertise – despite the fact that relationships are taken very seriously indeed in this organisation. We talk about the nature of bullying, what exactly Chris does, why that is scary, whether it's likely that Chris will change or leave, to arrive at the fact that they may not be able to change Chris, but they can change how they respond to him. "Would you be interested in trying out different ways to relate to Chris?" I ask. They're up for it and I find myself promoted to Chris, looking stern and raising my voice as I tell Frances to stop wasting my time... We have a few rounds of this role playing, as different lawyers find their voice and their confidence in the face of increasingly threatening language from

me. Much banter and laughter follows as tension is released. By the end of the morning I consider myself in the best job in the world.

Lunch on the run. I do get out of the office, but it's the briefest of breaks, as I want to put some thoughts on a flipchart before the afternoon meeting.

They all arrive promptly: Brian and Keith, joined by the rest of the senior team. This meeting room is becoming a hot house. Brian sets the scene: "We're here to help, we expect you (the group, not me) to tell us how we can best do that".

I produce my diagram of the patterns in the office as I see them, and the challenges at different points. I explain that this is only the meaning I have made of the conversations I've had and is intended as a starting point of a further conversation. I am hoping that they will take up the baton and when they seem reluctant to do so I disappear off to the kitchen to make tea for everyone. By the time I come back Lindsey is at the flipchart redrawing my diagram. Everyone is engaged and she has trouble keeping up with suggestions. They enjoy showing how they understand the issues better than I do, and I love every minute of it. The rest of my task is to avoid the group slipping into quick fixes and fully exploring underlying patterns before going into solution mode: and of course, to make sure that everyone is heard. It's concentrated work, but often I only need to point out that we're prematurely closing down the conversation to get us back on track.

By the end of the afternoon new responsibilities have been assigned – a new regime with a much more distributed leadership, plans have been made for follow through and process reviews, and Mary has asked for a coach to help her develop a stewardship approach to leading the office.

The office is celebrating its establishment in Edinburgh that evening. It's a big do with lots of clients and lawyers from around the country. I leave my clients to their celebrations. Many warm handshakes and the occasional hug. "You know, I don't mean to devalue your contribution" says Lindsey, "but I think we just needed someone from outside the organisation to listen and help us talk things through together". I smile, "Not more, not less" I think, as I get into a taxi that will take me into the great traffic jam that is Edinburgh rush hour.

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*Impact of her interventions have been removed,
 to guard the confidentiality of her client.*

Appendix 2

The Rough Guide to ACL

(with grateful acknowledgements to the rough guide to Alaska and the rough guide to Kenya from which the following has been freely adapted and plagiarised)

Preface

This guide is the product of several weeks intensive travelling in and around ACL. During an afternoon swapping stories about their travels, the authors were moved to write a guide that would convey both their tremendous affection for ACL and something about the quite unique travelling experience it offers. They hope that it will be a good read for experienced travellers and for those new to the territory. Such guides can quickly become out of date, so updates, tips and suggestions are most welcome, and will be included in future editions.

A few words about the authors, Tony, Paula, Leonardo, Poppy and Lara. All of them have chosen to make their homes in ACL, unable to resist its many charms and idiosyncrasies. Tony first visited the country in 1997 and after returning for frequent visits eventually settled in February. After hearing about ACL from a friend, Paula was sufficiently intrigued to want to explore the woodland paradise herself. She emigrated in March. Poppy had been looking for that 'somewhere else' to settle. She found herself visiting several enclosures which seemed full of doom. Then she stumbled across this unique environment and was seduced by the tantalising temptation of possibility that emanated from it. Although she was the last of this group of authors to discover this place she was the first to hang up her backpack and call it home. Lara bravely overcame her acute born-again-public-transport-user mania and is now a regular pilgrim to the sanctuary of ACL. Leonardo is an Italian traveller who enjoys the pleasure of life and a bit less the burden of it.... With a bunch of biscuits, strawberry cakes and chocolate tart you can easily buy his soul!

Introduction

ACL is a small principality that came into being about 15 years ago after seceding from Ashridge. Located in a previously rather run down part of Ashridge, its slightly shabby down at heel ambience contrasts with the polished wood and country house feel of its parent. As a principality, it still seems to be the San Marino of Hertfordshire, but its leaders aspire to it playing Bhutan to Ashridge's Nepal – mystical, mountainous and raved about by the few who are privileged to gain access to its rarefied atmosphere, secrets and wonders. Many who go there claim it has changed their lives – so what exactly lies at the heart of this most spiritual of consulting firms?

Getting there

Transport to ACL is through Ashridge. It is irregular, and it is certainly easier if you have your own car. There is an irregular bus service from Berkhamsted station, but it does not connect with the trains. This can be frustrating, as there are few taxis. You can try hitching a lift from a friendly local outside the station, but be prepared to listen to tales of woe about local politics on the journey. You will have to make the geographically short but philosophically long trek from Ashridge into ACL – do watch out for hostile management tribes in the corridor who occasionally accost the trekkers.

Working: visas and red tape

It is often easier to get to ACL if you have a personal connection. Short-term visitor visas are relatively easy to get (check special offers in the national press). You may be able to use a fixer – there is a particularly helpful company trading in lemons in London's West End that seems to know the system pretty well.

Once you have arrived it is very difficult to get a work permit, particularly in the current climate of high unemployment. Several interviews are required. Even after securing your visa it may be difficult to get billable hours. You will normally have to have been resident for six months before securing any work. Most employers will seek evidence that you are of good character (usually via the grapevine) before making a rather informal offer of a temporary appointment. If this goes well, you might

be offered ongoing work. Hanging around in offices is a good way to find out how the job market is going and doing volunteer work can also be a good route in.

Begging

This is an element of life at Ashridge that new arrivals often find disturbing. Newer consultants wander the corridors in search of shadowing opportunities. Most are visibly destitute, with only the shabby rags of their previous employment preserving their modesty and self-esteem. Some have regular pitches and others stay on the move. They can be extremely persistent in their demands and do not give up easily. If you are accosted, try frightening them away by showing them an invitation to tender – this usually works. The begging rituals are an important part of the initiation into full consultanthood, and novices will be required to endure the process for a few months before they are permitted to participate fully in ACL life.

Time zones

Ashridge is 20-25 minutes behind local British time, ACL often a few minutes behind that.

On our first visit we were reminded of a famous quote about Arabic being a language in which there is no word conveying the urgency of the Spanish ‘manana’. Much the same is true of ACL. Try not to get frustrated organising meetings – they will eventually happen if there is ‘energy’ for them (see phrase book below)

Festivals

There are a number of interesting and unusual festivals. We have not been privileged to attend the much-talked about development week. However lesser festivals such as the twice-yearly strategy days are events that bring an often fragmented and itinerant community together. Traditionally the spring festival is a time for review of the past years history, and an opportunity to add to the rich oral tradition. The celebrations in September are more Bacchanalian and may be more fun for the first time visitor, especially one who has little grasp of the language.

Things to do

One of the most popular activities is shadowing, a kind of safari in which new arrivals seek to view some of the exciting client wildlife in its natural habitat. Every year visitors arrive expecting to see herds of animals in the wild, exhibiting interesting behaviours. They go away disappointed. More interesting clients have been shadowed into near extinction, but you may have luck seeing some smaller and apparently less appealing ones. The family firm for instance can easily offer days of intrigue, violence and entertainment. You may even be lucky enough to see some firms during mating rituals (most of them however do eventually eat their partners so this is not for the squeamish). Consultants usually go on safari in pairs to protect each other from marauding clients. IT companies can be particularly dangerous, and we would counsel visitors not to approach them unless accompanied by an expert.

What to take.

You can avoid looking like a tourist by having your things in a large backpack or soft bag. Briefcases will mark you out as suspicious.

Many people arrive with a lot of personal baggage, but find that with time they are able to shed some of this and travel light. Do try to leave all your assumptions behind – having them stripped from you can be unpleasant and you may find it hard to get back those that you are particularly attached to. It is actually illegal to arrive at ACL carrying any class A management theory, any n-step models for change or books by Peters and Waterman.

Dress

Rules about clothing are complex and subtle. Many new arrivals find they have to purchase a completely new wardrobe to fit in. In general men should wear chinos until they are well integrated after which jeans can be worn to display increased status and self-assurance. Either jeans or chinos should be worn. Shirts should have collars. Pastel colours or check will let you mingle unnoticed. Ties are worn only on special occasions – you risk facing serious challenge if you are found to be wearing a tie on a day when there is no client meeting in your diary.

For women, dress is less rigidly coded. Suits are still frowned upon (especially those with shoulder pads or other symbols of aggression/authority). Legs should generally be hidden from view.

Unseemly behaviour

Avoid introducing agendas at meetings, clarifying objectives and asking for or giving instructions. Using the phrases ‘change management’, ‘activity based costing’, ‘business process reengineering’ or ‘management by objectives’ can result in your being ostracised. Never take fruit from the Wyatt room, or attempt to eat lunch before 1315, and don’t urinate in public.

Crime

You will know that you are being mugged when you find yourself writing proposals for clients you haven’t met to do work you’ve never done before. Don’t resist – knives and guns are sometimes used. Try to avoid dimly lit areas of client work and stay well away from those you suspect might be armed with invitations to tender.

Politics and the tribal system

Despite the modernisation of their lifestyles and the rapid advances of communications into what has been a remote region of the world, native ACLers still cling to their culture and traditional ceremonies. In recent years there has even been a movement to resurrect native languages before they are forever lost with the few elders that still speak them.

There are a number of local tribes, and distinctions between them can be hard to uncover. There are frequent crossings over between tribes, and occasionally disagreements between them can boil over into heated disputes. During some of the historic battles, parts of the territory were heavily mined. These areas are often not well marked, so it is sensible not to stray off marked paths in unfamiliar areas.

Language

ACL is remarkably close to English. But care is needed with some of the local patois, which can seem incomprehensible to outsiders. Ill-judged or inappropriate use of lo-

cal dialect can easily cause offence, so we offer here a few examples of the more common phrases that you may encounter together with a translation into English.

I don't have a lot of energy for this	A phrase with many meanings. Often used as a way of politely saying 'I can't be arsed to do this' or 'no'
What is this in service of?	What the hell are you doing?
He's very ISTJ	A complex system of classifying people according to their personality type, can be used to justifying finding someone difficult to work with
Let's look at the process	Either means 'I am bored with what you are suggesting or !I haven't been listening so let's change the subject'
Have you spoken to Sandy?	It will never happen
Client	A rare and protected animal crucial to the local economy
I'd like to challenge that	You're talking crap
Let's put a date in the diary	Let's postpone this indefinitely
My sense is	Can't you see that...
Are you around later?	Go away, I'm busy
Let's see what emerges	Let's let sleeping dogs lie
Engage with the system	Find someone who'll talk to us
Take an iterative approach	Make it up as we go along

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Appendix 3

The outcome of a review of our mentoring process, which was sent to the ACL community. I have used the same pseudonyms for colleagues as I have used in my accounts and you may recognize some of the 'usual suspects'.

Outputs from ACL Development day on mentoring

Antoine, Alicia, Paul, Catherine, Kathleen, Juliette,
Martine, Roger, Sandra

17 July 2003

Please talk to any of us if you are interested in finding out more
about our conversations!

The role of the Mentor at ACL



Getting even better at Mentoring

All mentees to re-contract with their mentors on the basis of our new understanding

Leadership team to meet with all mentors to discuss how to take mentoring forward in ACL – 2 days

Supervision (e.g. in Charlotte's sessions)
-> part of the mentor's job

People unable to sort their relationship with their mentor can talk to Kathleen or Catherine

360 degree feedback for mentors and mentees

Ongoing review of the quality of the mentoring relationship to be an explicit part of the contract

We - who have been involved in this conversation – talk to people around the place about our ideas

Coaching Skills development for all mentors

In the case of the collapse of the mentoring relationship either party to seek counsel from a member of the Leadership Team

1 Prepare our ideas as a proposal
2 Share it in the Sept LT
3 Share it with all in Sept (Mon meetings)
4 Conclude at next Strategy day

New Joiner checklist (Attached)

Healing and closure when there is hurt around

New Joiners checklist for mentors

- **Before your mentee's arrival (after they have signed the contract)**
 - stay in regular contact by email and phone
 - work on and agree a bionote and ensure it is added to the system
 - ensure their name is added to new tenders or to existing teams so that they have some work they can be involved in very soon after their arrival
 - Keep them updated with ACL news (e.g. forward Directions etc.)
 - Add their name to the circulation list (another way for them to become aware of what is going on in the ACL community)
 - Agree an induction process: set up meetings with colleagues around Ashridge, including facilities inductions
 - Support the procurement of equipment and ensure a session with Dave is planned to help them get accustomed to our systems
 - Explain that this arrangement is temporary, you are the person's joining mentor and would be very happy for them to choose someone new after 3 months.
- **Upon arrival**
 - Introduce them to as many people as you can (not forgetting associates)
 - try to work with them as soon as you can
 - meet once a week, if possible, or at least agree a time to call every week and stay in touch by email
 - take time for quiet reflection in your mentoring meetings (walks in the garden can be a treat)
 - expect your mentee to be in need of nurturing support and give it generously.
 - be an advocate for your mentee (e.g. in conversations with colleagues and with members of the leadership team)

note: some of this is about a spirit of valuing and welcoming a person wholeheartedly and may be hard to pin down in mechanics. Making sure you are there for them, and letting them know you are delighted with their presence seems truly important.