CHAPTER FOUR

The use of drawing as a tool in socioanalytic exploration

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Introduction

Drawing is a powerful tool in the work of socioanalytic exploration. Its power resides in its capacity both to give simple expression to complex feelings and ideas about organisational life, and to provide a vehicle for change and adaptation for the individual and the group during the sharing and exploration of what the drawing reveals.

This chapter presents the what, how, and why of drawing as an important tool in socioanalytic exploration with clients or research partners in organisations. It explores research with socioanalytic practitioners (Nossal, 2010) and case example material from organisational consulting assignments. Its intention is to serve as a guide to practice.

A case is made for the following key ideas:

- drawing provides an enormous amount of rich data about both the conscious and unconscious experiences that people have of an organisation;
- through the act of drawing, and then sharing what is revealed by the drawing, participants are provided with a means to develop

their capacity to think creatively and openly about their work in the organisation. This is helpful to the consultant in developing the appropriate "container" and context for socioanalytic exploration;

- the planning for, and introduction to, the task and the way in which drawings are explored, either with individuals or groups in organisations, have a significant impact on both the data that is generated and the opportunity for growth that is created through the dialogue;
- the way in which the drawing activity is held in mind by the socioanalyst is significant for the kind of containment for the task that will be provided;
- last, but not least, drawing can be fun and exciting and it provides a novel means of engagement with people in organisations.

One challenge for the socioanalyst when working with people in organisations is to create the space or the right "container" in which to engage them in exploring emotional and, perhaps, unconscious experiences. While as consultants or research socioanalysts, we may undertake training programmes in this methodology and work hard and continuously at developing a "mind" for the work, the question arises, how is the *client* to begin to develop, through experience, a like "mind" for their own learning and exploration in their work? What is meant here by "mind for the work" is captured in Bion's entreaty that, when working with patients, the analyst should attempt to be without memory, desire, or understanding and to adopt a state of "reverie" (Bion, 1970) The same is true for the socioanalyst working with clients. That is, one needs to be able to clear one's mind of preconceptions and premature conjecture or conclusions and allow the kind of reflection that will enable the emotional reality of the situation under investigation to emerge (see also Long, 2001 on the "state-of-mind" for this work.). Part of the role of the socioanalyst is to stimulate this capacity for thinking in the client and, in this way, to provide an opportunity for self-development and an improved capacity for creativity in their work. This was the starting point for the research that is reported here. It seems that drawing is a very useful and powerful tool for enabling both the individual and the group to enter a "thinking" space where there is openness to sharing and exploring in new ways.

About drawing

Drawing as a practice in socioanalysis is thought to have been used first by consultants at the Tavistock Institute in London in the 1970s during an action research project into day nursery care. Some of the thinking that informs the use of drawing in socioanalytic exploration has roots in psychoanalytic practice in the treatment of individual patients. Jung was a pioneer in this field, with his emphasis on the importance of symbols. "Jung saw value in drawings containing symbols from the unconscious that could work as a healing agent" (Furth, 1988, p. 1). In the literature of psychoanalytic practice, drawing is referred to as a potent and effective analytic tool. Kübler-Ross writes, "Like dream language, the language of pictures is the language of the unconscious, and it speaks when the conscious voice fails" (1988, p. x).

This is a view that is echoed by many socioanalytic practitioners. Another Jungian analyst (Brutsche, 1988) says that the interpretation of a drawing "allows (the patient) to experience that, deep inside, his unconscious is allowing for a surprisingly accurate expression of his emotional state of mind . . ." (p. xii).

In the field of socioanalysis there has been much debate about what usefully can be translated from psychoanalytic practice with an individual to the work of a socioanalytic consultant in an organisation (Armstrong, 1995). It is not my intention here to further this debate. From discussions with socioanalytic practitioners and from my own experience, there is enough anecdotal evidence to suggest that something of the way in which drawing is used and thought about in the psychoanalytic domain also has relevance and application in socioanalytic consulting to organisations. It is a hypothesis in this book that the associative unconscious is "tapped" in both contexts.

What those in other disciplines have to say about the use of drawing

Socioanalysts do not have a monopoly on the use of drawings in organisational consulting. Cognitive psychologists and other organisational researchers have also discovered its virtues. Meyer (1991) has produced some interesting work in this field. He explores drawing from the perspective of cognitive psychology. He presents a strong

argument for the use of drawing as a tool in organisational research. What is explored here is the limitation of continually relying upon responses and data from people in organisations that are expressed either in writing or verbally. He says, ". . . in gathering data, we almost always limit our subjects to counting, talking, and writing" (p. 219).

Meyer does not argue, as a socioanalyst might, that what is missed is an opportunity for a dialogue with the unconscious, but, rather, that there is good research data to indicate that we also know *consciously* more than we can tell.

> Pictures and graphics are seen as affording a means of communicating information about multi-dimensional organisational attributes with clarity and precision . . . informants often possess more copious and meaningful information than they can communicate verbally. (Meyer, 1991, p. 220)

He goes on to say that the brain is able both to store and give expression to far more complex data in a visual form, such as a picture, than it is able to do verbally. Meyer argues that

> organisational researchers try to devise instruments that will elicit verbal data conforming to a limited set of coherent categories . . . often, especially in research taking the entire organisation as an analytical unit, the phenomena of interest are fuzzy multidimensional constructs. In such cases, the coherence of respondents' verbal reports may be specious. (p. 221)

Meyer contends that "people possess more complex, subtle, and useful cognitive maps of their organisations than they can verbalise" (p. 231). Finally, he concludes, "Visual data seem especially worthwhile in efforts to move beyond mechanical and biological models of organisations to view them as systems for creating meaning" (p. 232).

While Meyer is not referring here to drawing as a means to accessing the unconscious in organisations, there is some synergy with the way socioanalysts also think of drawing as a way of communicating more than can be discerned from what can be consciously observed and verbally reported about the mechanical and biological dimensions of organisational life.

A number of other writers similarly advocate the use of drawing as a useful tool in working with people in organisations. Morgan

describes using existing pictures and metaphors to elicit more detailed exploration of organisational issues. He writes,

> . . . modes of visual imaging can break the constraints of an organization's conventional discourse and create a new space or new ground on which new developments can be built. Images speak far louder than words, concepts and theories about organizations could ever do. (Morgan, 1993, p. 233)

What he observed were "regular people using basic insights and imagery to communicate what they felt were fundamental truths about the state of their organization and its possibilities" (Morgan, 1993, p. 233).

Two other researchers, Nossiter and Biberman (1993), asked people to draw the picture in their mind of the organisation and then to describe in writing what they had drawn. They compared the responses of these people to answers from those who only answered a questionnaire. In this instance, there was no engagement between the client and the consultant other than to receive the instructions by mail. They concluded that not only was the "data" of a drawing richer and more detailed than those who answered a questionnaire, but also "respondents reported they enjoyed completing it". They reported that they believed "the more unconscious and less rational aspects of corporate culture" emerged. "The methodology focuses attention on the most salient idea or perception, discouraging the use of trite phrases and/or half truths" (Nossiter & Biberman, 1993, p. 15).

It is interesting that in the work of consultants and researchers outside of the socioanalytic domain there were so many echoes and resonances with what practitioners *in* the field have to say about the use of drawing as a tool. This is presented in detail below.

About the use of drawing by socioanalytic practitioners

Earlier research into the use of drawing in socioanalytic exploration (Nossal, 2010) reported that consultants and researchers applaud the utility and pleasure of using the tool. What is presented in this section is a summarised version of the findings under the headings of the questions asked.

What has been discovered from using drawings as a tool?

It captures the imagination and enlivens the spirit for the work. "[Drawings] make manifest . . . unconscious, preconscious and therefore previously unexamined attitudes, beliefs, feelings and fantasies" (Gould, 1987).

Drawings enable a very powerful and instantly different way for the group to relate to each other, often giving voice to the things that previously could not be named.

Taken together, what the reported ideas about drawings convey is that it is not just the content (the issues aired, the feelings expressed, the themes identified) that is given expression. The drawings also enable an exchange to take place between people in which important links are formed, old patterns in the dynamics are challenged and sometimes change.

What is proposed is that drawings, unlike many verbal responses, provide access to unconscious material and make it available for exploration. It is this ability to give expression to what was perhaps "known" but not yet thought (Bollas, 1987), or previously verbalised, that provides for the occasion of healing and learning for both the individual and the group. What is also worth emphasising is that often, through drawings, expression is given to thoughts and feelings that are more widely felt than just by the individual who drew the picture. In this way, an enormous amount of shared experience can be explored in a relatively short time, perhaps indicating "access" to the associative unconscious.

What are the applications in socioanalytic work for the use of drawing?

The range of applications for the use of drawing in socioanalytic work is very broad. Some examples follow.

- In the diagnostic phase of an organisational consultancy, in both individual interviews and group workshops.
- Drawings can be used as a means of communicating with the steering group in a consulting project about key issues emerging out of group work.
- Drawings can be used as a permanent record of a point in time in a project; they can be revisited again some time after the event as a means of reflecting on change and progress.

- In organisational role analysis, drawings can be used to open and deepen the exploration.
- The invitation to a client to draw a picture including the consultant/researcher might help to reveal what is being projected into these roles in accessible ways.

The invitation to draw a picture that portrays experience can be used as a diagnostic tool that, in the process, also serves as an intervention. Both the consultant and the client or client group have access to what the drawing reveals and this in itself can open the way to new insights and choices.

When do you introduce drawing as an activity with a client?

There was a diverse range of views about the timing of when a drawing might be introduced. Some consultants felt quite strongly that drawings are not something that you introduce up-front with a client, as expressed here:

> Don't spring drawings on people.
>
> Don't use drawings in the very first session of an organisational role analysis (ORA)—people can reveal/expose too much of themselves which can create too much anxiety and people may be left with more than can be worked through in the session.
>
> I only use drawings now with one-to-one client consultations when it is difficult to reach a deeper associative level of thinking. Sometimes there is something beginning to emerge, but we can't put a finger on it—when the client does a drawing, it often comes out in the imagery.

Others expressed a completely different view about when to introduce drawing:

> Drawings are the very first thing we do with a group of people.
>
> I use drawings as a way of beginning the ORA discussion.
>
> Drawings are a very helpful way to begin an unstructured interview in the diagnostic phase of a project. It's a good way to move very quickly to the important issues in the organisation and it frees people up to be quite open.

In my practice, over many years now, clients are often asked to do drawings at the beginning of a focus group or an interview during

the early diagnostic phase of a project, or at the very beginning of a group workshop with the aim of developing shared hypotheses about the current state of the culture of an organisation. On all these occasions, while there is an aspect of "springing" the activity on people in the hope of eliciting spontaneous rather than studied responses, the experience has been positive. The drawings that emerge are invariably helpful to the process of generating rich and open discussion. There is something in this process that works to make the process of data creation more of a shared enterprise between the consultant and the client (and between clients) as all parties become co-explorers in associating and making sense of the drawings.

The opposing views of practitioners about the merits and pitfalls of the timing of the introduction of drawing into an engagement might stem from different ways of thinking about the field under investigation. That is, when investigating organisational culture, it is the system of the organisation (its people and context) and not the individual (and his/her intrapsychic) that is the "container" for thinking about the drawing. Similar to the way dreams are discussed in social dreaming (see Chapter Six of this book), one might say that it is the drawing and not the artist that becomes the vehicle for exploration. It is beholden upon the consultant to ensure that there is clarity on this point and to intervene to prevent group members from drawing conclusions about the artist in the process.

These distinctions are less clear when it comes to using drawings in organisational role analysis (ORA) with individual clients (Newton, Long, & Sievers, 2006). The interplay between the "internal organisation" (the personal and the intrapsychic) and the "external employer organisation" through the exploration of role becomes part of the field under investigation. Again, consultants differ in their decisions about the timing of using drawing in ORA. Some suggest that by using a drawing early in the work, it is possible to move more quickly to a deep level of exploration. My own preference is to build a trusting working relationship first and possibly only introduce drawing in the event that it is difficult for the work to progress. The use of drawing as a tool in ORA reliably opens up the space for more profound work (Harding & Nossal, 2008). How far into the territory of "the personal" a role analyst and analysand delve is likely to be determined by a number of factors, for example:

- the training and competence of the consultant to manage and appropriately contain what might surface unexpectedly about the individual through the exploration of a role drawing;
- the consultant is led by the client; the territory for investigation is constantly renegotiated and tested as the exploration progresses. The consultant needs to be attuned to the anxiety levels of the client in order to make an assessment of how far to go with offering associations to the drawing;
- the contract for the field of investigation is negotiated at the outset: exploration of role is the primary task of an ORA (Newton, Long, & Sievers, 2006). While the exploration might wander into the territory of the personal, it always comes back to how it helps to illuminate something about the experience in role.

The conclusion about *when* is the appropriate time to introduce drawing is non-definitive. As I have sought to show, a number of factors warrant consideration and one of them is the preference of the consultant.

How do you introduce and set up the use of drawing with clients?

The way in which the drawing activity is set up has implications for the atmosphere for the work that is created and the kind of material that is generated for exploration. For example, since people are able to give quite precise expression to their internal world through drawing, thinking through the task of the drawing is important: what is the territory or issue to be explored and in what way is it going to be managed and contained? It is likely that you will elicit the drawing that you ask for, so be sure to ask for what you want.

While both Vince (1995) and Gould (1987) describe giving relatively detailed instructions in presenting the drawing task to clients, other consultants vary in terms of how much explanation they go into about the activity. My experience is that people seem happy to proceed with the task with very little in the way of a theoretical framework or rationale for the activity. Some of the things that are worth taking into consideration when planning are listed below.

- It is important to avoid being too literal in the instructions you give because this will limit that to which expression can be given.

- Typically, the individual is invited to "draw a picture of your experience of the organisation" or "draw a picture of your experience of your role". Depending on the focus of the investigation, it might also be appropriate to frame it as "draw a picture of your experience of working in this team", or "draw a picture of the experience of intergroup dynamics in this organisation".
- In the instructions, people are invited to use their imagination, to use colour, to use metaphor, to draw a "picture" and to avoid using words or charts.
- It is important to explain that the drawings are not a test of artistic ability and, if appropriate, to show some examples of typical drawings that use stick figures and quite child-like imagery.
- Give a brief rationale for the use of drawing and explain that what will be generated is a richness of information that does not come from just talking. Through drawing, the right side of the brain is accessed, and this can allow for more spontaneity. As part of this, it may be appropriate to acknowledge that the activity might feel a bit uncomfortable at first because it is a way of communicating thoughts and feelings that is unfamiliar. But something useful always comes out of it.
- It is important that the playfulness inherent in the activity is allowed to be present by encouraging people to have fun with the activity.
- I always use good quality paper and pens or crayons. Some people provide lots of materials, including glitter glue, cut outs, stamps, and stickers.

Practitioners will find their own way of working with the introduction of the drawing task.

How do you explore the drawings with clients?

Again, there are some important differences of opinion about the way in which, once completed, the drawings are explored, especially in the group setting. There follows a number of responses from consultants.

> One of the lessons that I have learned is to allow as much time as possible for the exploration of the drawings. This part of it should not be rushed. There needs to be time to work with all of the drawings and time to discuss and work through what emerges from them.

> I invite the group to associate to the drawing first and encourage them to be as wild and free as they like in this process. The individual then talks about what they drew and makes his/her own associations. We then put all the drawings up on the wall and look for the common themes and things that may be missing.
>
> The focus for the exploration of the drawing is important. It needs to be clear in the consultant's mind that these drawings are not there as an indication of the state of mind of the individual, but rather as a means of exploring the "state of mind" of the organisation.

In the following responses, quite a different approach is reflected:

> Show respect for the individual's drawing by looking at only one drawing at a time and inviting the artist to explore the drawing first before others make their associations.
>
> Pay very great attention to the issue of containment when exploring the drawings. Sometimes the drawings expose the unconscious in unexpected and painful ways and the consultant needs to contain this experience.

> It is always important to consider who is doing the interpretation. Different feelings and interpretations of drawings need to be shared and compared in order to provide a range of possible perspectives. Ideally, interpretation and sense-making in drawings is done initially by the individual who drew the picture, then collaboratively in the whole team (Vince, 1995, p. 13)

While it was not discussed in the interviews, it did appear in the literature that, in the exploration of drawings, it is important for the consultant to attempt to be aware of what they might themselves project on to the drawings, especially when working in a one-to-one context.

The material coming from drawings can be very rich and detailed. Strong feelings can be given expression and the unexpected can often emerge from drawings. What is reflected in the responses above is a tension between acknowledging what of the individual is given expression in the drawing and, at the same time, making the data about the conscious and unconscious world of the organisational system available for exploration. The more freely a group is allowed to associate to a drawing, the more opportunity there is for creative

thinking to emerge. It is the consultant's responsibility to ensure that the task is presented and contained in such a way that the purpose is clearly to explore and work with the organisational system and not the individual's personality or "pathology". This being said, the work does not preclude the exploration of possible "pathology" adhering to work roles or even groups and organisations, through the history of the role, group, or organisation and that which might have been "left" behind by previous incumbents or unresolved issues (Chapman & Long, 2009). In this way, the drawing becomes a "vehicle" for the exploration of organisational issues and this is where the focus remains.

Quite often and quite unexpectedly for the client, the picture of the organisation that emerges gives expression to a lot of pain, frustration, and a sense of powerlessness. It is the task of the consultant to ensure that this is handled in a sensitive, containing, and enabling way. Some examples are provided in the following section.

Examples of the use of drawing in consulting to organisations

The following drawings and descriptions offer some case example material that seek to demonstrate, in the applied context, the utility and power of what the exploration of drawings can reveal.

The use of drawing in ORA

Case example 1

Figure 4.1 shows a drawing that was made during an ORA consultation with a nurse unit manager of a small hospital. The invitation was to draw a role biography (see Chapter Ten). Up until this point in the work (about the fourth session), both client and consultant were struggling to make progress in exploring what was offered by the client as the "presenting issue". She recently had to performance-manage a very difficult member of her team. This finally resulted in the staff member leaving the organisation. The client described herself as ordinarily strong and confident in her management role. But in this instance, she had felt so manipulated and undermined by this

Figure 1. Nurse unit manager role biography.

member of staff that she had lost much of her confidence in her management capabilities. She sought to understand what had happened that could "unravel" her in this way in order that it might never happen again.

What was immediately striking about the drawing was that it was drawn in monochrome blue. It seemed neat, clean, and orderly. The orderliness stood in stark contrast to the literal nature of her work (an operating theatre full of blood and body parts), her role history (which had been punctuated with some extraordinary and dramatic events), and the recent torrid experience of managing difficult staff members that had been described. One of the associations to the picture was that this was the "sanitised" version of the role that somehow hid the "messy" and difficult realities. While this "sanitising" provided a good defence against anxiety, it also made what was hidden behind it unavailable for thinking. This, in turn, prevented her from gaining any insight into what had so undermined her confidence in the wake of recent events. By using the drawing as an associative resource, I asked her to look at the role biography that she had drawn and see if she could identify any point in the narrative of her work or life roles

where she had experienced similar feelings or difficulties in the past. While I could not have known, this proved to be the key to unlocking the source of her disturbance.

In fact, she was able to identify precisely the point in the picture (and her past) when she had had experiences of feeling similarly undermined and afraid. This led us into a rich and in-depth exploration of the ways in which these past experiences, at an unconscious level, continued to have an influence in how she experienced her role. Strong feelings from an earlier time in her life had been powerfully reinvoked by recent events. Once the originating cause of the disturbance was brought to the surface by associating to the drawing, it was available to be thought about and worked with.

Using the drawing as a tool for exploration, we were able to uncover, in a relatively short period of time (about four additional fortnightly sessions), some very deep and previously hidden internal dynamics that had been getting in the way of this manager accessing all of her resources for the role. As the consultant, I allowed her to lead the exploration; trying to stay carefully attuned to how much she was comfortable with revealing and exploring. In this respect, this client was extraordinarily humble, brave, and adventurous.

Case example 2

The drawing depicted in Figure 4.2 was created by a young senior manager, Peter (not his real name), in a university-based service provider office, who was presented with the challenge of leading his staff through a service and work culture renewal process. He had been promoted to the role of director ahead of some of his older colleagues who had been in the service a long time and who had also applied for the job. His staff described themselves as over-worked, stressed, and feeling pushed by their internal clients into the less interesting, process-driven work that was really the task of clients.

Peter can be seen in two places in this drawing: as the middle person in the group of three and as the figure floating above the two groups. Earlier in the consultation, the consultants working with the organisation had learnt that the three managers who went for the senior management role had made a "pact" that whatever the results, the three of them would manage as a threesome. The model was unworkable and made it nearly impossible for Peter to assert his authority and take

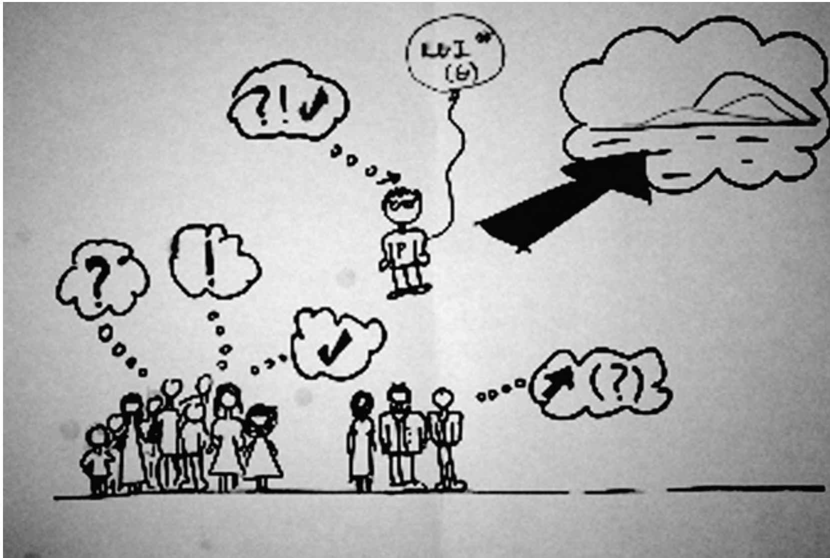

Figure 4.2. Peter's experience of role.

up the kind of strong, directive leadership that would be necessary to bring about change. Staff members (including the other two managers) were sticking resolutely to old ways of doing things, but continuing to complain about the current state as unworkable.

Through our associations to it, what the drawing reveals is that, at the outset, Peter did not have a lot of confidence in his capacity to lead the change. It was as if he would have to be a "super-hero" to do so. The figure floating in space (while intended to depict Peter as further along the path to change) appears to be held up by a rather flimsy-looking gas balloon that might or might not drift to the "island getaway" in the upper right corner of the page. The arrow depicts the direction that they should be heading (towards a brighter, less stressful future), but everyone, including Peter, has their backs to it as if looking towards the past, and this is felt to be solid ground. This island destination is in a cloud that might also drift away. Our association to this was to the seeming difficulty in believing that it would be possible to bring about real change—it seemed like an impossible goal at this point.

The other thought bubbles, as described by Peter, represented the mixed feelings in the group and these symbols are replicated in his

own thought-bubble as acknowledgement of what he has to contain as their manager, as well as some of his own feelings of ambivalence. The detail that Peter had been less aware of, but that nevertheless proved important, was the fact that all the figures lacked any facial features such as eyes and mouths. This led to an exploration of how relatively voiceless Peter and members of the group felt in the context of the broader system. They were severely under-staffed, owing to a large increase in their workload, but their suffering seemed invisible to those who could act to authorise the employment of more staff.

The drawing proved a helpful way of creating an appropriate thinking space for the work. In his words:

> From my perspective it was a really important first step. I don't think that I am necessarily or automatically an open person, so the drawing gave us both some things to think about at the very beginning. I think it also highlighted to me that I was feeling isolated in the role and helped me recognise that this was an issue for further discussion—it stopped the feelings of isolation being an additional hurdle.

As we explored what was depicted in the drawing, much information about both the literal and emotional aspects of how the role was experienced were given expression in a short space of time. It was as if the territory for the work of the ORA was visually mapped out. Over time, we would often refer back to aspects of the drawing as a kind of "touchstone", or reference point for how things had either changed or stayed the same.

Drawing as a tool in culture diagnosis

As described above, drawings provide material for a co-created understanding of role experience (both conscious and unconscious) and this can be used diagnostically by the pair. Drawings can also provide a lot of data about the perceived culture of an organisation when used as part of a diagnostic process. The following case example offers an illustration of this.

Case example 3

The client organisation was a sub-section of a large government department. The project was initiated by the newly appointed direc-

tor, who sought leadership development and culture change both for his executive team and the senior management group. He had inherited what he described as a culture where senior people expected to be told what to do. His predecessor was described as a "benevolent dictator" with a "command and control" style of management. He was also very concerned about the fact that the teams, with interdependent tasks and responsibilities, worked as if in "silos".

We began the process with what we describe as an organisational culture diagnosis—an in-depth examination of the work culture. We held individual interviews with the seven members of the senior leadership team and small focus discussion groups with the next layer of management in their functional units (a total of twenty-four people took part). Everyone drew a picture as part of this process. The invitation was to "draw a picture of your experience of working in Department XX and put yourself in it". In the interviews, the request for the drawing came at the end, whereas in the focus groups we began with the drawing activity and the drawings became the starting point for the discussion. In the focus groups, each drawing was considered in turn. First, the artist was invited to explain what they had drawn and then the group as a whole was invited to associate freely to what they could see in the drawings. These associations were captured on an electronic whiteboard. Some examples of the drawings and the associations to them are presented below.

Figure 4.3 is a "Mr Men" drawing, while Figure 4.4 depicts a feudal scene.

> Mr Messy is in control, not you!
>
> All the managers are playing very different instruments, but none is looking at the conductor.
>
> There are different strengths in the organisation, but how do you conduct them?
>
> The artist [in bottom left hand corner] looks very small and powerless.

Some of the associations to Figure 4.4 were:

> Each of the areas is fenced off from the others. Occasionally a sheep jumps the fence. There is a bridge to a brighter future, but no gate to go through.

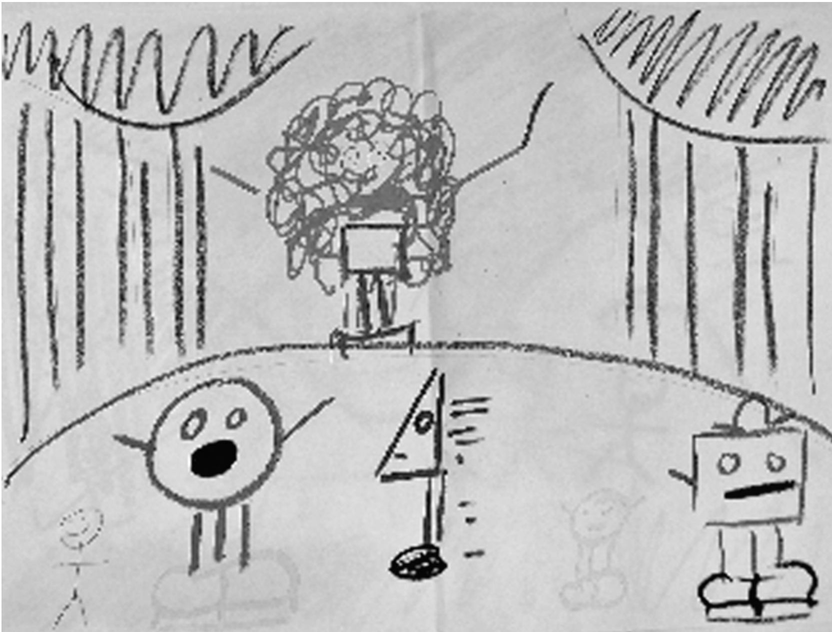

Figure 4.3. Mr Men drawing.

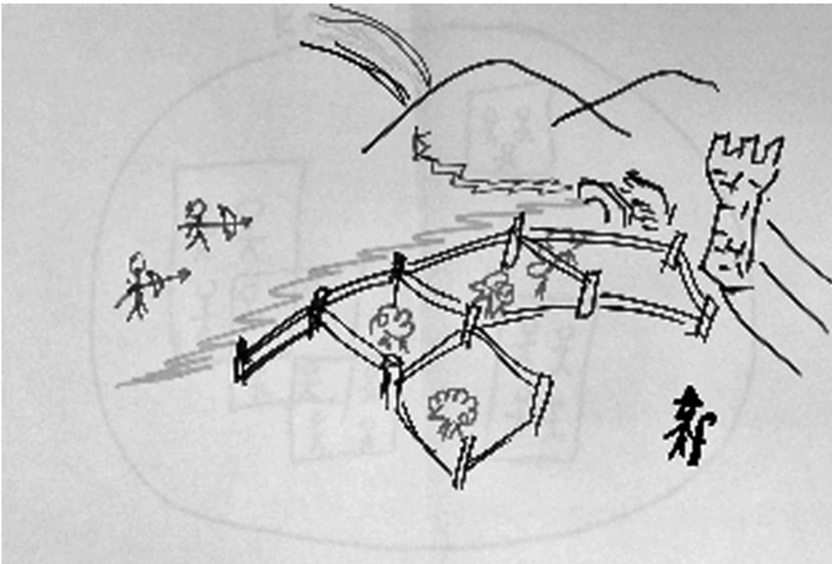

Figure 4. Feudal scene.

> The castle looks like a fortress built to protect us from outside attacks from our stakeholders.
>
> The "shepherd"—the Director—looks like a wicked wizard.

Figure 4.5 shows a chariot rider confronting the barrier of a brick wall.

> We're constantly fighting a battle—with no one in particular—a combination of all the groups.
>
> We're trying to sell a message, but we hit a brick wall.
>
> We're fighting to get people to work with us—inside and outside.
>
> The brick wall is the rules we hide behind.

Figure 4.6. represents the feeling of being stuck in the middle.

> We're stuck in the middle between two groups who don't understand each other.
>
> There are a lot of unhappy people and we're holding people back.
>
> The groups are divided; you need very long arms to try to connect them.

Figure 4.5. Chariot rider facing brick wall.

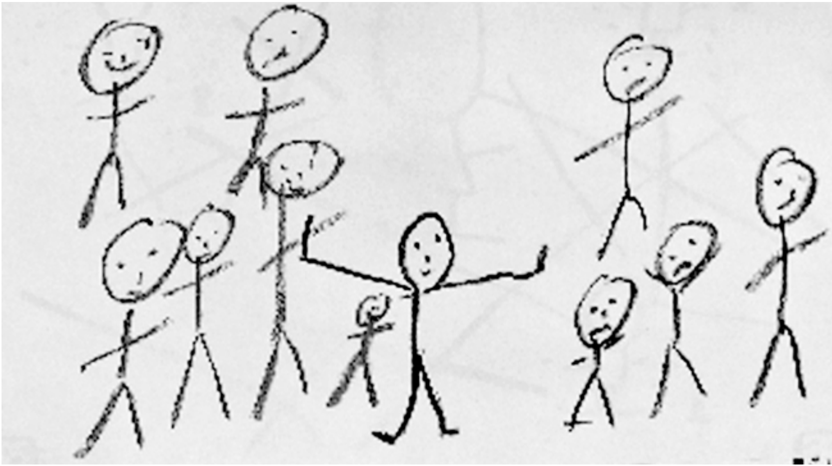

Figure 4.6. Stuck in the middle.

Some obvious common threads in the drawings are the divisions between teams and elements of threat, hostility, or chaos. After the discussions with the groups, the consultants collated and analysed all the associations to the drawings (including our own) from both the interviews and the focus groups and looked for discernible themes in the data that had been created. These became the basis for a working note: a summary of the themes and some working hypotheses about the current work culture.

The next step in the process was to bring all the project participants together for a one-day workshop to explore the findings. Rather than simply present our working note at the beginning of the day, we began by creating a gallery of all the drawings (with permission from the participants—thirty-one in total). Participants were invited to view them and in small groups discuss their associations and what, if any, themes they could discern. For example, were there any recurring images or patterns? Were there any surprises? What overall impressions were they left with? What working hypotheses might they form about the current work culture?

Our experience has been that by working in this way, we are not privileging the consultants' interpretations over those of the clients'. Rather, the hope is that both the consultants' and the clients' work culture diagnoses will be consistent, or if they are different, this also becomes a basis for an interesting discussion of things that might be

observed by the consultants that might be more difficult to see by the clients. In general, by the time we come to presenting our working note, it merely serves to reinforce what they have already discovered as a group about their current work culture. The working hypotheses that we then offer about more hidden (maybe unconscious) aspects of the culture can be more readily engaged with. These hypotheses are just a small step beyond their own diagnosis and might or might not provide a deeper layer of insight. Once this kind of shared understanding of the current state of the work culture has been created, both consultants and clients are in a good position to think about appropriate next steps.

The drawings provided the group with a very powerful visual representation of their shared experiences of the organisation. It was as if the drawings, with their primitive, yet inescapable clarity of expression, helped to open our clients' minds to the issues in a way that the spoken or written word is so often not able to do. It is not just the person drawing who is enabled to find expression, but also those who view the drawing, who, in what they see, connect readily to their own experiences and those of others. As one participant said,

> "It was a bit weird at first, but I found it a lot easier to draw a picture and then talk about it, particularly since my opinion was not one that I would come out and just say in an open forum like that."

These examples also illustrate clearly some of the depth of feeling that can emerge from the work with drawings. This way the work can help individuals and groups to gain a shared and in-depth perspective about the work culture. They can then use this to decide what they would like to change and to refocus their attention and energy on the primary task of the organisation.

Concluding remarks

Through working with drawings, something shifts in the way people work together to develop understanding, to make meaning, and to learn. This shift can take place within the individual as well as in the group, and I believe that sometimes this occurs in the realm beyond what we can consciously name. All we know is that things have

changed in some subtle, yet quite profound way. This puts me in mind of something Armstrong wrote. He seemed to suggest that the work group might become an "arena for transformation" when it engages in its capacity for "serious play". "Or in those moments in a group . . . when people are able to associate to others' material without an irritable preoccupation with ownership and without recourse to a prescriptive idea of 'relevance'" (Armstrong, 1992). For me, this connects to the very heart of what it is to work in a socioanalytic way. There is something in the inherently playful and sensual nature of drawing that helps to create a working space where there is the freedom to engage with the real experience of people in organisations. Drawings seem to enhance people's capacity to think creatively together. It provides a opportunity to "breathe new life" or "fresh air" into a space that might have become saturated in such a way that people feel stifled or so anxious that they are no longer able to think. Sadly, this saturated space is the one in which many people in contemporary organisations work.

If we are prepared to accept the proposition that drawings not only speak the language of the unconscious and create an "arena for transformation", but also speak of more than can be described or captured verbally, it has to be acknowledged that what we have is a very powerful and simple tool that can assist us in the work of creating the opportunity for individuals and groups to increase their capacity for creative work on their primary task.

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