

Problematic behaviour at work: A reflective approach for team- group leaders

David Henchman¹ and Sue Walton¹

Abstract: *This article sets out to describe a model that, in our role of practice facilitators, we have found to be effective in helping team group leaders to reduce problematic behaviour at work. We illustrate the application of the tools and structures comprising the model with examples and consider the underpinning theory. Our methods, which are informed by cognitive behavioural and groupwork theory, have been developed from working as practitioners with individuals and service users in groups over a 15 year period. These methods form the basis for our current work with team group leaders. The article demonstrates how application of the model empowers team group leaders to use their existing managerial skills, knowledge and experience with confidence. It enables them to address problematic behaviour routinely and proactively rather than going down the costly procedural route. As a consequence, this reduces the amount of their time spent on stressful policy and procedure and enables them and their team groups to work towards achieving the aims of the organisation. The tools and structures are equally relevant to anyone involved in running or participating in groups.*

Keywords: *cognitive-behavioural theory; groupwork; leadership; problematic behaviour at work; teams.*

1. Trainer and Facilitator

*Address for correspondence: David Henchman and Susan Walton, Yorke Walton Ltd,
7 Priory Park, Bradford on Avon, Wiltshire, BA15 1QU.
yorkewalton@talk21.com*

Introduction

This article sets out to describe a model that as practice facilitators for the past 10 years we have found to be effective in helping team group leaders to reduce problematic behaviour at work. We illustrate the application of the tools and structures comprising the model with examples and consider the underpinning theory.

Our methods, which are informed by cognitive behavioural and groupwork theory, have been developed from working as practitioners with individuals and service users in groups over a 15 year period. (Henchman and Walton, 1993 and 1998) The training that we do with managers as team group leaders developed out of courses we previously ran for main grade staff in dealing with service user behaviour perceived as challenging. We currently lead learning and facilitation groups in both academic and workplace settings as well as working on a one to one basis with senior team group leaders.

It is our experience, supported by recent research (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, 2007), that, if team-group leaders are introduced to relevant tools and structures they can become confident in their ability to deal with problematic behaviour themselves and less likely to resort to costly disciplinary and procedural measures. The tools and structures that have proved to be effective in this respect form the basis of our training courses. They are equally relevant to anyone involved in running or participating in groups.

The problem of definition

What to call the behaviour we focus on poses ongoing problems of definition and we are aware that we are not the only practitioners who have had to grapple with this issue (Doel, 2004). On the one hand, 'conflict' has connotations of quite extreme behaviour and we know that behaviour that presents big problems can actually be very subtle. In terms of trying to resolve problematic behaviour, if it is seen as 'conflictual' there is the potential for adversarial positions to be taken. On the other hand, 'challenging behaviour' is an alternative term that is widely used. It implies that there is some kind of universally accepted understanding of what the behaviour entails. It is often attributed in

such a way as to suggest that it is a diagnosable condition i.e. 'so and so has got challenging behaviour' and in some instances we have even encountered it as a term to categorise an individual. In fact we know that a behaviour that is challenging to one person might be totally unremarkable to the next person, or even to the first person if it was presented by someone else or at a different time. In other words challenging behaviour, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder. It means different things to different people and we should be wary of its potential for being used as a powerful label with negative consequences.

Furthermore, attributing labels to members of groups on the basis of their behaviour, e.g. 'the joker' or 'the saboteur', in our experience can result in generalised responses to the behaviour that ignore the motivation for it. Approaches that are based on stereotypes are less likely to resolve the issue and often exacerbate the situation (Handy 1993 cited in Elwyn *et al*, 2001).

By way of an alternative we offer 'problematic behaviour'. There is of course the possibility that its usage could also become institutionalised and used as a label that shortcuts reflection. At least at the moment, however, we think that it begs the question 'to whom is the behaviour problematic?' thus encouraging wider exploration and the potential for better understanding.

Overview of the model

Our starting point is that for team-group leaders to be effective at influencing behaviour that they find problematic they must be able to understand what is behind it. Motivation is seldom straightforward so we equip team-group leaders with an approach that enables them to unpick the complexities of the people they are working with as individuals while recognising that they are also members of dynamic organisational groups (Tuckman and Jensen, 1977).

To this end we use an assessment grid (fig.1) that sets the behaviour within the group and, additionally, the organisational context enabling an appreciation of how factors relating to the individual member of staff, the team group leader, the team group and the organisation, interact.

Identifying as many as possible of the situational factors relating to

Fig. 1. Assessment grid

Member of staff	Team Group Leader
Team Group	Organisation

the behaviour and categorising them under these headings facilitates structured reflection and the development of working hypotheses as to what is behind the problematic behaviour. It then becomes possible to devise effective and contextually intelligent (Nye, 2008) strategies for influencing the behaviour.

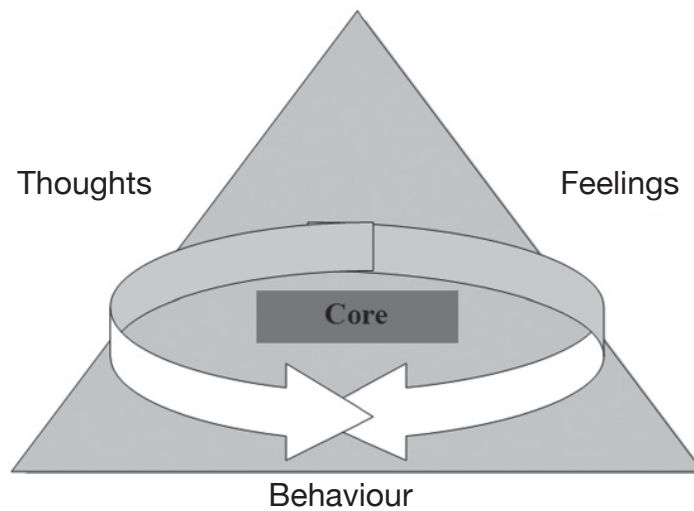
Application of the assessment grid

Member of staff focus

The first step of our approach requires analysis of an example of the problematic behaviour from the perspective of the member of staff presenting the behaviour. We use the Triangle (fig 2) as a structure to achieve this analysis. Informed by cognitive behavioural theory (Trevithick, 2005; Henschman and Walton, 1993; Ross et al., 1986) we work from the premise that all human functioning can be summarised under the following headings: Thoughts, Feelings and Behaviour. There is a constant interplay between what we think, what we feel and how we behave.

This interplay is filtered through what we call the core comprising all the elements that go to make up identity. Central to our model is the belief that by trying to understand the operation of this interplay we can arrive at a deeper and richer appreciation of behaviour.

Fig. 2. Cognitive behavioural triangle



In the context of behaviour perceived as problematic, core beliefs about self, colleagues and figures of authority are of obvious relevance and to register their significance is consistent with other cognitive behavioural approaches. We also borrow from psychodynamic thinking (Hollis, 1977) and include the other elements that go to make up identity such as gender, age, ethnic identity, culture, religion, sexual orientation, history, experience, knowledge, values, roles. In simple terms the core can be thought of as what we carry around with us, our baggage or luggage.

A team group leader adopting our approach will choose a specific example of the behaviour and build up a balanced hypothetical understanding of it using their knowledge, however sparse, of the core of the member of staff's triangle. The team group leader knows what the person did (their behaviour) so can hypothesise what the thoughts and feelings might have been in the light of what they know about the core of the person's triangle.

Rather than talking about behaviour in general, they choose a particular occasion when the behaviour has been problematic and

imagine having a filmed recording of that event. In slow advance mode they can stop the action as it develops and observe each action sequentially. They can enrich their understanding of why the action develops in the way that it does by asking the question at each freeze frame, 'What was the staff member feeling? If they were feeling that, then what might they have been thinking?'

Reflecting on the member of staff's core is a means to help address these questions. That is, in order to understand what someone is feeling or thinking in the here-and-now, we can usefully take account of what else we know about the person. Of particular relevance to us are the aspects of the person's core that are likely to be impinging on the current situation and their beliefs pertaining to what is going on.

This then is a form of functional analysis and a development of an 'antecedents, behaviour, consequences' or ABC approach combined with Critical Incident Analysis, favoured in cognitive behavioural programmes (Henchman and Walton, 1993). We should stress that, at all times, we must remember that we are not engaging in anything other than structured reflection and that we should remain conscious that our recollections of events and opinions about them are subjective. It is only when we are conscious and explicit about them that we can offer them up for scrutiny and critical evaluation.

Practice Example

Dev, an otherwise confident team-group leader is at loggerheads with an older, female member of staff (we shall call her Jane), to whom he is line manager. Jane is an experienced practitioner with valuable skills.

Despite numerous challenges from Dev, she persistently ignores deadlines for specific routine tasks, leaving Dev feeling vulnerable to criticism. Other more complicated tasks she completes efficiently and in accordance with deadlines.

Dev feels angry and powerless. His response is to micro-manage Jane, the effect of which is to exacerbate what he perceives to be her stubbornness to co-operate. Dev's consequent feelings of helplessness and frustration are heightened and he is considering embarking on a more formal method of addressing the situation.

Dev applies our approach to try and understand what is behind Jane

ignoring deadlines. The first step is to collate all the information that he has about the core of Jane's triangle.

Most significantly what emerges at this stage is that, while collating all the factual information he has about her, something that hasn't seemed particularly important previously, assumes a new significance. Despite her years of previous managerial experience, Jane was unsuccessful when she applied for a managerial post at the same time as our younger, male, team-group leader.

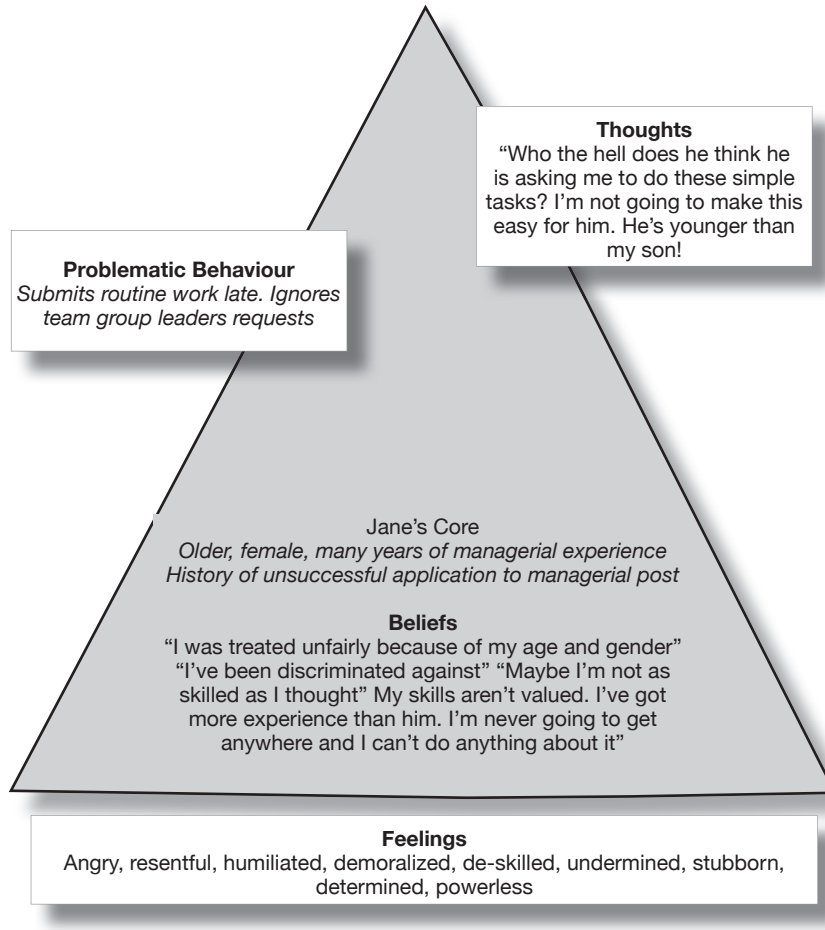
Reflecting on the factual information from the core of Jane's triangle enabled Dev to form some hypotheses about what her beliefs might be about herself, about Dev and about how she has been treated by the organisation. Thus, he can make further assumptions about how her experiences might impact on her thinking and feeling when she is reminded of those experiences by Dev allocating her simple tasks that she considers to be beneath her level of knowledge and experience. Dev thus develops a picture of what Jane's Triangle might look like (see fig 3)

Facts vs. assumptions

The process of forming hypotheses based on assumptions about what someone else might be thinking and feeling raises an issue about which team-group leaders understandably express their discomfort. The process feels unethical and oppressive because they sense that it is wrong to make such assumptions. However we consider that this process is one in which we all constantly engage. It only becomes problematic when we make decisions based upon the assumptions without consciously recognising that they are assumptions.

What we are proposing, instead, is that team-group leaders should become systematically aware of the assumptions that they make and use them as the basis for developing hypotheses about what is behind the behaviour which they can subsequently test. Having undertaken such an exercise a team-group leader is in a position to share their assumptions with the member of staff and thus be able to establish their validity or otherwise. This is something that obviously can't be done if they remain in the mind of the team-group leader in the form of conjecture.

Fig. 3. Triangle analysis



Why is the triangle analysis effective?

The triangle provides a structure that requires that we consider one aspect of being human in light of all the others and with the influence of the core firmly in mind. When we are confronted with someone's behaviour it is all too easy to focus on it in isolation from the reasons for it, especially when it is extreme or because it has a particular impact on our own core.

Using the structure requires us to stop, reflect and remember that behind all behaviours there are accompanying thoughts and feelings i.e. to empathise. Often it is these feelings and unarticulated thoughts that are driving the behaviour. However, we consistently work with highly trained and experienced team-group leaders who struggle to distinguish between a thought and a feeling and this has obvious consequences on their ability to make sense of behaviour and to formulate effective strategies to influence it. Contemporary research into the relevance of emotional intelligence and its impact on how teams function affirms our sense of the importance of the ability of team-group leaders to empathise with their staff and to deal with feelings (Ayoko *et al*, 2008).

The triangle analysis also requires that team group leaders take account of the broader internal context of an individual's behaviour and, when they use their knowledge of the facts about the person's core, they can then make informed assumptions about what the thoughts and feelings might be. In the example above, it was the process of stopping and reflecting that enabled Dev to become conscious of, and to collate, the relevant knowledge about Jane's previous application for a management job. It is when they arrive at a detailed and balanced understanding of the behaviour that team group leaders can influence most successfully. The process of using the structure helps them to step back and achieve this balance.

How can team group leaders use their understanding of behaviour?

The process of making an assessment of a member of staff's triangle is often a ground breaking experience for the team group leader who, maybe for the first time, is reminded that there is a whole person behind that problematic behaviour. A common response we encounter is, 'Well no wonder they do that.' or 'I had forgotten about their good bits and I was only seeing the negatives.'. As Mahatma Gandhi commented, 'Most of the miseries of the world will disappear if we step into the shoes of our adversaries and understand their standpoint' (cited in Elwyn. 2001, p.141).

If procedural measures have already been embarked upon it is likely that the team-group leader will have set themselves ready for a battle.

Sometimes the restoration of a balanced perspective, i.e. a change in the thinking part of the team-group leader's triangle, is all that is required to resolve the problem. If the team-group leader changes how they perceive or think about the problematic behaviour, it follows that how they feel about the behaviour will also change and, with those changes, the pattern of how he or she behaves towards the member of staff will often shift dramatically. They may no longer see the behaviour as problematic or may re-evaluate the behaviour as a symptom of a different problem. (Reid and Epstein, 1972).

At the very least it is usually obvious by this stage that the team-group leader should try a different approach to dealing with the behaviour. The insights gained from considering the person's core, and the thoughts and feelings underlying the behaviour, usually open up a wealth of relevant possibilities of how to proceed.

Not least, there is now an opportunity to share the team group leader's insight with the member of staff, thus demonstrating an attempt to see the situation from the other's perspective, while allowing the opportunity for checking the assumptions made. Helping other people come to an understanding of themselves is a powerful and empowering means of influencing behaviour. Gaining insight into why we behave in the ways that we do is usually the first step to making a change. The process of the team-group leader checking out their assumptions with the other person can have the effect of helping that person to become more self aware.

We are aware that there are approaches that advocate the avoidance of psychodynamic constructs (Harrison, 1983, cited in Elwyn et al., 2001) and advise concentration on adapting behaviours without reference to what is behind them. This apparent simplicity, with the focus on solutions rather than problems, is superficially attractive but our view is that we do not have to avoid the reality that people are complex and have strong feelings, especially when they are in conflict. If team-group leaders adopt an approach that acts against them being overwhelmed by the complexity, they can and should work with reality.

Team-group leaders can sometimes use the power inherent in their role to make a member of staff stop behaving in a way that is a problem to them. If, however, there are strong feelings underlying the behaviour, these will not just go away and we would expect them to emerge in some other form of problematic behaviour.

The behaviour that we observe in others is open to a multiplicity of interpretations but a solution focussed approach would seem to suggest that it is possible to avoid perceiving the behaviour in such a way that, consciously or not, will effect how the team group leader will feel and behave towards the other person. It also seems artificial and potentially damaging to deliberately ignore aspects of someone's identity that we suspect is relevant to their behaviour. It also runs counter to our belief that conscious competence is the preferred state for an effective team group leader. (Race, 1991)

Team-group leader focus

The previous exercise, while demonstrating that the team-group leader has seriously attempted to put themselves in the shoes of the other person, also establishes unequivocally that the team-group leader is a person too, complete with feelings that are affected by the behaviour of the other person. This then introduces the next and equally relevant part of the grid.

Having established that problematic behaviour is defined in terms of its perception as problematic by the team-group leader, it follows that the team-group leader should think about why this should be. Our favoured tool to facilitate the team-group leader's self reflection is again the triangle analysis, used in conjunction with tools that focus on leadership styles.

There are a number of theories that seek to explain the application of power and its impact on individual and group behaviour (Lippit and White, 1953; French and Raven, 1967; Johnson and Johnson, 1987, cited in Henchman and Walton, 2006). Lippit and White's (1953) model (cited in Brown, 1994 p.70) identifies three broad styles of leadership: autocratic, democratic and laissez-faire and a range of leadership behaviours that typifies each. Team-group leaders complete a questionnaire (Clarke, 2002) to encourage reflection and to identify the styles with which they feel comfortable. This exercise promotes insight and enables them to consider the implications of their preferred leadership style and whether it in fact might be a contributory factor to the problematic behaviour of the staff member that they have focussed on.

This is a useful starting point for critical reflection, although we rarely meet team-group leaders who want to be autocratic or laissez-faire. They are value-laden labels and there is a tendency for the democratic style to be the one that they aspire to. We agree with the view that there is no best or ideal management style, rather an effective team-group leader has to be able to perform the leadership behaviours associated with each of the styles when it is appropriate. (Blake and McCanse, 1991 cited in Elwyn et al., 2001. p2.76).

Accordingly team-group leaders are encouraged to use the PMI, a critical thinking tool devised by Edward de Bono (1986), to consider in a more open way that each style involves advantages (Plus), disadvantages (Minus) and neutral but interesting (I) aspects for the team group leader, the team and the organisation. Consequently they can invent their own labels and a good example of a set of labels deriving from a PMI, that do not have implicit value loading, is 'task focussed', 'team focussed' and 'self actualising'.

Practice example: applying the learning about team group leader's triangle

In the case of Dev and Jane, the team-group leader described his feelings of anger, helplessness and powerlessness. Having considered any elements of his core that might be impacting on his feelings when dealing with this member of staff, he recognized that his relative youth and inexperience were factors that led him to question his ability to perform his role.

Further to this he reflected that his ethnicity and gender were factors that certainly had a bearing on how he perceived his older female member of staff, as well as how he thought others might perceive him.

Obviously none of this was completely new to him but it was the first time that he had considered all of these aspects together in a systematic and structured way. The process of doing so enabled him to see that there was a direct link between his feelings of vulnerability about his role and his resultant decision to micro-manage Jane. It was this insight that directly resulted in him changing his behaviour.

It also enabled him to view his triangle alongside Jane's triangle (literally on the same piece of paper) and he commented on the impact

of seeing that they shared the same feelings of anger and powerlessness.

In terms of how he might use these insights about his own feelings, he decided that, when he started having creeping doubts about his ability to perform his role, he would refer to his triangle and reflect on his many qualifications. He would run over his factually successful experience of being a team-group leader and, if necessary, read through summaries of positive appraisals. He was confident that by changing his behaviour in this way, he could influence how he felt and thought.

If he had concluded that, on reflection, his feelings of lack of confidence were deriving from a lack of knowledge or skills, he could have identified relevant training needs. In the event he realised he could do something about his feeling of being alone. He had clearly identified what the issues were and with this clarity felt confident that he could go to his line manager for support.

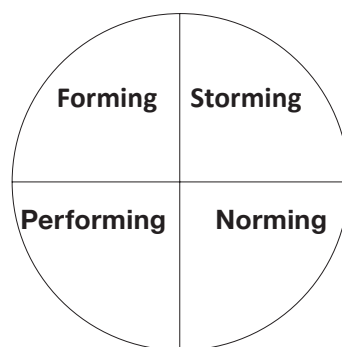
Team-group focus: The big picture

Thus far we have used the triangle analysis together with other tools that encourage reflection to try to understand and then influence individual behaviour. We now need a structure to help us consider the possibility that the behaviour might stem from issues relating to the team-group.

For example in a newly convened group of individuals that is going through a process of getting to know each other and working out who does what, we can expect there to be anxieties, disagreements and the potential for conflict between individuals. If the team-group leader perceives the behaviour to be problematic he or she can decide to address each individual separately. It is possible that, in this way, the reasons for the anxiety come to be understood and addressed. This could be a lengthy process but, even if it is successful, it misses an opportunity for a process to begin that ultimately results in the team becoming a group that deals with conflict itself.

Such groups thrive on the creative potential of individuals expressing their different opinions and passionately held beliefs about the best way to achieve the team's aims. To arrive at this more desirable outcome the team-group leader needs to stop and reflect. When considered in its group context, the conflict can be regarded as entirely consistent with a group in its infancy. This thinking enables him or her to initiate a

Fig. 4. Tuckman (1965) Stages of small group development

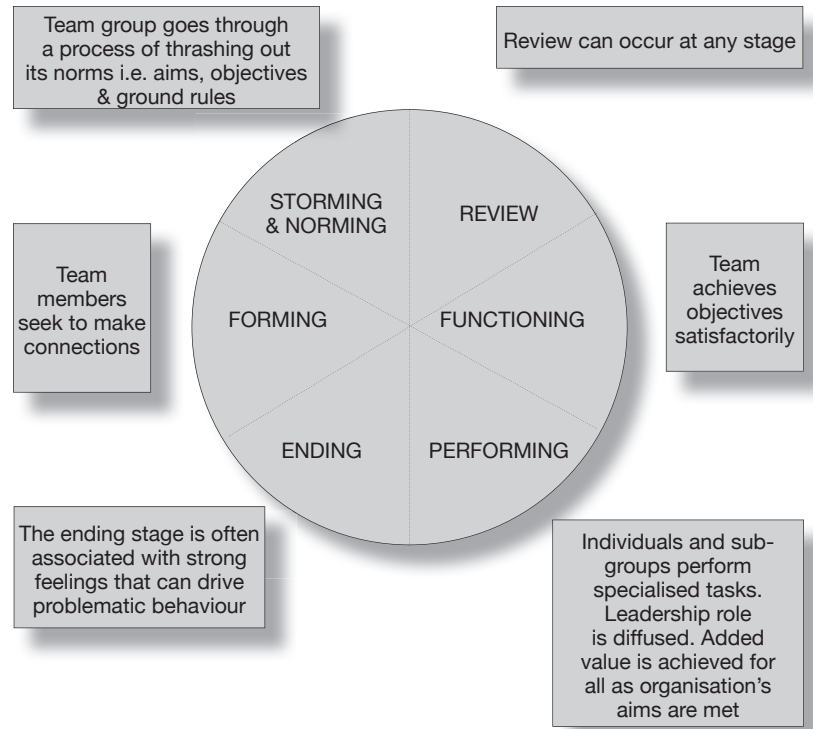


process by which the individuals share with each other their anxieties and air disagreements, rather than rushing in to try to quell the anxiety.

Similarly, a well established and effective team that is to be disbanded, due to organisational changes, is a team in which we can expect strong feelings and powerful behaviour, relating to the end of the existing team group (Preston-Shoot, 2007, pp.139-140). The behaviour will be presented by individual team members and the team group leader has the same option to deal with the behaviour on an individual basis. To do so would however ignore an opportunity for the team-group to have the sort of positive ending that can derive from a joint expression of regret at the passing of something valuable and a celebration of the team-group's achievements.

We have found Tuckman's (1965 and 1977) often quoted but, in our experience, seldom used model to be a particularly useful tool that facilitates critical reflection about what is happening at the group level. (Fig 4). He initially identified four stages of development and suggested groups need to experience all four before they achieve maximum effectiveness. He later developed the model with the addition of a fifth stage (Tuckman and Jensen, 1977) that recognises the ending or adjournment of a group. We would concur with Schön's view (Schön, 1983, cited in Smith, 2005, p.5) that his model 'provides a metaphor or image that we can play with to make sense of the phenomenon before us'. We have 'played with the metaphor' and developed the model to make sense of our observations of problematic behaviour and the group process (fig. 5).

Fig 5. Tuckman's model as modified by Yorke Walton 2007



Our experience as facilitators of literally hundreds of groups (both of service users and teams) leads us to the conclusion that the processes of storming and norming usually proceed simultaneously. Part of norming is that members express their differing and sometimes strongly held views about the purpose of the group, how it should be achieved and how individuals should behave towards each other, i.e. if they disagree, they storm about what their norms should be. Storming, thus, is a normal (particularly when the personnel in staff teams are constantly changing) and vital part of group development and recognition of it as such can help the team-group leader to respond to it positively. We have, thus, modified the model by combining the storming and norming stages to emphasise that you cannot have the latter without the former.

In common with the anxieties implicit in forming, already referred to above, our experience is that there is also potential for storming and

norming behaviour to be seen as problematic by team-group leaders. This might be because it is perceived as a failure in their leadership or because of the perceived imperative to protect the team-group from disharmony. There is a consequent danger that the team group leader might attempt to 'manage away' behaviour by discouraging the expression of differences of opinion about what the norms should be, thereby driving the conflict underground and making it far more difficult to address.

It is another waste of an opportunity to promote the development of the team-group. A meaningful negotiation of the team's norms is a vital part of group development and we would propose that the quality of the process of negotiation has a major bearing on the degree to which team members will really buy into the norms. It is this process that enables group norms to become rooted in the core of individual team members. It is only when norms are explicit that they can be used as a reference point for dealing with problematic behaviour and getting the team group back on course when it deviates. The absence of a meaningful process can result in the development of unspoken or underground norms based on power and precedence, that can determine anything from who does the washing up to whether or not team aims are pursued. The potential for behaviour that is problematic is thus likely to be greater (Doel, 2004; Doel, 2006) as is the potential for oppressive behaviour.

Further to combining storming and norming we have adopted two additional stages relevant to influencing problematic behaviour: the review stage and a functioning stage, which occurs before performing (fig. 5). In a departure from Tuckman's (1965; 1977) linear structure, review can and should be undertaken at any stage in the process when the team-group departs from agreed norms and it can be a powerful and empowering means for the group to get back on course. The potential for review in this respect is further enhanced when it is explicitly acknowledged from the outset that the team-group will, without doubt, go 'off course' and that this is not a problem as long as 'review' is built into the process. (Jeffers, 1987)

Functioning we interpret as a stage when the group is satisfactorily achieving its aims and objectives without achieving the full potential of the individuals working together as a group. By way of an analogy, this is like a group of session musicians getting together and accurately churning out pieces of music as required. The advanced stage equates

to Tuckman's (1965) 'performing' stage and happens when 'the whole becomes greater than the sum of its parts' (Aristotle [ca. 364BC]). Then, the leadership role tends to be shared, individuals and sub-groups are able to specialise without threatening the integrity of the whole and the aims and objectives of the team are met with added value for all concerned.

To follow the previous analogy, this equates to a band that might be performing the same piece of music as the session musicians but, when playing it, improvise and perform solos that give the performance an additional quality that can't be simply measured in terms of the accuracy of the notes played. Whilst it is inevitable that team-group leaders are likely to experience problematic behaviour even at these advanced stages of team group development, the spur to reaching the performing stage is that such groups do not rely on the team-group leader exclusively to deal with problematic behaviour. The resolution of problems is perceived as an opportunity to create energy and debate that can lead to more creative solutions.

Organisational focus ... the bigger picture

The first stage of the model was the analysis of an individual's problematic behaviour and the identification of factors that relate solely to the individual. We broadened our understanding by recognising that the team-group leader, to whom the behaviour is problematic, is a key player, so we focussed on them too. The individual and the team-group leader operate within a group context, so we also focussed on team factors. The team group is usually part of a bigger organisation that operates in a wider world. It is consideration of what is going on at this wider level that helps us to gather the final pieces of our assessment jigsaw. Typically, the factors that are identified at this level relate to organisational policies and have a bearing on every individual within the organisation. Constant change, restructuring and multi-disciplinary working are factors that team-group leaders regularly identify as significant.

Organisations exist within a wider social and political context of which we should also take account. The law imposes a framework within which organisations must operate and the resultant dilemmas,

tensions and stress have a knock on effect all the way through the organisation. For example, data protection legislation requires that care professionals follow strict procedures which may delay their attempts to protect a child. Human rights legislation requires that workers involved in residential care must balance individual choice with a duty of care. The government initiates measures to improve standards, introduce targets and measurable outcomes to evaluate performance. Organisations undergo inspections and clearly all of these measures have an impact on the stress levels of individuals, team-groups and their team-group leaders.

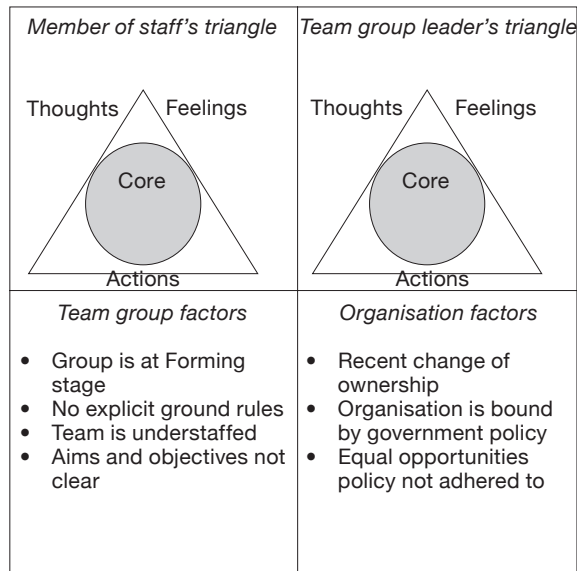
Practice example

In Dev's case he worked in a local authority. Relevant factors included the organisation's policy on equal opportunities. Despite there being a robust policy, both he and Jane believed that the policy wasn't protecting them. The consequence for each of them was a sense of vulnerability. Dev's vulnerability was exacerbated by pressure to meet performance targets. Another factor operating at this level was the organisation's recruitment policy which had a bearing on the make up of the team and the allocation of work. Dev felt pressurised into allocating tasks for which Jane was over qualified and she felt deskilled and concentrated on work that she considered in line with her abilities.

Having made the connection between his employer's recruitment policy and his feelings of being under pressure, Dev was better able to reflect on the consequences of his actions on Jane's feelings and to understand why she was not meeting deadlines. Recognising that she too was feeling vulnerable, enabled him to come to an understanding of her behaviour. Now that he understood it, he was no longer frustrated and angered by it and could clearly see that to influence the behaviour he would have to take account of how organisational factors were affecting them both.

We have now identified a range of factors relevant to a single example of behaviour from one member of staff. The resulting picture would include the details in the staff member and team-group leader's boxes but otherwise might look something like the example in figure 6.

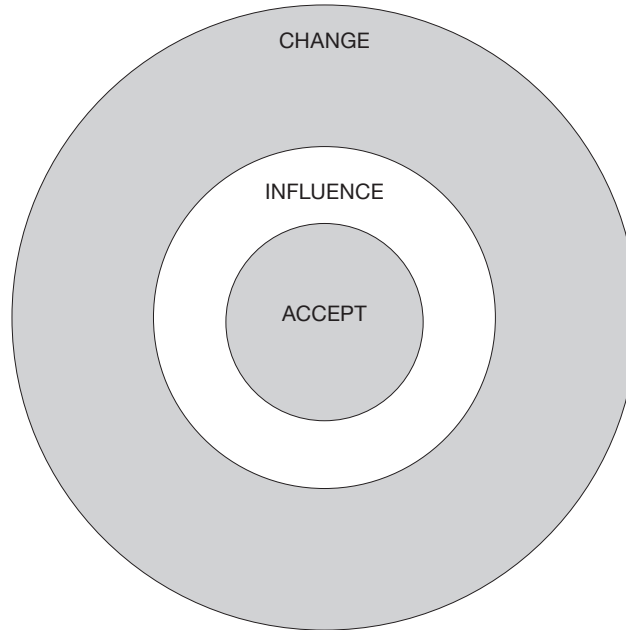
Fig. 6. The completed assessment grid



Some team-group leaders have expressed their sense of being overwhelmed by seeing in print what they are up against when they consider that they have whole teams to deal with. This feeling will be allayed by the application of our final tool which we refer to as C.I.A., standing for Change, Influence and Accept. (Thompson, 2006). Some of the factors on the grid the team-group leader will have the power to change, others they might have to accept and the rest they will be able to exert some influence over.

Given the potential for feeling overwhelmed it is important that a team-group leader can make the distinction between what factors they can change or influence and what they must accept. Application of the C.I.A. facilitates reflection on this distinction and enables them to put their energy only into what they can change or influence. It is often a key moment for team-group leaders when they realise the factors that they have the power to change, for the most part, fall inside the box that relates to them. Specifically it is only their actions and thoughts

Fig. 7. CIA



that they have the power to change as well as some aspects of their core, e.g. lack of knowledge or a particular belief.

In contrast to those team group-leaders who find the stark reality of the picture as set out in the grid overwhelming, there are those who have stated that it is an accurate illustration of the difficulties inherent in their role. One likened the four boxes of the grid to being like four juggling balls that she, as a team-group leader, is required to keep up in the air at the same time, constantly having to balance the interests of the organisation, the team group and the individual. It was a point of great clarity for her that, unless she was also able to take account of her interests, she wouldn't be able to address those of the others.

Other applications of the assessment grid

Situations change all the time and the assessment should be constantly revisited and reviewed. Because it is a written document it lends itself

to being shared with staff, colleagues and team-group leaders with a view to critical evaluation. The assessment can become a living tool for professional development purposes for both team-group leader and member of staff. We also have evidence of it being used to influence change at higher levels within the organisation, its comprehensive and coherent nature proving powerfully persuasive.

Conclusion

Our experience is that the assessment grid model equips team-group leaders with the knowledge and tools that encourage reflection and a thorough understanding of the problematic behaviour. By completing a structured but dynamic assessment that takes account of the context of the behaviour, the relevance of organisational issues, the stage of team-group development and factors relating to team-group leader and staff member, the team group leader is then able to develop an action plan that focuses only on the elements that he or she has the power to change or influence.

The anecdotal evidence is that, when they have applied this approach, it empowers team-group leaders to use their existing managerial skills, knowledge and experience with confidence. It enables them to address problematic behaviour routinely and proactively rather than going down the costly procedural route. As a consequence, this reduces the amount of their time spent on stressful policy and procedure and enables them and their team-groups to work towards achieving the aims of the organisation, while taking full account of themselves, the team-group and the individuals who comprise it.

Finally there is the question of how much time it takes to make the assessment and carry out the resultant action plan. It is self evident that of course it does take time. It is equally the case that the time it takes will reduce with practice. The assessment grid can also be used in a variety of ways that could speed up and enhance the effectiveness of tasks, like supervision and staff development, that are being done anyway.

Most persuasive are the statistics from the Chartered Institute for Professional Development (2007, p.32): 'Employers on average spend 351 days of HR and management time dealing with conflict.' Our

response to the question, 'Where am I going to get the time to make such an assessment?' is to suggest that the questioner estimates how much time they currently devote to dealing with the problematic behaviour and asks whether they have the time not to do it?

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