

WHO IS THE CULPRIT – ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN A PRISON

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In the following frame you find some highlights of Worldwork Theory, that explain some of the terms and concepts that are used in this case description. If you are already familiar with Worldwork, or less interested in the theoretical aspects, please go directly to the beginning of the case description

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Highlights of Worldwork Theory

Here are some highlights of the theory and methodology required for a better understanding of the case description. For more information on terms and concepts, please read the introductory article [Worldwork – Transformation in Organizations, Communities, Business and the Public Space](#).

*According to the Worldwork paradigm, an organization or group functions on different **levels**, which act as parallel worlds. One level is the everyday reality, consisting of organizational facts, people, structures, goals, strategies, and problems that need solutions. On another level, which is self-organizing, a group is structured by an **organizing principle**, a **field**. The field distributes the various polarities, or positions, within the group. On a self-organizing level, some issues that are considered “problems” are in fact attempts of the system to balance itself. Many of these self-balancing tendencies are related to polarities, where only one side is directly visible, and the other side is a non-local presence within a group. For example, listen to a leader saying: “We are strong and fearless, and will go on no matter what!”, and you can sense the polarity in the group, a doubter and skeptic, for whom those words are meant, an imagined opponent, who believes we are hopeless and we don’t want to go on. As facilitators, we can make **roles** out of these positions in order to make them more visible, and give them a chance to interact. Imagine it as if the group is following the script of an invisible director - something like a larger non-local group mind - to perform a play. When you try to lead a group, you might sense that an invisible hand was working against you, when in fact it is this self-organizing tendency that is pulling in a different direction.*

***Roles** can be further differentiated into consensus reality roles and ghost roles. **Consensus reality roles** (also called “CR roles,” or I sometimes just use the generic term “role”) are positions that belong to the central belief system of the culture or group, and thereby are generally accepted by that*

group. They can be voiced without provoking a strong group reaction. In contrast, ghost roles are behaviors that we cannot voice, because they are not "acceptable" or "rational" within a given organizational culture, or outside of what it considers "reality." Although ghost roles are not explicit, everyone feels their presence and suffers from them. Ghost roles can also be detected in unintended communication.

CR roles and ghost roles perform a sort of shadow play. Imagine a puppet theatre, in which two puppets are having a dialogue, and behind a lit cotton screen of the puppet theatre, you see the contours of a third puppet. The two front puppets are caught in a dialogue, but once in a while the puppet behind the screen interjects a sentence. The puppets in front seem to be unaware of the shadow puppet behind the screen, and tend to believe that the other visible puppet had made the remark. In a puppet theatre, this leads to amusing misunderstandings. Amusing to the spectators, but not to the puppets, who are actually distressed. The level of the distressed puppets who can see the shadow puppet would be the consensus reality level; the level that includes the shadow puppet would be the self-organizing level, or what we call the dream level.

By the way, the above example about the audience but not the puppets enjoying the play also holds true for group processes. Many of the interactions, if you are caught in one polarity or role, can be very painful, but once you understand the structure, speak ghost role, behind the confusion, it might even produce a smile on your face.

We are all aware of these dynamics. When we talk about what "really" goes on in a group, as opposed to what is being said on the surface, we are in the realm of roles and ghost roles. The roles speak the appropriate sentences, use the appropriate communication style, and have the appropriate viewpoints, whatever they might be in a given organizational culture, but we hear the whispers of the ghost roles in the insinuations and subtext, the gossip, the lack of reactions to some of the things that are being said.

One reason that groups often avoid making unintended communication explicit, or giving voice to the ghost roles, is the fear that the consequent conflicts will be irresolvable. This makes sense from a consensus reality perspective, where we are used to not having our conflicts resolved and where relationships can be harmed forever, because someone spoke "the truth." From a Worldwork perspective, this makes sense from a different angle. Roles and ghost roles are non-local in the sense that they belong to everyone. Therefore, processing ghostroles means to realize, that you too are like the person, role or group, that you thought was responsible for all the difficulties. This is also why if a person who has taken on an unpopular role within an organization leaves, someone else will often pick up the same role or some of its aspects. Although ghost roles are most easily projected onto other groups, they are also present in one's own group, where they remain marginalized. In the case description, you can see how both

subgroups that are being described project a particular behavior of their own group on to another.

These dynamics are why it often takes an emotional or charged interaction to understand fully how these roles are present in one's own group. The process of gaining self-awareness about one's own nature cannot easily happen on a rational and linear level only, as it is precisely that level, which often contains the belief systems that marginalize the very issue that a group needs to wake up to. Because of this mirroring process, the only resolution in that sense is a raised awareness, of how we are the other, how we ourselves are part of and contribute to what upsets us most. No wonder we shy away from direct confrontations.

The process of achieving this awareness can highly emotional. It often forces us to traverse a period of escalation and confrontation. If we are able to do that, and at the same time follow our total experience with awareness, step by step, we will eventually come to appreciate that these roles are present within the whole system. The total information or knowledge contained within the roles now becomes explicit and can be used creatively by the whole group. From this perspective, disturbances or problems are potentials that are crying out to be used! It is the facilitator's job to create a safe container for the participants, and to make sure, that at the end of a group process, conflicts are resolved, and everyone has understood new dimensions about the problems that were being presented. Participants and clients not only have the right, but also the duty to be skeptical and be concerned about the outcomes. It belongs to the work of the facilitator to notice and relate to these fears and make sure that everyone is protected.

Sustainable facilitation is based on discovering and supporting the basic self-facilitative tendencies of the collective. Roles which actually facilitate the entire process are themselves contained in all groups, yet these roles are not always recognized or expressed by the group itself. One example of these roles is eldership. Eldership is based on a warm detachment that understands life and people as a developing and unfolding mystery and therefore respects and supports every person and tendency, while still being able to create boundaries in a non-offensive way. It is rooted in a person's convictions about the meaning of life, and the role that spirit and nature play. These convictions don't necessarily have to be explicit, but are often just felt in a person's heart. The elder remains centered in her or his own beliefs about the core values that make living together on this planet possible. However, these beliefs are not forced upon others, but rather modeled in a way that inspires others to follow. Eldership is independent of age and is expressed as often in ordinary people as it is in leaders and facilitators.

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The Case Description

Introduction: Quantum Entanglement - Organisations as Holograms

The quantum view of Worldwork assumes a field-like organising principle that has a structuring influence on an organisation. Analogous to a magnetic field, where the magnet is not in direct connection with metal filings, it can organise the effects of field and is noticeable on all organisational levels, although there often seems to be no direct causal connection to any source that is producing it. On each organisational level, or within a particular department, subgroup or leadership group, we can witness the specific local expression. Many organisations could enhance their efforts at change management by becoming aware of this hologram effect, and how the problems of one particular department or section are mirroring a process that belongs to the organisation as a whole.

Often these issues can also be seen in society at large. Sometimes, society hasn't come to terms with the issue that the organisation is dealing with, and the organisation turns out to be an agent for cultural change, forging a new way for all of us to follow. If an organisation becomes aware of this aspect of its development, it can create the proper strategies for it to be more effective on that level. This in turn will have a productive influence on how it will bring its innovations to the market and understand its own internal conflicts better.

Among the many organisations in which we have facilitated change are law enforcement and prison systems. We have researched and worked within correction facilities in the USA, Japan, Australia and some European countries. The following piece provides a short spotlight of this hologram dynamic on our work within one such correctional facility. It demonstrates how the process of working on internal change not only gives rise to

new and improved practices within the prison facility itself, but also contains the basis for a possible marketing campaign to change social awareness. Furthermore, it can lead to better strategies for how to relate to funding agencies and the political bodies that control the prison system.

Escalation and De-escalation: Facilitators as participants, leaders and followers.

Another important aspect of any facilitation is the unfolding of escalation and de-escalation processes. All escalation is based on the process of a person, or a collective, feeling threatened, not heard or not respected. When dealing with open conflicts we therefore need facilitation methods that allow us to work with escalating conflict in a way that empowers the person and enables self-respect and dignity, while at the same time creates boundaries that contain the conflict from escalating further. Worldwork believes that escalations themselves are useful, as they hold within them the power and *pizzazz* that will eventually allow the two parties to come together as equals, and to use their diversity in a new and creative way.

How we understand and support escalating processes between two or more sides when we are in the role of the facilitator is a crucial element in any facilitation, and includes also how we work with escalation if we ourselves are getting personally addressed. Different organisational cultures frequently have developed their own credo and ground rules for how to proceed with escalating processes. These programs usually work up to a point, such as when breaking these ground rules can mean losing a job or have other kind of consequences. Worldwork was developed with warring factions in mind, where the ground rules are not followed, and where there are no means for enforcing them. This has turned out to be a great asset, as we have found that in many open conflicts the ground rules are only being respected as long as there is some sort of power balance. Thus, for example, military experts are well aware that the Geneva Conventions tend not to be followed, even by groups with an ethical standpoint, at

the point when one party feels that they are fighting for their survival. This we have found true also for organisations on all levels, as is demonstrated in the following case description.

Background

The organisation that we now introduce was a prison, where we were scheduled to work for a few days. Our program, which we designed with the person responsible for change management, included facilitating a group of inmates in their maximum security wing, followed by working with a group of the staff, which consisted of guards, nurses, counsellors, and administrators. Finally we met with some members of the executive leadership. Our approach to change management in prisons didn't stop at working with the staff only. We developed also a process-oriented counselling approach for inmates and a process-oriented professional coaching model for guards. As part of that approach, we tried to make the hologram effect visible for everyone involved, in order for the group both to understand some of their conflicts, and also to give access to a parallel world, where everyone sees how they play an important role for society at large. This helped them to work together towards a change, while at the same time remaining in a world with strict boundaries and rules that are enforced by one side. What follows is a summary of one of the days.

Opening Situation: The first group we worked with was mixture of inmates, some correction officers and ourselves, the three facilitators. As we opened the group, one of the inmates challenged me right away, as the lead facilitator¹.

His basic viewpoint: 'I know they have flown you guys in from the USA, because they (*the prison administration*) are afraid of a prison riot, and because we are all so fed up with what is happening in here. Now you are

¹ The facilitator team included Amanda Frost, from Sydney, Australia, Dr. Jytte Vikkelsoe and me. Please see Jytte's dissertation **Vikkelsoe J. (1997) Beyond Guilt and Innocence, Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, The Union Institute, Cincinnati, OH.** Dr. Vikkelsoe was a much valued co-researcher in the early stages of my work in prison systems. Her dissertation is an in-depth exploration of the impact of value judgment and how they hinder self-reflection on the level where change and transformation occurs.

supposed to prevent that, right? Well, it won't work, buddy!! '

I instinctively tried to de-escalate and respond truthfully that this was not the case, and that we had no prior knowledge of any unrest.

Inmate: 'Oh yeah,' he answers, 'either they didn't allow you to tell us, or you would be too much of a coward to admit it if you were allowed.'

***Analysis:** This is a direct confrontation and escalation, which can no longer be avoided, since my offer for de-escalation was not accepted. I must admit it was a little scary. The prison world sustains interactions where you negotiate out of a position of strength and not weakness. There are many reasons for that. One that is often overlooked is the loss of respect and dignity that follows incarceration, creating a subculture or world that partially endorses brutal fighting to reclaim self-respect and dignity. Behind the bully, who runs over everyone, and has no compassion for the other side, can be a ghost role that we can describe as:*

'I am in prison and I am captive. I can't do or design my day in the way that I want to, but I still have my self respect, and still have my power. I would rather risk things and pay the price for it than give up this belief in myself.'

On the other level, the prison inmates and guards play out the drama of instinct and domestication, of power and boundaries.

Intervention: *The inmate needs to be met in both worlds.*

I answer:

'You are scary. You must be used to bullying and challenging everyone in this place and getting away with it. I say no to that. I love the strength and pride that I sense behind your words - it's awesome to experience

that in these surroundings, and see how your spirit soars in the midst of all the troubles - but I hate how this comes out as an attack against me. I will insist on us meeting as equals respecting each other, no matter what you do, because I know you are looking for that also. Why else would you show so much strength.'

We silently stared at each other for a long moment, our eyes locked into each other. He then broke out in a grin, and said, 'You're alright.' Everyone breathed out!

***Analysis and comments:** One interpretation of this interaction was that the credibility of the facilitator and the respect for the inmate both seem to have found a place, such that no one was forced to back down. It felt like being in an initiation ritual and a test for how authentic a relationship can be within this particular setting. Central to this was the authenticity of the facilitator's feelings, such as admitting fear or owning making mistakes. Such honesty and authenticity supports the move towards a sustainable solution.*

In our analysis, the ghost role is the 'prison revolt'. The escalation that just happened can be viewed as 'the prison revolt' and since it was solved on a personal level, it is more possible now to solve it on a group level also.

***Beginning Intervention:** To bring out the ghost role of the one who revolts and the one that is revolted against. Key questions here include what do you want to revolt for? What is getting to be too much? Here follows a summary of how that interaction went.*

Facilitators: 'We would like to know in detail, why a prison revolt was mentioned. Who can explain that best.'

Inmates (assuredly): 'The guards hate us, they make our lives as difficult as possible. They think we are the scum of the earth and shit on us whenever they can.'

Several guards protest: 'This is not true; we are just following orders. We know it's difficult in here, but we

respect you as human beings, and want to support your process of rehabilitation.

Inmate: 'No, you don't. I wanted to call my family yesterday, for example, for the birthday of my daughter, and you didn't let me. How is that helping me with my rehabilitation?'

Guard: 'You always want to call, but you know you can only have so and so many calls. You have to plan it better.'

***Analysis:** The ghost role of the guard who hates the prisoner and thinks that 'they are scum' is still floating in the field. It's now cycling. Every accusation from the prisoner's side is meant to show that the guards hate them and work to spite them. Every answer is meant to prove that the opposite is true. There are many ways how one can view this process. One of them is the idea that the prison inmates, as those with less rank, are pushing up against those with more rank, and that the self-reflecting tendency of the system is trying to bring more awareness to the rank situation, so it can be used better. This was our working hypothesis at the time and we started to unfold the rank position by assisting the guards in showing their rank.*

***Intervention:** Who on the guard side can admit a little bit and sometimes that the original accusation is true, and that they can use their power in many ways?*

After a long journey and the negotiation of many edges, one guard acknowledges the accusation. This amazingly courageous man, who had spoken up several times about his compassion for everyone earlier on, admitted to being part of the ghost role.

Guard: 'Yes, often I hate it here and on some days, I despise you guys. During these days, I do think you are scum. I want to sit in my office and have as little to do with you as possible. If I come in here, I can't wait to get into the little cubicle and turn on the TV, so I don't have to interact with any of you.'

There is silence and a change of atmosphere, and in our perception some sort of relaxation. Then an inmate reacts. He quietly says:

Inmate: At least you're honest about it. See,' he says to the other prisoners, 'I told you so.'

Others nod, and one prisoner adds that he knew it all along. The voices are no longer raised as before. It's a de-escalation signal that a facilitator picks up.

***Analysis:** Again and again, we are surprised at how by owning a ghost role actually has a de-escalating effect on the situation. Here especially, where you would intuitively expect a riot, the atmosphere actually became less tense. Unfolding changing atmospheres is a central part of our facilitation model. One of the facilitators frames it and asks for clarification of what happened.*

Facilitator: 'This seems to relieve you' she asks. 'Can you explain why?'

Inmate: 'Finally, someone has the courage to admit it to my face. I will respect this man from this day on. If we had more people like him in here, this place wouldn't be such a mess. We are just sick of the way that no one ever admits anything, and always acts like they do everything right. It's sickening if you get treated all day long as if you were dirt, and even more sickening if they never tell you straight into your face, and just avoid you.'

One of the guards nods inadvertently.

***Analysis:** Like in the other case examples, you can see an organic role switch happening by one member of the opposing side agreeing. Please read more in the theory section about how the quantum view in Worldwork sees this role shuffling invariance as part of an innate tendency of organisations to self-reflect. In the situation here, we now can follow the role switch and unfold it further.*

Facilitator, turning to the guard who nodded: 'You know about that?'

Guard: 'Yes, I am sometimes in a similar position, as many people turn away from me when I say that I work in the prison. Many of my neighbors avoid me. If I make friends with someone, they sometimes tell me with surprise that they didn't think that a prison guard could be a nice person. Even the prisoners say you must be stupid if you can't get a job outside of here. They despise us for working in here.'

A couple of prisoners nod.

***Analysis:** The ghost role of being identified as scum is filled as both sides now are in it. They become aware that they do it with each other, but are also on the receiving end of it by the mainstream. This process of internalisation is well known from the studies of marginal groups. The marginalized group internalises the view of the mainstream. They inadvertently make a role switch by viewing themselves and each other in a similar way to how they experience the mainstream's view of themselves. A new ghost role of the mainstream bystander has now emerged, who doesn't want anything to do with prisons, and looks down at the world of crime, incarceration and law enforcement. Here you can see role switching and quantum entanglement. To begin with, the guard sees the prisoner as scum, then the prisoner sees the guard as scum, and now the mainstream bystander sees the whole system as scum. The guards, the prisoners and the mainstream bystanders act as entangled quantum objects, where you no longer can localise one signal with one group. All signals belong to all groups.*

The facilitators start to play out the roles, and are being eventually joined by guards and inmates. Here is a summary of what the role said.

The mainstream bystander: (played by the guards and inmates together, as they perceive the role): I think criminals

are dirt, prisons are dirt and I don't want to deal with them. Police and prison guards are brutal and enjoy brutalising and incarcerating other people. It's a world of perverts regardless of which side you look at. I don't want to have anything to do with it, don't want to see it, read about it, and pay for it. It's like a garbage dump. Keep it out my sight.

Those that speak for the guards and inmates reply to the mainstream bystander:

Inmates and guards: (in a roleplay that is answering to the bystander role) 'You are also a criminal. You cheat a little here, you lie a little there, you take drugs that are legal and probably some that are illegal. You kill your friends, if it gets you ahead, you betray your children if there is an advantage. You are not really better than us, just more lucky or more devious.'

***Analysis:** The marginalized group detect themselves in the flickering signals of the marginalizer. The bystander is also a criminal by ignoring social issues, by not processing violence and by pretending not to be part of the system. The prison community, including the 'perpetrators' and the guards, is a ghost role for society, which doesn't deal with its own aggression. Inmates and guards so to speak act out our inner and social drama before our eyes, keeping us in line with the law.*

On the other side, in the role of the bystander, there is an answer:

Mainstream Bystander role: (played out by prisoners and guards): 'Yes, it is true, what you are saying. But I don't despise you only. Sometimes I look at a prisoner and envy them for their courage to have left the rules of society and followed their own rules. In these moments, you look free to me and I feel like a prisoner.'

There is an awesome silence, then a prisoner with tears in his eyes says:

'Thank you!! And I have envied you for your courage to resist your impulses so that you can lead a life that is supportive of your families, and allows you to have relationships and go for walks in nature. I miss all of it in here.'

There is a pause. Everyone is quiet, while many look touched and sad. One of the facilitators asks if someone could speak to the atmosphere. Another inmate says that it is good to know, even for a short moment, that however far apart we are from each other, underneath we are somehow connected and the same. Some guards nod.

Then an inmate says, with a big grin on his face:

'Hey, that's good stuff you guys are doing, where can we learn that.'

In a consequent discussion with every one, we were told that the biggest problem for that group is boredom, and that many of them came to realise how much they want to learn things. We spent the remaining sessions with this group teaching them conflict facilitation skills, and peer coaching skills. Those were our special areas of expertise. We also could have taught anything else, from astronomy to organic gardening, so eager were they to learn.

Postscript

In the staff meeting later in the day, in a very touching process, the same ghost roles emerged, such that the guards, nurses, counsellors, and administrators suffered from not being respected for what they do, and from not being thanked by the public. We thanked everyone present for making our streets safer, for allowing us to not have to worry about crimes so much, and for their contribution to creating an easier life for those on the

outside. One guard, with tears in his eyes, said that in the 26 years of working there no person yet had thanked him for his work, or even acknowledged the value. He reported that some people would react by becoming quiet, or hostile, when he revealed that he worked in a prison, while others would get curious and wanted to hear some titillating stories. Many would say that they could never do such work. The group closed with new insights over the importance of the role that they played in society at large and a growing sense of self-respect for being agents for social change.

In addition, we taught interventions to the staff for interacting in situations where they felt marginalized by their mainstream friends, and started to develop strategies for how to inform the public about the deeper aspect of their work. This was seen as part of a long-term strategy in which self-respect, marketing of ideas and awareness for society, improved funding and increased workers pay were all linked together and needed to be supported by the organisation as a whole.

Conclusions

In a meeting with the warden, I thanked him and asked for support in these ongoing projects. His concerns, although on a different level, paralleled the processes that the guards, inmates, psychologists, administrators, and staff people went through. In the ensuing conversation he complained about the lack of support from politicians and media for his work. He bitterly criticised the politicians, who didn't want to be associated with crime and prison because it was bad for their image, especially in times when public safety was more in the background. Likewise, the media, he complained, only reported on prison issues if there was a scandal involved. In the discussion, we talked about how politicians and media themselves are part of the same polarity that we witnessed during our days in this prison. The warden was helped to realise that he was not only leading a prison compound, but at the same time was also an agent for social awareness around such issues. Describing such a conversation as very helpful, the warden likewise talked of the negative attitudes

of society and lack of appreciation for his work, such that, as he put it, 'these attitudes get to you, and you yourself start to think that what you do is not of real value.' We were shocked, but then not surprised, to hear that he too couldn't remember when the last time was that someone publicly or privately thanked him for his work.

As in some of the other cases, these days created the foundation for a new organisational visioning process. In one of the countries that we worked in, some of our work was videotaped and made available to other prison facilities, in an effort to disseminate their experience and results through the whole system.

We ourselves were very much moved and have since tried to raise the public awareness on these issues, wherever we have the opportunity, as here on our web site for example.

The prison system reflects a greater problem within society at large, and demonstrates also both that the problem is resolvable and how this can be done.

The problem is not so much the particular characteristic of one of the roles, but the lack of relationship between them. The isolation, which inmates undergo when being imprisoned, leads to complicated reactions that further asocial behaviour and hinder or inhibit rehabilitation. This isolation is a larger issue, as you can see above, because it is not only the inmate that gets isolated, but in fact the whole system. By working with a process-oriented consulting approach, a number of changes happen, such as a shift in the relationship between the various organisational parts, and new strategies to break through the isolation. This is indirectly addressing the warden's issues with the lack of financial and political support for his organisation. With the inner changes of the organisation, their myth and vision becomes clearer, which in ensuing sessions can be addressed and formulated into appropriate PR and political strategies. Finally, it brings a new light on staff training and inmate counselling, creating the basis for change management in an organic way.