

Reflections on the ISPSO Melbourne Regional Event

Held in the Blue Room at North Fitzroy Star Hotel/Restaurant from 4pm-9.30pm on Thursday 20 August 2015.

Convenors: Rob Ryan and Nuala Dent

The event had two components, a workshop and a dinner, and was open to current and prospective members of ISPSO. There were 19 people at the workshop and 16 at the dinner.

Workshop Attendees: Biliانا Agin, Trish Buckley, Mary Burgess, Jennifer Burrows, Jinette de Gooijer, Nuala Dent, Janet Duke, Mike Faris, Caroline Farmer, Stan Gold, Helen Goodman, Susan Long, Mike Long, Belinda Mackie, Katherine McPherson, Susan Mravlek, Hannah Piterman, Rob Ryan and Jim Walker

Dinner Attendees: Biliانا Agin, Trish Buckley, Mary Burgess, Jennifer Burrows, Jinette de Gooijer, Nuala Dent, Janet Duke, Mike Faris, Caroline Farmer, Stan Gold, Helen Goodman, Susan Long, Mike Long, Susan Mravlek, Hannah Piterman and Rob Ryan.

Apologies: Andreas Amentas, Rob Cairns, Anna Clark, Diana Dalton, Kate Dempsey, Elisabeth Wilson-Evered, Wendy Harding, Joy Humphreys, Judy Kent, Jane Lowther, Brigid Nossal, Allan Schafer and Jacqui Watt.

Setting the scene

The idea for this event came from a discussion between the convenors about a desire to connect the local community and to think together about the themes that came up at the 2015 Annual Meeting (AM) in Rome, and what that might mean for us here in Australia.

The Workshop (4pm-6.30pm)

This was a structured activity, offering three 'tastes' of the Annual Meeting. The tables in the 'Blue Room' were set up in cabaret style, in groupings of 4 or 5 people. Each session was forty minutes, and the presenters took up the offer in different ways. A more detailed description is provided as Appendix A.

Session 1

Mary Burgess presented a summary from the final keynote presentation by Professor Francesco Avallone on Organisational Decline and Necrosis and posed some questions for us to discuss at our tables: What is our experience in Australia? How do we work from a systems psychodynamic perspective with the toxic elements in organisations to turn them around? Are there opportunities to do similar research in Australia. There was discussion about the stress in organisations and in our community more generally.

Session 2

Drawing from the workshop facilitated by Philip Boxer and Simon Western, Caroline Farmer gave us an experience of the Lacanian 'Plus One' process. We worked in threes, in roles of speaker, listener and plus-1 to explore the challenge being faced by the presenter. The technique demonstrated the impact of focused observation on what is assumed and what is missing or neglected, and the use of metaphor to present this back. People talked about the resonance of the imagery that was affirming and/or energy releasing.

Session 3

Susan Long presented a paper she had written, which wove together transcripts of dreams shared in the Social Dreaming matrix with associations and links to the experience of the conference. This provided a rich platform to explore the unconscious elements of the conference in relation to the themes present in the AM, and which were taken up further during the dinner.

Many thanks to ISPSO members Mary Burgess, Caroline Farmer and Susan Long for their thorough, stimulating and thoughtful leadership contributions to the workshop program.

The transition

At 6.30pm, we all moved out to the bar area as the room was reset for dinner. This provided an opportunity for participants to connect in different groupings and re-assemble for dinner. The discussion was light-hearted and the mood warm.

The Dinner (7pm-9.30pm)

This was a more informal opportunity to connect and discuss themes that had emerged in the workshop, members' experiences of the AM, and ideas for future events.

The room had been reset with one long table, reminiscent of the previous regional dinner held in May. There was a slideshow in the corner, with pictures from the Rome AM. Thanks to Niels van Steenberg, Nicola Wreford-Howard and Joy Humphreys for sharing these (and to Nuala for curating the show). The discussion was unstructured initially.

After the main course, 'Emmy the Emu' made a reappearance as the talking 'conch'/transitional object, for a 'whole group' discussion. While we had thought a chair shuffle might be helpful later in the evening to facilitate different connections, it seemed we had been shuffled enough by the conversations, as well as the earlier groupings, and needed the stability of staying in the same place. The dinner finished at 9.30pm.

The Dinner Conversation

The conversation explored the experience of the Annual Meeting in Rome and associations to the themes that emerged, as well as opportunities for future regional events.

In relation to the Annual Meeting

- There has been little discussion of the conference on the listserv since the AM
- Members who attended the AM described a preference to interact with a small group, rather than a large one, related to a sense of containment. It seemed to be a preference that attempted to mitigate against the feelings of coldness and isolation experienced at the AM in regard to the meeting as a whole.
- The decision for the next meeting to move from Turkey to Granada, while related to membership in the area, may also be due to an underlying sense of fear of holding the event in Turkey.
- The experience of a group that requested a room to discuss anti-Semitism raised the issue of groups within ISPSO, their boundaries and membership. What is tolerable?
- Also present were themes of marginalization from the female perspective.

The last two themes generated strong emotions in the dinner conversation.

Other themes

- The importance of place was raised

- One prospective member observed she had yet to join ISPSO after several years, and wondered whether it was related to how ISPSO was often reflecting introspectively about itself. A response to this was that this characteristic reflects an ISPSO organizational strength because the organization is able to look at itself critically and learn (unlike some other organisations).
- We spoke of leadership in the moment compared with formal leadership positions. An example cited was Martin Ringer's paper about his experience on a cruise liner which had an attempted hijack by pirates off the coast of Somalia (see ISPSO library for the paper)
- Caroline Farmer won the 2015 Bridger Memorial Award for her paper presentation at the Santiago AM in 2014 ('Addressing the Chasm' – see the ISPSO library). She is the fourth Australian to do so in the seven years the award has been running. The others being Peliwe Mnguni (South African but in Australia at the time), David Patman and Joy Humphreys.

Perhaps this demonstrates something of the creativity and quality of Australia's work in this field (and maybe the 'youthful' state of our community?).

What we noticed

- The hotel staff were attentive and unobtrusive and the food was good
- Attendance at this event was female dominated. At the workshop were 14 females, 5 males. At the dinner were 12 females, 4 males. With apologies included, these numbers represent about two thirds of the Australasian membership.
- The event also attracted prospective members – 3 attended and there were apologies from a further five.
- All participants spoke at least once during both events.
- The design of the event worked seemed to work well in that people were engaged
- The group was able to bear conflicting views and opinions and able work through this in the moment
- In our co-handling of the registration, we had someone off the list but with last minute changes, we ended up with the same number of people that we had expected.

Reflections after the Regional meeting

We are curious about the fact that the AM social program wasn't mentioned at all in any of the sharing in the large group.

We find this particularly interesting, especially as the social program was the first aspect of the AM to be finalized (before the workshops and AM program).

It consisted of three major events: a welcome Cocktail party on Members' day, an ambitious out-of-town Gala Dinner on a country estate, and a Riverboat drinks and canapés event.

These events were designed to showcase aspects of Rome and create networking opportunities. Is it that they are assumed to be effective at achieving their aims and therefore not thought of, even though we contend that networking and relationship building is a key aspect of an AM, as well as regional events?

Some participants noted that they felt well-contained during the event.

Future Opportunities

Stan presented a future possibility of us exploring the experience of a significant culture change project which is in process at Barwon Health - it could offer a valuable opportunity to

think about the socioanalytic learning which may be available. His suggestion was received with interest from the group as a valuable opportunity to be further followed up.

Following this was a suggestion to also look within our own group, not just at the 'other' when considering mental health.

Nuala raised the idea of an inter-regional meeting, combining face-to-face and virtual events towards a shared purpose.

Next Steps

Participants interested in receiving a copy of Mary's slides, or Susan's paper should send an email request to Nuala and or Rob.

Mike suggested a copy of the photo slideshow from the Annual Meeting be uploaded to the ISPSO library.

Rob and Nuala agreed to circulate this report to dinner attendees for their comment, and then to forward final document to Richard Morgan-Jones.

Financial Operations

The workshop was free for members, and \$50 for non-members. The dinner was \$50 for members and non-members, with drinks available for purchase at the bar.

Three prospective members attended the workshop, raising \$150.

16 people attended the dinner. Two people paid directly to the venue, 14 people paid in cash. We took \$700 and paid the venue \$630, with a net surplus of \$70 for the dinner.

In total \$220 was raised and has been deposited in the ISPSO bank account and one possibility is that it be used to support future events.

ISPSO REGIONAL WORKSHOP

THURSDAY 20 AUGUST, 2015 4:00 – 6:30pm at the NORTH FITZROY STAR

Convenors: Rob Ryan and Nuala Dent

Session 1: From Organisational Decline to Well-being

Facilitator: Mary Burgess

This workshop facilitated by Mary Burgess, Director Service Quality Australia builds on the final Keynote Presentation on Sunday 14th June, presented by Professor Francesco Avallone. Currently he is professor of “Occupational psychology” at La Sapienza University of Rome as well as “Health and wellbeing in organizations” and is faculty member at the “Prosociality, innovation and efficacy in educational and organization contexts” PhD.

Over the past few years Professor Avallone was in charge of the progetto sul benessere organizzativo (organizational wellbeing project) promoted by the Dipartimento per la Funzione Pubblica in which over thirty-three thousand people and over two-hundred public administration bodies were involved. His presentation to ISPSO focused on some of the results of this work. He focused on themes of:

- The emergency of living together
- Organisational development and decline
- Organisational well-being

This workshop will offer an overview of Professor Avallone’s key points and then invite discussion at tables about the Australian organisational experience of the themes and then an opportunity to feedback your thoughts on these:

- How do we work from a systems psychodynamic perspective with the toxic elements in organisations to turn them around?
- What is our experience in Australia with organisations around the variables Avallone described – in decline, exhibiting toxic variables, or healthy, sustainable cultures of well-being?
- Are there opportunities to do similar research in Australia

Session 2: Lacan, triple-loop-learning and the governing metaphor

Facilitator: Caroline Farmer

This will be a short, interactive presentation about my (and Rob Ryan’s) experience of a workshop facilitated by Philip Boxer and Simon Western at the Rome conference called ‘Lacan and Organisational Consultancy in a Network Society’.

The workshop centers around an experience of the ‘plus-one’ process, a process similar to other peer/triadic processes in which a ‘third’ participant observes the telling and investigation of a particular event or circumstance by the other two and then feeds back their observation (in this case in the form of a metaphor) in order to open up the exploration.

Drawing from the workshop facilitated by Philip Boxer and Simon Western, Caroline Farmer will provide an experience of the Lacanian ‘Plus One’ process. Participants will work in threes, in roles of speaker, listener and plus-1 to explore the challenge being faced by the presenter, with a focus on what is assumed and what is missing or neglected.

Session 3: Social Dreaming

Facilitator: Susan Long

As a host at the social dreaming in Rome, Susan will give a presentation on the themes and experience, drawing on the transcript of the dreams shared.