

## General Principles and Mindset for running session at other people's conferences

*This paper is a short exposition of the principles and ideas I have developed around running what are in effect psychodrama outreach or marketing groups for conferences and groups where said conferences and groups generally have little to do with psychodrama in any direct fashion or where I am not a specialist. At the end of this exposition I include two recent abstracts that I prepared and were accepted for conferences. Please consider responding to me with your own experiences so that we can build up a resource for people considering doing this kind of work.*

### **Things in common**

What ever the conference group, be it doctors, lawyers, scientists, therapists or others the first thing to do is to have a tentative go at role reversing with the kinds of things these people do and the kinds of dilemmas they face and the kinds of workshops that they might find useful. Remembering when you do this that pretty much all professional groups have some things in common. When I highlight an example I also put a suggested area that many ANZPA members could focus on that would be of value for this group. The overlap areas are by and large:

1. They work with other human beings (understanding humans)
2. They work with other sub groups (understanding groups and group dynamics)
3. They are part of a larger environment (understanding group interactions)
4. The individuals work with bosses (leading upwards) or
5. The individuals work with subordinates (leading generally)
6. They have some other group that can be considered as clients (being client focused)
7. They have to be organised in some form or other and especially around how the people are organised (understanding people)
8. They have emotional responses to all of the above including avoidance, anxiety and the choosing of restrictive solutions.

What this means is that these are areas in most people's professional lives where a psychodramatist, sociodramatist, sociometrist or role trainer can offer real help and guidance. Understanding people is core to our training and practice. It is not the same for other professionals.

### **What this means**

There are probably other things in common and they are all to do with professional groups being full of people who work with people. Generally speaking people who work with other people don't understand those other people or at its most positive there are gaps in their understanding of other people. Most professional's training is related to the technology of their craft. Engineers, for instance, on average are in a supervisory relationship in 70% of their first jobs, yet get no or at best minimal training for supervising people. Their previous experience is being supervised academically. For instance:

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- Some doctors can't understand why clients get angry with them for being straight up and down and unemotional (role reversal with clients)
- Some social workers can't understand why their clients don't take their advice (role reversal with clients)
- Some scientists can't understand why government doesn't take them seriously enough (sociodrama with role reversal into government roles)
- Some professional groups are scared of their clients such as self harming or schizophrenic (role reversal with clients)
- All professional groups have problems dealing with "difficult staff" on a personal as well as professional level.

There seems to be a lot of "role reversal with clients" as a possible workshop process. For instance a workshop session called "Dealing with difficult clients" would fit many professional conference groups.

### **Getting the thinking going to prepare a session proposal**

Some professional groups, of course, espouse an element of role reversal called empathy; psychologists, counsellors, therapists, psychotherapists. For those professional groups utilising the powerful learning that is to be gained from employing role reversal in the service of getting to know our clients better, seems very straightforward to me.

Packaging this so that it is attractive to the target audience is another step in the process. And this is where your role reversing with the client group generally will assist. If you need some ideas, see if there is someone you know in the professional group and ask them for some advice about what would be of value in the 'understanding humans' area.

A good example of the kind of thinking required can be illustrated from a colleague who trained as an opera singer, sang in many prestigious ensembles and now is an organisational consultant teaching and training people in how to use their voice. She asked us all "Who here thinks of themselves as a voice professional?" Of course none of us said, "yes" at this point. She then asked, "Who here uses their voice as part of their work. Who here uses the voice as the main way to communicate with others?" Everyone in the room said "Yes!" She continued, "You are all voice professionals" and then proceeded to do some remarkable work with voice, posture and other things.

Another consultant asked a large group "Who here works in political organisations" No one put up their hand. "Who here works with one or more people?" Nearly everyone puts up their hand. "You all work in political organisations." According to the author Jack Vance "a necessary and sufficient condition for politics is two people."

### **Applying this simple point to most professional groups**

We could ask in any professional group a similar kind of question – here is my version but please consider your own. "Who here considers themselves a person who works professionally with people's emotions, feelings, idiosyncrasies, foibles,

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inadequacies and mental problems?" Many people would deny they do this. Then the follow-up question is "Who here works with other people?" Then you are a person who works professionally with ....."

Lets do a couple of case studies of how this might eventuate. Lets think of the Australian Facilitators Network. They are a loose alliance of folks who are into facilitation and develop competencies around facilitating. Now they do an OK job with developing facilitators and in their conferences the sessions would generally be about this area and areas for which they are competent. In many ways ANZPA institutes train people to be facilitators as well (as a sub group of being a group worker which is part of being a psychodramatist, sociodramatist, sociometrist or role trainer) so it would all be good stuff. However the facilitators mob are not trained to use the technology of psychodrama such as concretisation, role reversal, mirroring etc. This means that most of the sessions will not be experiential though they may be interactive.

So there are opportunities to make a real contribution to this group through addressing areas of their work that they cannot easily address apart from in an academic or modest manner. Lets say we run a session looking at the way group facilitators warm themselves up prior to a session. We could invite an individual or do a generic version in front of the whole group and then have people do it in smaller group as peers. We could set out, concretise, the physical warming up process as well as the internal or psychic warm up processes including the feeling elements and the thinking elements.

The process of concretisation add surprise and delight into the group and the area would be of value to group participants. As the individuals did it in smaller group they could discuss what worked, or what didn't work and they could enter into peer supervision or problem solving. The psychodrama methodology could be highlighted at some point, training options could be presented with regards the local institutes, other groups you may be offering could be broached and a short discussion on the value of these methods and the value of learning them.

### **Common elements that most conference participants could value**

With this kind of program, participants get a wide variety of value. Rather more intimate discussions than at the conference generally: reduces isolation and stimulate cognitive processes for extroverts, progresses relationships, creates different connections more easily than leaving it to individuals. Pictures are getting concretised from whole group input that alert participants to their common experience and common dilemmas: reduces isolation and creates professional community, participants get to experience the wider variety of ideas in their professional community. Modelling of how groups can be run: expanded ideas of group facilitation and group presentations and training. Mirroring of individuals experiences as they are concretised: modelling individual recognition in a group setting, modelling being present with people. These values are important in a general manner for all professional groups.

### **Planning for afterwards.**

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It is worthwhile considering having follow-on programs very close to the conference proper. Often conferences finish prior to weekends and this makes for obvious opportunities.

Most conference bags have the opportunity to have included some marketing material. Very useful for upcoming programs and worth considering adding another brochure for the "immediately after" workshop. This is all rather crass and exploitative and useful to engage people. I have added a brochure for a program following a recent ACA/PACFA conference. The mistake we made was not having it ready to put into the bags and not having it of the same artwork and style as our other inserted brochures. Another mistake was not simply having it as a three hour stand alone workshop because the conference goers were quite "conferenced out". So coming to a few hours was feasible but coming to "another whole day" was a bit OTT.

### Getting in

There are a range of conferences where practitioners would not have to argue the toss. Most conferences for counsellors, psychologists, psychotherapists would find our presentations acceptable. There are ones where one would have to argue more strongly. Such as legal conferences, medical conferences, farmers conferences, engineer's conferences. The argument is about our specialist training and finding out if they have professional development of what many see as a the "soft end" of PD, on their agenda. Sociometric links and relationships make these easier.

### What I wrote

#### 1)

This was a workshop designed to illustrate role reversal through a framework that therapists and counsellors should be familiar with.

#### **Seeing a person on their own terms.**

This workshop will actively and experientially work with the principle of seeing

a person on their own terms. During the workshop we will examine what are the cultural and individual forces that make doing this action so difficult. There are threats and concerns for individuality, there are concerns for getting it wrong, there are worries about another person's autonomy. All these issues are relevant in other areas of counselling, psychotherapy and group psychotherapy as well.

This workshop is designed to have participants reflect on their capacity to enjoy seeing a person on that person's own terms. That may sound like an easy task but I keep noticing in groups a desire by people to have others change their self perceptions. Usually to change their self perceptions in order for them to be seen like this person viewing them wishes they were seen; in ways that fit with a person's worldview; in ways that alleviate a perceived problem; in ways reduce tension in the room; in ways that reduce the tension of the therapist; in ways that will make the other person feel grateful or appreciative. This has to be a loser's gambit. Oh wait! This is what counselors and psychologists and others often try and do. So do many people in leadership positions. See if the following imaginary (yeah

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right!) dialogue has any familiarity.

*"What is it that you are passionate about doing in your life?" Enquiring Counsellor*

*"Well nothing that I am passionate about but I am quite keen on ....." Helpful collaborator*

*"You seem very passionate when you talk about ....." Socratic teacher*

*"Well passionate might be too strong a word." Careful judge*

*"Passion is something that gets your interest and holds it" Determined teacher*

*"OK then perhaps I am passionate about ...." Reluctant acolyte or student*

*There are a number of reasons why this may be the case and this workshop will examine what those in the group make of this contention. We will then consider what we can do about it for ourselves and then what we might, on a good day, do about it for others.*

## 2)

This was a proposal for a conference on the matter of people who self harm.

### **Title of presentation**

Knowing the insides: using the psychodramatic process to get inside the world view of self harming individuals in order to reduce your own fear and increase your capacity to stay close.

### **Outline of presentation**

This workshop will use a very simple psychodramatic process to bring to life some of the inner workings of people who self harm. These experiences will be brought forth from the group participants rather than presented as a learned treatise. These experiences will be your wisdom, your experience of clients and also perhaps some of your own self harming. Your imagination will be stimulated and this work will illuminate some of the isolation of the person who self harms and their difficulty allowing people to come close. Your capacity to see people as creative and whole will be challenged.

Areas that we are likely to cover are:

1. *The isolation of the person who self harms.* Self harming has as one of its many causes the issue of isolation. The self harming individual self harms because they are isolated ("I don't like being alone") and as a response to their isolation ("I am so alone look at what I am prepared to do!"). This isolation can create fragmented relationships, relationships that push people away, scare people or concern people. This can in turn lead to further self harming and hence further isolation. Getting to see and know this isolation from the perspective of someone who self harms, will give participants added insight into how they do their work, how they have done their work up until now and perhaps how they should work with self harming individuals.

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2. *The difficulty of allowing people to come close.* You could see this as an issue of trust. More usefully it can be viewed as an issue around reliability – as a counsellor or helper, colleague or friend, are you a reliable person? Are you a person who will *act* in reliable ways. It is the actions that count not the “feeling of being trustworthy or committed”. And one real question is “If I allow you to come close will you try and change me or teach me?” Participants will be able to see and experience the narrow window of opportunity they have with self harming people to establish a reliable relationship where they are influential rather than written off.
3. *Overcoming the need to teach, change or alter the self harming person.* In families that are worried, with professional that are concerned, with organisations that are funded to look out for individuals who self harm, there is often an over-developed role response which is to try and teach the self harming person the error of their ways. This can be approached subtly or it can be overt. To the self harming person the approach of a teacher rings alarm bells which also say “I am not good enough otherwise they wouldn't be trying to teach me” or “who the hell do they think they are to try and teach me, they don't even know me. The simplest solution to the overuse of teaching is to beef up the role of active listener. Or better yet someone who can actively enjoy non-judgementally exploring the world of the self harming person. This will be practices during the program.
4. *Seeing a person, seeing creativity and seeing wholeness.* When a counsellor sees a person as self harming there is a certain narrowing of their focus and a narrowing of their relationship towards their client. Add to this perhaps a few other tasty ‘diagnoses’ or ‘observations’ (depression, chronic smoking, addictions, low income, single mum, unemployed – you name it) and a person can easily be mistaken for a hulking death trap sucking life from all around them. Finding ways to feel expansive towards people who have weighty labels is life giving for all the individuals concerned. This requires a real recognition that self harming is not an isolated act but a living expression of a creative human being. This can be a real challenge. Getting to know the inner life of this creative expresser will help the carers, helper, counsellors, nurses, psychologists and others concerned.

### **Workshop Process**

This workshop will be an experiential session and will examine in some depth the experiences and wisdom of the participants in relation to their ideas of what and how a self harming individual makes sense of their life and world. The psychodramatic technique of role reversal and interviewing for role will be highlighted and presented for participants. The use of sociodrama will allow all to become involved. Participants will gain insight that can be easily and immediately translated into their work with self harming and other individuals.