How do we generate our living theories of caring in the restructuring of a Carer's Centre?

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Abstract

The authors are the CEO and Deputy CEO of a Carer's Centre charity and an independent human resources consultant. The authors have researched their influence in the restructuring of the Centre. Within this context, the paper explores the generation of living theories of care giving (Hutchison, 2013) using a values based approach which listened to staff, provided staff with open and honest feedback and adjusted the restructure to meet the feedback received. Our learning was influenced by Living Theory, Whitehead (1989, 2013) as we wanted to live our values in practice. When we found ourselves to be living contradictions we wanted to learn how to improve our practice to move our practice more in line with our values. We were influenced by Dadds' and Hart's (2001) ideas on 'methodological inventiveness' which stresses the importance of practitioner-researchers generating their own methodologies for exploring the implications of their questions. We were influenced by literature on transactional analysis Berne (1964) and Theory Y McGregor (1960). Kubler-Ross (1969) Grief Cycle and Lewin's (1947) Change management model – 'Unfreezing. Moving, Refreezing' provided a traditional theoretical framework to the restructure. However, Hutchison's (2013) living theory of care giving in which individual's seek to live their value of care-giving provided a unique analytic framework which includes the clarification and communication of the individual's expression of 'care-giving', with digital visual data and empathetic resonance (Huxtable 2009). Our research findings have shown the process of restructuring is difficult for people leading to loss of trust, closed communication, increased inter team tension and splitting. Despite this we have found the final outcome has seen a renewed commitment to the organisation, greater sense of purpose and an increase in positive energy.

Introduction

This paper begins by explaining living theory which is the methodology used in this paper. Each author then tells their story to explain where our values come from in practice which form the basis for our living standards of judgement which we measured ourselves against and which changed the entire nature of the restructure as our values remerged in this process. We will briefly look at what happened in the process of restructuring and then explore the learning that came out of our research for each of us, the learning of others and the learning that is applicable for other social formations.

Methodology

We are using a living theory methodology (Whitehead, 1989, 2008, 2012, 2013, 2014). The key characteristics of living theory methodology are that it is ethically driven and that as researchers we take a personal responsibility for what we are doing in our research. As we are researching our values emerge in practice and we have found it is necessary to have a belief in the process. Living Theory has a methodological inventiveness (Dadds and Harts, 2001) which means as a research practitioners we are actively looking for methods and methodologies which we will draw on through our research because they work within our value base and fit with what we are enquiring into. Living Theory gives all researchers a responsibility through the research for human flourishing. This means not just making change for change sake but because the change will encourage human flourishing meaning the research will make a difference to people in a positive way.

Living theory is interested in different types of learning, as living theorists we start with ourselves and ask ourselves, what is our learning? We then look at what is the learning of others whom we have worked with. We then consider what is the learning of social formations. Meaning how can we spread our learning to other communities, so that it is not just about our personal learning, it is not even just about the learning of those around us, it is about how we can spread our learning further?

Living theory has a different standard against which the research is judged which is a living standard of judgement (Charles, 2007), which means our values become our living standards of judgement against which we judge our research against. Basing research on values has led to criticism of living theory for not being objective. It is of course true that the research is not objective it is based on our subjective view point, however in order to ensure our claims are rigourously validated we have used Habermas four criteria and Winter's tests of rigour (1989).

We have paraphrased Habermas's criteria (1976) and asked validation groups and each other, is what I claim to have claim we have learnt right, understandable, authentic and truthful? This opens us up to the risk of criticism and new ways of thinking from the responses we get but also offers us a collaborative approach to improve our writing and our learning, ensuring that our writing meets Winter's criteria for rigour.

In order to identify where our values come from as authors we will begin by telling our stories. Auto-ethnography has been criticised for being self-indulgent and narcissistic (Coffey, 1999). To counter such criticisms we are clear that by understanding our stories it will become clear where our values comes from. Without bringing our stories to the research we are unable to identify how we came to hold the values against which we judged ourselves which is key to being able to use a living theory methodology.

Sonia Hutchison

CEO of the Carers' Charity

My Story

I was born to a couple who were already a concern to social services and was born with my name on a child protection register, my mother was of German/Polish descent who has schizophrenia and drug issues and my father was from English/Scottish/black West African descent and had schizophrenia and drug and alcohol issues. After being in short-term care twice I was moved into long-term care at the age of three. Educational outcomes for children in care are expected to be low only 13.2% gain 5 GCSE's A-C compared with 57.9% of the general population http://ewww.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000930/sfr08-2010.pdf only 6% go to university compared to 38% of young people http://www.education.gov.uk/researchandstatistics/datasets/a00196857/children-looked-after-by-las-in-england. These figures were lower when I was in care. Children born to two schizophrenic parents have 36.6% (Slater and Cowie, 1971) chance of developing schizophrenia.

There are many more negative statistical predictions for my life, however, I have not become a self-fulfilling prophecy (Merton, 1968) but instead have thrived to become a Chief Executive of a Carers' Charity and been recognised for a community achievement of the year award for my tireless work in the local community. I am motivated to be the change I want to see in the world (paraphrasing Gandhi, 1913) and to support others to do the same. My values have emerged from my experience of these being given to me as a child, values of hope, love, justice and participation.

My foster family and friends did not tell me I would become the negative statistics I have quoted but held open a space for me that showed me there were other possibilities, even though I researched schizophrenia and the care system and was aware of these statistics as a young person. My meaning of hope is based on knowing that things could be a story of ruin and wreckage but having a space held open for better possibilities.

My family and friends loved me in an active force to make my life better, my foster parents had a deep conviction to provide a loving environment where I could flourish and as I grew up my friends were supportive to do the same. I remember my foster mum telling me at a young age that love was not a word but an action.

As a child I remember watching programmes about the deep south in America and being moved by the injustice of the racism depicted, my foster parents always encouraged me to talk about my views and I was able to explore my views on justice. Whilst I didn't always share my foster parents views I was brought up sharing the view that people deserve to be treated fairly and not treated differently because they were different. My experience of being in foster care potentially made me different but I felt I deserved the same opportunities as my friends and never hid that I was fostered as I didn't feel I should be ashamed about it.

Due to my experience of being in care I had lots of opportunities to be listened to as even back in the 1980's social service wanted to hear the voice of the child. A social worker gave me a leaflet about the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) when I was aged 12. The leaflet explained Article 12, which Alexander Nurnburger, aged 9 had translated into plain English and said: 'Whenever adults make decisions that will affect you in any way, you have the right to give your opinion, and the adults have to take that seriously'. I felt generally this was the case with the social workers I had and that my foster parents brought me up not to feel I was the next generation but that my voice was already important as a child.

In my research I felt it was important to check that I remembered my childhood accurately and asked my foster mum to have a video conversation with me to validate my memories. The picture below shows the moment at the end of the video where my foster mum look up at my foster dad. I can see a real sense of love as we look up and our faces express the love we feel.

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pTwQ9FWxuRI&feature=youtu.be

During the video conversation mum says that social workers were 'always careful to listen to you and seek your views' 1:12. This meant that from a young age I was used to being listened to by adults making decisions in my life. Also mum talks about her mum being respectful by listening, paying attention and valuing children's views and that mum had this as a role model. Therefore I was fortunate to have the experience of being listened to from the important adults in my life and I can see where my belief as a child came from to be listened to. Mum confirms that I had many opinions about things as a child (3:36) and that I was confident to articulate these.
I found having this conversation with my mum really affirming and helped me to feel I had an accurate memory of where my values came from and that the video really

reflected the love I have in my family.

My role is as a CEO of a Carers' Centre for a small unitary authority for over four years. I am working in an environment 'where Governments are downsizing and privatizing due to fiscal pressures on budgets and due to a recognition of the limits of the state as a deliverer of social services.' Austen (2000 p. 69) Under my leadership the Centre has gone from an income of £338,582 and 8.7 full time equivalent staff in the year 2009-10 to £648,203 14.4 full time equivalent staff in the year 2013-14. During 2013 we had another growth spurt and took on the Young Carers Service due to being successful in a tender for the contract of the service. Our success made us more than double the size of the organisation when I began. At this point we began to have some staffing related difficulties which resulted in a senior manager leaving and some negotiations taking place. As a result it looked like we were unlikely to meet our contractual obligations if we did not make some significant changes. I realised that our structure was not fit for purpose and needed a more serious overhaul than the organic expansion we had been doing with the new contracts we had been winning.

As a CEO I try to live my values in practice and hold myself to account to the values of love, hope, justice and participation (Hutchison, 2013). However, we had a reduced senior management team which meant I was working to cover lots of roles and was feeling tired and too busy. Both these states make me less able to consider others and their needs and less able to hold space open for better possibilities. I felt the legalistic sense of justice had taken over due to the employment law we had to work under and I felt I was not able to treat people fairly but just in a defensive way to protect the organisation under the law. Finally I felt I was not including people because there were things that were confidential meaning staff could not participate. I felt I was entirely living outside of my values and a living contradiction (Whitehead, 2008). On top of that I was feeling bruised as I felt I had made a number of mistakes and wanted to make sure they did not happen again.

I began by getting help from someone I felt shared my values and had the skills I lacked, a consultant that was well known to the field of Carers' Centres and had helped a number of other Carers' Centres with restructures and working with the other Senior Managers.

Chris Hickey
Charlton Associates – Director

I'm driven strongly by a belief that life is a socially constructed (Kuhn, 1962) value-based search for meaning through seeking a shared understanding with people I encounter. The values I strive to live most strongly are truthfulness, openness, honesty and fairness. My family influences are caring, education and the law with a fair sprinkling of doctors, teachers and lawyers in my parents and grandparents generations. My own upbringing in a raucous Irish catholic household was strongly influenced by a strict version of Catholicism that emphasised personal and social duty and responsibility, laced with a lingering sense of historical injustice of the treatment

of the Irish. This led to my strong drive to see justice and fair play socially, professionally and politically. My 36 year career has been in teaching and social work that has metamorphosed into promoting organisational justice through my work as an independent consultant.

In my current work I seek to encourage much clearer and more direct communication between managers and staff with a determination to reduce and eliminate oppressive and unjust management. I combine this with promoting hard work, effort and engagement by all to achieve a common goal.

There are two imperatives for me that support a better understanding of working relationships in hierarchical organisations. The first is the need to develop and grow a genuine search by the manager to understand how it is for the employee. This is best done through asking 'how are you?' and 'how can I help you?' This is balanced by the second imperative that is the need for managers to give clear, balanced and truthful feedback to employees. It is my experience that it is this second element that managers find the most difficult. Managers either give too much praise or too much criticism and achieving the tricky 'Goldilocks' position of just enough of either (or both) is a much needed and little practiced skill.

The challenge of being honest with people in a hierarchical relationship with differential power is the investment needed to build a trusting and open dialogue. The situation mitigates against employees readily admitting doubts, weaknesses or failures that hand the manager opportunities to sack them. Managers themselves are often inhibited in acknowledging similar failings for fear of undermining their authority and handing an employee a stick to beat them with.

David Trumper
Deputy Chief Executive

My key value is fairness there is no big experience that led to that. Having two things in my life that could be perceived a hurdles was being gay which made me to care about equality and having a disability made me care about equality. The fairness is about getting buy in and commit to what we are trying to achieve. It's about a dialogue and an agreement about where we are going and it is more likely to work. This has led to equality, fairness and respect.

The Restructure

Chris will tell the story from his perspective for this paper as he has the experience of having supported many restructures and seeing the similarlities and differences from his years of experience. Whereas for David and I we had little experience and were struggling with where to begin.

I was invited to help the Carers' Centre in BaNES to review their structure in the aftermath of a difficult and challenging staffing issue. We embarked upon a change process designed to address the underlying organisational and structural issues rather than take an organisational sledgehammer to crack a single staff nut. My initial engagement didn't feel any different from a number of similar exercises I had conducted in the past and I approached it with a process and structural frame of reference.

We began with a series of discussions within the management team talking about what was happening at the Carers Centre and what needed to change. The initial sense from the managers was that, given it is a relatively small organisation (20 staff) with a very clear set of targets and outcomes set by the funder, what was needed were some changes that could be made relatively straightforwardly. The early conversations assumed a traditional approach that saw the management team crafting a solution and presenting it to the team.

There were 4 three hour meetings over a month with plenty of contact in between to explore all aspects of the organisation and explore a range of possible structures. What I found particularly exciting was the sense that we were completely free and unconstrained and that this was an organically driven change fuelled by dissatisfaction throughout the organisation and there was not only an expectation of change but a demand from everyone that change should happen sooner, rather than later.

We were aware that the meetings were causing heightened anxiety in the team as the perception was the managers were meeting 'in secret' to discuss making changes to the team. We understood that any change is unsettling and can seldom be achieved overnight but felt the best course would be to get through the changes quite quickly as the solution to staff anxieties.

We needed to come up with a viable, workable and affordable structure that met the needs of the funders; the needs of the organisation to have a better grip on what was happening; to end confusion and uncertainty in the team and make it possible to make changes in the future without having to change everything.

The early part of our discussions saw the management team create a new structure based on our interpretation of the needs of the organisation and this was done largely at the first session. The next two meetings centred much more on philosophical discussions on the nature of engagement with staff and desired types of management styles and behaviours. It was at this point that the exercise began to take on a significantly new and previously absent dimension.

It became clear that there was quite a difference in management approach evident in the group. Much of the discussion we were having about the drivers for change centered on the different nature of the contract from previous agreements with the local authority. The current contract is a much tougher, clearer set of expectations from previous iterations and there are clear and unambiguous targets for service

delivery that go beyond what the centre has ever delivered. This pushed us in the direction of pursuing a similarly tough, clear and unambiguous approach with staff along the lines of 'shape up or ship out', get on with it etc. with little sympathy for expressions of concern or anxiety by staff, leaving anxiety about achieving the targets firmly with the individual.

Exploring this potential shift in approach created some psychological discomfort, as whilst it was superficially appealing it would require a new management style that emphasised the use of power and control in a setting where these elements were less emphasised. The discussion centred on whether this approach was the right one to use. It was agreed that employees were clearly not meeting the targets and were perceived at some level to be out of control.

By moving the debate away from behaviour and style towards exploring underpinning values it became clear that this approach did not sit well with values of participation, love, justice and hope. In fact a 'tough' approach to managing people represented a strong challenge to all of these values and would be difficult to enact in the centre because it would be so far from current practice.

My role at this stage was in facilitating the discussions, teasing out the different strands and trying to stay relatively neutral. I was able to bring in experiences from the past to support or challenge positions but saw my primary role as promoting dialogue. I am instinctively a risk taker and as we progressed through the discussions I became less neutral and more engaged by the possibilities created by the fact that this group really controlled its destiny. We were free to take whatever approach we wanted so, rather than simply and quickly create a new structure and crack on, we could attempt something much more challenging to all of the team. My realisation of my own power and that of the management group where we were experiencing hope for a better future, full participation in creating change, love of our colleagues and a strong sense of helping to create a fairer and better organisation could be extended to the whole team.

The discussion moved to articulating a different approach based on the shared values where managers engaged in debate about the targets, tolerated wider variations in performance and shared the anxiety of achieving the target between the employee and the manager. This would have to start from the base of participation. There were a number of discussions about the role of managers, the role of employees, what response should be made to the sense that generally the staff were feeling unhappy implementing the new contract and unhappy about changes in management style. What was agreed was the need to engage with the team in this debate.

The restructure changed in nature from a top down imposed solution to a dialogue with the team. We held a day long engagement session at which we began with a blank sheet and asked the team to identify the problems they encountered at work in doing their job. This was arranged into themes that small teams took away and fleshed out. These thoughts, problems and issues were then collated, written down

and taken away by the management team to use as the basis for creating a structure to solve the identified problems.

Key to this was the document that identified every problem and issue raised by any team member. This was taken away and an answer to each and every point was written down as an accompaniment to the new structure and used as a test of the efficacy of the plans. When it came to presenting the new structure to the team what was self evident to everyone was that it obviously addressed the issues identified by the team and provided elegant solutions to the problems everyone was experiencing.

What made it different?
Restructuring is an integral part of organisational life. There can hardly be a single person reading this who has not been involved in any number of organisational re-ordering of the deck chairs. The thing that has raised this restructuring above the mundane is the way in which the management team became sensitised to their values and moved from simple considerations of process and structure to add a third dimension.

By exploring and articulating our value base and discovering how much of it was shared meant we avoided going down a very different and difficult route that would have created more problems than it solved as the change in style required would have almost certainly promoted more conflict within the organisation not less.

By synchronising our values with our behaviour we were able to be totally authentic in presenting the work to the team and because the values of participation, love, justice and hope have deep roots in most people it struck a chord with them and helped create a new dynamic in the team that has released potential, reduced conflict, created energy and enhanced commitment.

My normal experience of restructuring is that at the end of it change is achieved but the difficulties of achieving the change has left people feeling bruised and battered rather than energised and enthused. Most change processes occur in a values vacuum. Organisational goals and priorities dominate and the majority of employees are involved but not engaged. This usually increases people's cynicism and disengagement and frequently lowers morale.

Our Learning

Sonia Hutchison's Learning

My learning from this experience

It is now nearly a year since we restructured and the new structure is working incredibly well, I am very proud of the staff that stepped up internally into Senior Officer Roles and have moulded and shaped their teams and I am very proud that the staff that have had new line managers and for some misgivings about the restructure

have stepped up to the challenge. It is not a perfect organization and we continue to learn and have our difficulties. However we achieved all our key promises to funders and carers in 2013-14 which is entirely down to the success of the restructure and are set to have a two year extension to our contract due to our success.

I learnt that I am unhappy working out of my value base. At the beginning of the restructure I found myself to be a living contradiction in every aspect of the process. I was feeling bruised and responsible for some staff problems we had experienced and feeling that I needed to fix the problems. I was inexperienced in what needed to be done and found myself in a situation where the traditional approach was to do to people rather than with them. I began by feeling this was the only solution and after exploring what that would look like in practice I sought another way and was encouraged and supported by Chris that we could run a restructure in a way that I could fully live my values of love, justice, hope and participation (Hutchison, 2013 & 2014).

These values I define as:

- Love being a powerful force of compassion and action to improve another's life for the better
- Justice is acting to ensure that people are treated fairly and right.
- Hope is an active ability to hold space open for better possibilities
- Participation is actively engage people with shaping and changing the world for the better.

I learnt that as a team we needed to all believe in these values in order for the restructure to be truly values based and that the staff team know when these are genuinely lived or being used to 'get things through'. I learnt that the results are better and more easily defended when they are not a solution I have imposed but that have been led by our values. I have learnt that difficult decisions are much easier when I am true to my values and that whilst the job of a Chief Executive is often difficult and tiring, I feel much more confident in my decisions when they are value based. I also learnt that I do not have to have all the answers and that coming to a shared solution can be much more effective.

I found that learning together with the new Senior Team showed that as senior managers we were not saying we are all knowing but that we have more to learn and that we wanted to learn together. I learnt along with the rest of the senior team about how transactional analysis Berne (1964) and Theory Y McGregor (1960). Kubler-Ross (1969) Grief Cycle and Lewin's (1947) Change management model –'Unfreezing. Moving, Refreezing' are useful models as managers. These models gave us a language to express what we were experiencing or what we wanted to achieve, however, I found the learning together was a powerful way to improve practice and ensure we were all sharing the same values around management approaches.

Chris Hickey's Learning

What have I learned and how has it changed me?

This restructuring has been really eye opening for me and has helped me realise the importance of exploring and articulating the values underpinning the process of restructuring teams and organisations. My values have always been there and shape my actions, choices and behaviour but my experience has been that these tend to remain unspoken and implicit rather than the driver. When we brought our values to the fore the process changed quite dramatically. Once we let go of having to come up with the right answer and focused on coming up with the right process that would allow us all to create the solution, I found myself much more relaxed and more able to listen and reflect.

Synthesising and articulating values and behaviour created a much firmer and clearer rationale that allowed the change process to unfold in a more holistic and grounded manner. In lots of change process manuals they talk of getting 'buy in' from participants as the key. The management team were keen to achieve this too. What we found was that by changing the process, by stopping coming up with solutions and moving to asking questions, we gave 'buy in' and that's how we got it. We promoted the principle of 'nothing about me, without me', kept people informed and released the energy and potential of the team.

I realised that so many of my previous experiences of restructuring whether as part of making it happen or as a recipient had taken place in a values vacuum. Organisations embark on restructuring because there are perceived problems that need to be solved. Often people in the organisations are experiencing the organisational problems and finding ways to address them but just as often the problems are perceived by managers and not be employees to the same degree.

In most cases managers are aware that change causes difficulties, they understand that people are resistant to change and that it needs to be managed carefully. However, responsibility for the change lies with a few. In previous restructurings I have seen it as my duty to be part of creating an elegant solution that addresses the problems. Engagement with the recipients of the change has been a process of explanation, persuasion and direction and there has often been a lot of anxiety and upset along the way that has had to be managed but is seen as collateral damage.

This process has also had its share of anxiety and upset but at a much lower level than in other similar processes. With high levels of engagement has come lower levels of anxiety and once the new structure was created it has worked from the very beginning with few hitches.

I've learned that it's never too late to learn new things and this is liberating and energising in itself. I embarked on this restructuring with no expectations that it would be any different from a number of others I'd been involved in. Instead it has turned out to be a new experience altogether that will inform my practice going

forward.

David Trumper's Learning

I felt if we had of told people what to do the same problems would have existed afterwards and we wouldn't have solved the underlying issues, the one I felt most was that the staff team felt a divide had opened up of the 'us and them'. I was most upset that they felt this divide of 'us and them' as it felt like a failure. It felt like we'd gone from being 'cuddly and lovely' to having what felt like an aggressive contract. We toyed with having and us and them way but it did give us the test of whether we could go to that road and it highlighted we did not want to go that way but it did help us make them.

Listening is good, the bit I am most proud of is the document that responded and it was the most logical way I could respond because we responded to everything, it has also helped to make me sure of why we made the decisions and have not had to go back and revisit this document. I would do this again and identify why they were unhappy and respond and get people to sign up. Before that we had responded with a knee jerk reaction and went into an information vacuum so I would have started to listen and give more communication earlier.

It is time consuming and an emotional roller coaster. We could have slowed down a bit in how we presented and let people catch up so I've learnt we need to give time for the emotions and to give people more time to apply and to be more neutral rather than so encouraging of staff to apply so they came their own conclusions. I felt that whilst we did a good job getting everything ready we were not prepared enough to manage the fall out that came from people being promoted from within and that we need to be much more prepared for this in any future opportunities. I will remember in future that emotional responses are different for different people.

Our influence on each other

Sonia's perspective

As the Chief Executive I found Chris's influence was his greater knowledge and understanding of the restructuring process giving David and I the confidence to be able to be value based in our approach rather than take the traditional top down approach. I felt confident enough to tell Chris when I wanted him to lead and when I wanted David and I to lead to ensure we gave all the key messages to the team ourselves as senior managers so they knew they were from us not from a consultant we could later scapegoat. I felt confident that Chris shared our values.

David's influence was to ensure we not only said we had listened to staff but that we wrote a comprehensive 'you said, we did' document which David took the time to write so we could give it to the staff team. I also felt supported by David to take a values based approach, I felt we backed each other up even though we didn't always

get things right due to our inexperience and things took us by surprise. I felt we both had the best intentions in our approach and the same feeling of responsibility to give the messages to the team and not use a consultant to be a scapegoat later.

Chris's perspective

David's big influence was when he said we had to write out for the staff the 'you said, we did' and put it in a format and address point by point and without David I would have overlooked that. Without that response we would have found it hard to achieve what we did.

Sonia's influences was very good leadership skills, leadership that did not need to be in charge but stepping up when things needed to be persuaded, engaged and motivated. It was impressive to watch Sonia's relationship with the team and the trust and confidence they had in you. It was great to see Sonia's openness and did not take any challenges personally.

David's perspective

Sonia influenced me by not helping me not to be set in boxes and helping me to understand how other people might perceive things.

Chris helped us to arrive at the agreement that was right for our organisation and helped highlight the management style differences and enabled us to make decisions based on our values.

Conclusion

To conclude we have found how to bring a values based approach into a restructure which is traditionally carried out in a values vacuum through our different perspectives of practitioner research. We have found this has enabled us to develop our living theories of caring. Not only were we happier with the outcome the staff team have also been happier and have ownership over the new structure.

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