The Management of Counselling and Psychotherapy Agencies

Colin Lago and Duncan Kitchin

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PROFESSIONAL SKILLS FOR COUNSELLORS

The *Professional Skills for Counsellors* series, edited by Colin Feltham, covers the practical, technical and professional skills and knowledge which trainee and practising counsellors need to improve their competence in key areas of therapeutic practice.

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The Management of Counselling and Psychotherapy Agencies

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Foreword

The composition of this book has taken much longer than either our contract with Sage specified or indeed our own expectations forecast. Quite literally, one of us feels he has been 'sleeping on it' for some time, having put the publishers' advance towards a new bed! Rather more seriously, the length of this incubation period has, in part, been determined by the myriad challenges we have been faced with in attempting to address and describe precisely what is required in the management of counselling and psychotherapy agencies.

Almost two decades have now gone by since one of the authors conducted a survey on the establishment of counselling services (Lago, 1981). Many such agencies were then and continue to be, established through the vision, commitment and enthusiasm of their founders (the subject of Chapter 1). The task of management of these organizations has seldom in our experience been considered as of primary importance, certainly in the early years. The vision and commitment have often acted as the binding force for collaboration and productivity. The task of management has, of course, had to be operationalized by various people at various times during these formative stages but our sense is that the need for management in its formal sense has only become fully necessary in the developmental stage following the birth and early infancy of the organization. Before that, enthusiasm and energy will have sufficed to get all the jobs done.

The profession of counselling and psychotherapy has expanded considerably in the last decade of the twentieth century and this development has facilitated the establishment of many more counselling organizations, a wide range of literature, codes of practice and ethics, new training courses and new research. Clients have

also become much more sophisticated and knowledgeable of the field and they in their turn (very appropriately), demand the highest standards of professional practice.

These developments will increasingly place demands on organizations offering therapy that they be managed soundly, ethically and professionally. We believe that this book is therefore a timely contribution to those in the profession concerned with the optimum delivery of therapeutic practices. The management of counselling and psychotherapy services should be of concern to all practitioners, not just those appointed as managers. As Carroll and Walton (1997: 1) have so succinctly expressed it:

> understanding that there is more to counselling than what happens in the counselling room enables counsellors to have an eye and perspectives on the 'contexts' in which the counselling takes place.

The overall management task then, in counselling and psychotherapy organizations, is to provide and sustain an optimal context in which therapeutic services may be delivered with sensitivity, care and professionalism.

Despite the assertion above that management should be of concern to all practitioners involved in counselling organizations we are aware that, in practice, a vast number of therapists want little or nothing to do with management, its activities and processes. At its most extreme, this attitude expresses itself in the oversimplistic division between counselling as the pure ethical, uncontaminated expression of honourable intention and management as a tainted and tainting experience full of compromise, domination and Machiavellian intent!

The authors know each other as a result of working at Sheffield University; one as a (now semi-retired) lecturer in management studies who is also trained as a Gestalt therapist and the other who is the Director of the University Counselling Service. Each author has written several chapters, and as a consequence readers may become aware of their different styles. We hope and trust that any dissonance in these styles will not prove overly problematic.

Their cumulative experiences have incorporated working in industry, the youth service, school and higher education, lecturing in management, providing consultancy and staff training to a wide range of statutory, industrial, commercial and voluntary organizations, involvement with counselling and psychotherapy training

courses, stress management teaching and working for and on behalf of employee assistance programmes.

Various words have been used interchangeably in the text in order to avoid repetition and/or cause reader boredom and stress! Such word clusters include all those terms that relate to the counselling organization and they include: agency, office, service, institution and organization. Unless specified otherwise in the text, references to colleagues, staff and personnel refer to all the categories of staff employed within a service (eg. receptionists, cleaners, counsellors) whether paid or voluntary. The terms manager and management are used interchangeably in the recognition that a variety of models of management are presently practised including those of the lone manager, job shares and management by committee. We have also used the terms counselling, psychotherapy and therapeutic services interchangeably to maintain both reader interest and consistency with the humanistic (American) literature.

We have attempted, as much as possible, to take into account the management needs of the complete spectrum of counselling and psychotherapy agencies, from impoverished voluntary projects operating a time-limited phoneline service two nights per week to professionally established organizations with full-time staffing complements.

Our initial meetings were consumed by brainstorming ideas, one of which attempted just to list the types of organizations now offering counselling and psychotherapy. This list included the following:

■ national phonelines (Childline, HIV helplines)
■ counselling/psychotherapy in GP surgeries
■ specialist psychotherapy units in the NHS
■ school psychological services
■ employee assistance programmes
■ voluntary organizations (Rape Crisis, Cruse, etc.)
■ Relate (and other national bodies)
■ women's therapy centres
■ youth counselling agencies
■ counselling services related to conception, pregnancy, abortions, insemination, etc.
■ 'crisis' response teams and organizations (post-traumatic incidents, bank holdups, etc.)

- local phonelines (Samaritans, Gayline, etc.)
- counselling services in schools, further and higher education
- hospice counselling facilities
- counselling psychology/clinical psychology departments
- in-house counsellors (eg. police force counsellors)
- independent psychotherapists and counsellors.

Inevitably there will be many unique aspects to each type of organization depicted above requiring different elements and facets of management.

As a further part of our preparation we interviewed therapists in and read documents from a sizeable sample of the above organization types.

We (bravely!) made attempts to conceptualize these organizational contexts into matrices from which we might deduce particular management requirements or expertise. Similarly, we attempted to explore the different agencies through both (a) an analysis of their resources and (b) an appraisal of their stakeholders. Though profoundly useful in furthering our knowledge of this very wide spectrum of counselling and psychotherapy organizations our attempts to simplify and conceptually synthesize their management requirements into neat packages were, of course, completely frustrated! We hope, nevertheless, that the contents of this book prove useful to those charged with the task of management of counselling agencies.

McLeod (1994b: 163) notes that there has been very little systematic research on the organizational context of counselling. Further, Carroll and Walton (1997: 1) remind us that 'not to recognise and work with the context in which counselling takes place is to ignore the enormous impact that context has on behaviour'. The book attempts to address the very wide range of issues that are involved in the processes of management of therapeutic contexts. Much as the therapist's task is focused on the client, the service manager or management team must concern themselves with optimizing the therapeutic context in which the therapy takes place, having due regard to caring for, supporting and administering the staff team.

The structure of the book starts from the moment of conception of a counselling agency and proceeds to a consideration of the early days of psychotherapeutic services (Chapter 1). Consequently, both Chapters 1 and 2 have titles featuring building

metaphors ('laying the foundations' and 'building a sound structure'). Quite literally, the context of any organization necessarily starts with its building and location. Issues related to access, decor, maintenance and so on are thus given appropriate prominence in Chapter 2. Staffing, governance and publicity aspects are also introduced here.

Chapter 3 provides a very focused review of many considerations involved in selecting staff. This is always a complicated arena of management activity and given the increasing number of qualified counsellors and therapists job seeking, combined with the plethora of interview and assessment methods available, managers' headaches can only increase!

In an increasingly litigious climate the themes embodied in Chapter 4 (Ensuring Competent, Professional and Safe Practice) and Chapter 5 (Daily Working Practices) will be of primary and daily importance to those occupying management positions. Add to this responsibility the tasks of Managing Crisis (Chapter 6) and we might hypothesize (in the words of Gilbert) 'that a (manager's) lot is not a happy one!'

The book, to this point, has taken as its focus a wide range of concerns that appropriately and legitimately can be described as management activity. What does the manager have to do, how often, with whom, for whom, how, when, why? Many of these issues are detailed in Chapters 1 to 6.

But what of managing itself? What is managing? How is it done? How does someone train for it? What are the challenges and pitfalls? Chapter 7 attempts to address some of these questions. We were concerned that many therapists might suddenly find themselves in management positions having not really been prepared or trained to fulfil such roles.

Earlier in this introduction we alluded to the perceptual and attitudinal splits that can exist between being a therapist and being a manager. Many counsellors have actively chosen to become so, dedicating themselves to professional and personal development in order to offer optimal therapeutic resources to clients. For some therapists, the interviewing room and the individualized focus of the work offers quiet, secluded refuge in which they aspire to assist their clients plant the necessary seeds of growth.

This very special working atmosphere carries with it the danger, we believe, of becoming an entrapping environment for the

therapist. The challenges inherent in management, especially for the promoted therapist could be formidable and not at all desirable. All outside the counselling room is not safe, contained, paced and boundaried! Checking the contents of the first aid box, drawing up staffing schedules, running staff meetings, representing the organization at civic and fund-raising functions, directing colleagues, etc., etc. are considerable challenges. It is our experience that many therapists are now actively not seeking management opportunities precisely because of the perceived demands of the management role. Management, in this sense, may be part of the therapists' shadow world, an element that can be projected upon, ignored, denied, resisted and so on.

This book, however, is for everyone involved in counselling and psychotherapy agencies. Research has indicated how substantive the client's contribution is to the successful outcome of therapy. Similarly, all colleagues involved in counselling organizations have a part to play in the management efforts of those organizations. Teams work much better when pulling together, their final achievements being much more than the sum of their individual parts!

In the words of one author who was involved in the establishment of a counselling service:

> . . . avoid unnecessary committees, keep the organization and language of the venture simple and business like. Don't be seduced by counselling jargon and keep the whole enterprise well spread with humour! (Burrows, 1995: 123)

If only . . . !

Acknowledgements

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Laying the Foundations: Creating a Counselling Service

A considerable number of Counselling Services have become established in the United Kingdom during the last fifteen years. Inevitably, the establishment of these services has reflected an enormous amount of hard work and planning by the various persons and committees involved. Clearly, the nature and philosophy of these emerging projects will reflect both their individual aims and unique structures as well as their more global drive to provide counselling type resources.

(Lago, 1981)

Almost two decades have now elapsed since the article from which the above quote is taken, was written. In this intervening period considerable expansion has taken place within the world of counselling and this is reflected in a much wider range of services now available. Nevertheless, many would argue that the levels and distribution of counselling provision are still inadequate, patchy, under-resourced, over-reliant on voluntary contribution and effort and under-researched. This general inadequacy of counselling facilities exists in the face of an increasing rise in need, demand and expectations of counselling in society at the

present time. Many more counselling services are needed and we hope this book will be helpful to all those involved in such endeavours, as well as to those services already in existence.

Historic Origins

When people ask 'How did the Counselling Centre begin?' the answer is not the short, simple one they probably expect. It is actually a glimpse into the social history representing the changing face of the caring professions in the twentieth century. (James et al., 1985)

The above quote is taken from an article describing the establishment and structure of the Nottingham Counselling Centre and was made in the context of its historical origins in the Charity Organization Society established in 1875. A diagram of organizational development (similar to a family tree) is provided below (see Figure 1.1). From this diagram one may see the emergence of a range of different organizations, with different emphases geared towards serving the needs of the community and reflecting the ideas and concerns of those particular times.
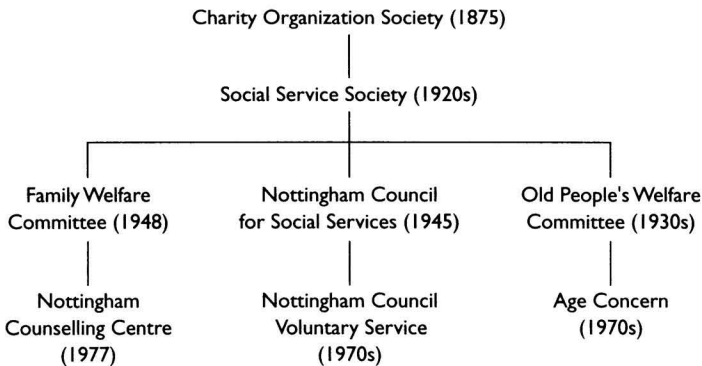
Charity Organization Society (1875)
|
Social Service Society (1920s)

| Family Welfare Committee (1948) | Nottingham Council for Social Services (1945) | Old People's Welfare Committee (1930s) |
| Nottingham Counselling Centre (1977) | Nottingham Council Voluntary Service (1970s) | Age Concern (1970s) |

Figure 1.1   *Diagram of Organizational Development (James et al., 1985)*

An overall analysis of the above diagram reveals that the changes of name and directions of the organization have occurred at intervals of between 25 and 40 years. Many of the counselling services referred to in the opening quote of this chapter will now have been in existence for three or more decades and many