



ISPSO 34th Annual Meeting, Copenhagen 3rd - 9th July 2017: Dreams always take place: Spaces, Places, Rooms, and Furniture, inside and around us

PARALLEL PAPERS VI
SUNDAY 9th JULY 1100-1215
ROOM IV - 7.0.22

Rob Ryan:

Border protection – creating “good enough” psychic and physical workspace in a refugee support organisation

This paper describes, analyses and draws upon the experiences of a consulting pair working with the leadership team in a leading Australian non-government refugee support organisation – ‘Beacon’. This organisation had recently experienced significant internal conflict and trauma in the context of rapid growth and community turbulence.

There is an exploration of the impact of the psychic and physical work spaces and the extent to which they enable the organisation’s work to occur in ‘good enough’ ways. That is, those which contain anxiety, encourage learning and reduce the impact of direct and vicarious trauma on all the participants (refugees, paid and unpaid staff).

The paper proposes hypotheses about the impact of systemic forces emerging in the organisational relationships, the challenges involved in creating adequate psychic and physical workspace, the effects of dependency, challenged leadership and the relationships with asylum seeking.

In addition, it examines important contributing aspects of the organisational culture, including the impact of holding environments, unclear role boundaries and accountabilities between paid staff and volunteers, including the experiences within the consulting dyad. It uses a psychoanalytic framework to analyse some dimensions of the challenges inherent in: creating adequate containment to meet the organisation’s purposes the organisation using a technical response (a new grievance procedure) to respond to the impact of internal trauma and cultural challenges which demanded deeper treatment identifying systemic influences of the refugee policy and practices in Australia and how these impact on the organisation

the tensions between the roles of leaders, other paid staff and volunteers

Rob practices professionally as a psychoanalytic organisational consultant. He gathered data by reflecting and building upon his lived experience of working on the cultural change intervention with the senior leadership team of Beacon.

It is hoped that this paper will stimulate conversations about the challenges of achieving a productive space to support refugees, how systemic forces impact and may be managed within refugee support organisations, and the learning available for consulting to these organisations.

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