

# Creating Healthy Organisations in the wake of the recession

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## 1. Introduction

*I should set the scene. This paper is a working document based on research carried out by Campbell Keegan within large UK organisations both in the private and public sectors, over the last 20 years. It also includes input from books, papers, conferences and conversations with colleagues, particularly academics and practitioners working in organisational change. Its limitations are that it is both exploratory and UK-centric. However, I hope it will trigger comments and thoughts from those who work with and within organisations in other areas of the world, so that we can share experience and develop ideas together.*

Who would have thought, three years ago, that international banks would crash and that economies would collapse worldwide; that we would be plunged into the worst recession since the 1930s? The recession has forced us to re-evaluate structures, systems and assumptions that seemed invincible. There are few certainties left. Or at least that is what I believed when I started writing this paper. Increasingly there is a sense of brushing off the near disaster and carrying on as usual. But the cracks still show. In the immortal words of Leonard Cohen, “*There is a crack in everything. That’s where the light gets in*”. In my view it is important to follow these cracks and learn from them. If we do not, then we will simply repeat old patterns, probably with the same or worse consequences.

It is clear that the way in which many private and public sector organisations operate needs to be re-examined. Hierarchical, ‘command and control’ structures which use poorly applied mechanistic targets have fostered organisational cultures that are often toxic. We only have to think of the Mid Staffordshire NHS scandal which erupted earlier this year, in which it is claimed that more than 400 people may have died through lack of care, whilst managers followed their targets.<sup>1</sup>

We are all familiar with target driven cultures. Most targets are essentially quantitative measures. They can provide useful steers, especially when applied to simple goals, but they are limited in their usefulness. They are by nature reductionist, static and linear; targets remain constant even as organisational or client needs evolve – or indeed change rapidly. On their own, targets are inadequate for dealing with the complexities of dynamic, social and organizational environments. This is not necessarily a problem provided we recognise their limitations. Most importantly though, if employees cannot meet the specified target, or if they do not support the targets because they see them as unattainable or irrelevant or counterproductive, then the target will fail., Paradoxically, the targets themselves may be met, but they will not have achieved the goals they were designed to achieve. As Mark Scoular,

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<sup>1</sup> The Times, 25<sup>th</sup> February 2010



Chief Inspector within the London Metropolitan Police explained it, “*We no longer target criminality, we target how many stop-and-account forms we get during a shift...I fail to see how, with current key performance indicators, we are doing anything but fudging the real picture.*”<sup>2</sup> Police targets may be met, but this does not necessarily mean less crime.

So why are targets so ubiquitous throughout government and other organisations, if they do not do the job? Targets appeal because they appear straightforward, easy to apply and it is simple to assess their effectiveness. They are comforting in the way that quantitative data, superficially examined, seems comforting; they make a messy, contradictory world simpler, apparently comprehensible. When targets fail, the response is often to seek better targets and a great deal of effort has been expended on this type of work (Boyne, 2002). But the ‘perfect’ target is an illusion and it is an illusion that has had some disastrous consequences.

However, targets are not the only way of attempting to steer and assess organisational performance. Qualitative approaches, whilst messier, less easily comprehended or summarised, more complex, dynamic and, well, bigger, can give us a much richer understanding of organisations and the ability to work effectively within organisations. This is because a qualitative way of thinking or Qualitative Mind<sup>3</sup> is steeped in an understanding of people and how they feel, think and act both individually and in groups.

This paper touches on a range of projects in which qualitative exploration has helped to shape the future of organisations. It will focus on two studies in particular; a recently completed<sup>4</sup> (January 2010) exploratory project, carried out by Campbell Keegan, that addressed “Citizens of the future: the role of Policing”. This was a joint Royal Society for the encouragement of the Arts, Manufacturing and Commerce (RSA) and National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA) project. The overarching aim was to contribute to the development of the UK police service of the future. This exploratory project examines some of the unintended effects of organisational targets and begins to explore how we might introduce qualitative thinking and methods of assessing organisational effectiveness as a complement to targets.

The second project describes a study we were involved in several years ago; it was a year long Leadership programme for senior managers who worked within a Mental Health Trust. Throughout this project we specifically introduced training in qualitative approaches as an antidote to a strongly

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<sup>2</sup> The Telegraph, July 8<sup>th</sup> 2007

<sup>3</sup> This phrase was originally used by John Dewey to mean “the interaction and exchange between the dynamic qualities of a live person and the equally dynamic qualities of the person’s experiential world.” More recently it has been used by Joanna Chrzanoska to mean a qualitative way of seeing the world, in all its complexity, relationship, ambiguity and layers of meaning

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.thersa.org/projects/design/reports/rsa-npia-symposium>



target driven culture. As a consequence, senior managers felt better able to both meet their targets *and* deliver a better service to their clients.

At the risk of sounding like Nick Clegg – or is it David Cameron? - the current financial crisis, combined with seismic political shifts in the UK, could be a rare opportunity for change, if we can grasp it and use it as such. But can we learn to live with the uncertainty that this would involve, if only for a short while? Rather than rush back to the security of our familiar but maladapted target driven culture, can we pause for a moment to '*let the light get in*'; to explore and expand the role that Qualitative Mind might play, not only within a research context, but also in society as a whole - and as part of developing organizational resilience and happier, more productive workforces.



## 2. The insidious Qual-Quant divide

### 2.1 Divided Society

Given the business we work in, it is hardly surprising that we view qual and quant as largely the preserve of research. It is our bread and butter. We tend to think of them – and the division between the two - as a fact of life, laid down by the hand of God or the rule of nature – or at least until recently we did.

We often treat qual and quant as if they are fixed entities set up against one another, rather than useful metaphors for understanding the world. But we are not alone in this. The Western mindset is predicated on the belief that things are defined in relation to other things. We have mind vs. body, classical science vs. quantum, mechanical vs. organic, us vs. the world (which thankfully is beginning to change) and so on. We use opposition as a way of defining our world. So it is natural that we treat the quant-qual divide as *if* it is reality.

In every sphere of our lives in the Western world we are immersed in this quant-qual, either-or style of perception. It is so taken-for-granted that we no longer see it. It has become what John Shotter (1993) calls 'rationally invisible'. Crucially, if we believe that qual and quant have an existence outside of our own perceptions, then it is a short leap from viewing qual *and* quant to viewing them as qual vs. quant. We set them up in opposition to one another.

However, in reality, the qualitative-quantitative divide is a social construct that has been developed in Western culture, but it is not a 'fact'. It is purely one way of seeing the world; a metaphor for reality, not reality itself, just as giving a red rose is a metaphor for 'I love you'. The Milky Way (probably) does not change according to whether we count the stars or write a poem about it – it is our way of perceiving the Milky Way that changes. I am arguing that qual and quant are not intrinsically different. They are the same world, just viewed through different lenses and we impose this distinction rather than it being a natural part of the world.

Not all cultures think in this either-or way. Australian aborigines have a sophisticated cultural life. Religion, history, law and art are integrated in complex ceremonies which depict the activities of the ancestral beings that created the landscape and its people, and prescribe codes of behaviour and responsibilities for looking after the land and all living things.<sup>5</sup> Aborigines view themselves as part of the land, not in opposition to it. Similarly many Eastern cultures emphasise the connections between people, God, the land, the culture, rather than divisions. (Watts, 1969) Where there is a concept of

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<sup>5</sup> Lonely Planet, Australia, 2002



difference, the parts are often seen as necessary parts of a whole, for example Yin-Yang, rather than in opposition to one another. Many decades ago, when I was studying undergraduate psychology, I became very interested in 'Eastern' thinking'; Buddhism, Hinduism, Sufism. I came across Alan Watts, a writer and philosopher who translated Zen Buddhism into a form in which it could be accessible to a Western audience. "The Book on the Taboo of knowing who you are", was first published in 1969 but still seems extraordinarily prescient today. Watts draws on both Newtonian science and Zen Buddhism to challenge prevailing Western perceptions of reality. When I first encountered Watts' writing, I was bowled over by the notion of viewing the world as fluid, indivisible, a pattern of movement, which we, as 'individuals' come *out* of, (because we are a transient expression of the whole realm of nature) rather than come *in* to (as temporary and 'alien' visitors) in much the same way as the wave *comes out* of the ocean and sinks back into it. It introduced me to the idea that everything in the world is connected. It was the first time I had come across these ideas – though they are mainstream today.

Watts' ideas still seem to me to have particular relevance to the qual-quant division and so I have quoted him at length below:

*I have sometimes thought that all philosophical disputes could be reduced to an argument between the partisans of "prickles" and the partisans of "goo". The prickly people are tough-minded, rigorous and precise, and like to stress differences and divisions between things. They prefer particles to waves, and discontinuity to continuity. The gooey people are tender-minded romanticists who love wide generalisations and grand syntheses. They stress the underlying unities, and are inclined to pantheism and mysticism. Waves suit them much better than particles as the ultimate constituents of matter and discontinuities jar their teeth like a compressed-air drill. Prickly philosophers consider the gooey ones rather disgusting – undisciplined, vague dreamers who slide over hard facts like an intellectual slime which threatens to engulf the whole universe in an undifferentiated aesthetic continuum. But gooey philosophers think of their prickly colleagues as animated skeletons that rattle and click without any flesh or vital juices, as dry and desiccated mechanisms bereft of all inner feelings. Either party would be lost without the other, because there would be nothing to argue about, no one would know what his position was, and the whole course of philosophy would come to an end...*

*Historically, this is probably the extreme point of that swing of the intellectual pendulum which brought into fashion the Fully Automatic Model of the universe, of the age of analysis and specialization when we lost our vision of the universe in the*



*overwhelming complexity of its detail. But by a process which C.G. Jung called “enantiodromia”, the attainment of any extreme position is the point where it begins to turn into its own opposite – a process that can be dreary and repetitive without the realisation that the opposite extremes are polar, and that poles need each other. There are no prickles without goo and no goo without prickles.*

Alan Watts (1969)

The most important message I take out from Watts’ writing above, is the assertion that prickles and goo (or qual and quant) are interdependent – “*there are no prickles without goo and no goo without prickles*”. This is something we find easy to forget. We are more likely to see prickles and goo as at odds with each other, eternally at war. It is a war that neither can win.

## 2.2 Divided organisations

I want to talk about how qual and quant thinking surface within organisations because how organisations work and how culture develops in organisations is an area I am particularly interested in. In my view, this is an area in which, the quant-qual divide can become most unbalanced and most destructive. This is particularly true in large organisations and within government departments.

We deal with organisations all the time; our own, our clients’, government departments, suppliers. They come in all shapes and sizes. Essentially organisations are groups or clusters of people.





Crudely, organisations can be viewed in one of two ways - in terms of their structures – how each person slots into the hierarchy; their allocated role in the organisation - or in terms of the relationships that have built up between individuals within the organisation. Of course this is ridiculously over-simplified. All organisations are a mix of the two ‘types’, but I am simplifying to make the distinctions clear; we are talking about structures vs. relationships ...or mechanical vs. organic, prickles vs. goo or, indeed quant vs. qual...

Some organisations tend to put more emphasis on structure, others emphasise relationship. For instance, senior managers, forced to make people redundant, may retreat into a mechanistic perspective, viewing those who are to be made redundant as cogs in the machine, because it is easier to deal with in this way rather than addressing the messy human stuff.

This assumed division between quantitative and qualitative aspects of organisations is important, because it underlies the whole target culture. If we start with the assumption that there *is* actually a split between the two ways of seeing the world (rather than it just being a useful model) - and then we prioritise one side of the split over the other, we create imbalance. Prioritising quantitative ways of understanding the world had led directly to the dominance of targets cultures that we have experienced in the last decade or so. Let us examine some of the consequences of target culture.



### 3. The effect of targets within organisations

#### 3.1 Targets that hinder and targets that help

I should say straight away that I am not averse to targets in principle. I am against poorly designed, rigidly enforced, inadequately monitored and over-prioritised targets. Often these targets become reified, fossilised. They foster a 'blame and reward' rather than a learning culture. There are too many cases in which this style of targets has corrupted the goals and purpose of the organisation, sometimes to the extent that they have undermined the whole ethos and aims of the organisation.

As Alfie Kohn (1999) points out in 'Punished by Rewards' manipulating people with incentives seems to work in the short term, but ultimately fails and even does lasting harm. People actually do inferior work when they are enticed with money, grades or other incentives. As Kohn illustrates, the more an organisation relies on incentives, the worse it gets.

Joanna Chrzanowska reinforces this point.

Targets are a current 'taken for granted', as many people work with an implicit behaviourist model in their minds about motivations. Ironically, the behaviourist model does work in the negative – failing to meet targets is, in general, a de-motivator. (Chrzanowska, 2010)<sup>6</sup>

Onora O'Neill's 2002 Reith Lecture, which addresses trust, targets and accountability, sums the issue up very nicely:

I'd like to suggest that the revolution in accountability be judged by the standards that it proposes. If it is working we might expect to see indications – performance indicators! – that public trust is reviving. But we don't. In the very years in which the accountability revolution has made striking advances, in which increased demands for control and performance, scrutiny and audit have been imposed, and in which the performance of professionals and institutions has been more and more controlled, we find in fact growing reports of mistrust.

However, not all targets are bad. Properly constructed targets, which are reviewed on an ongoing basis and which are regarded as tools rather than ends in themselves, can make useful contributions to improving productivity, health and happiness within organisations. Targets used in this way are signposts for the journey; they are not destinations. They can be flexible. If these targets are not working, if they are not helping people or organisations to achieve their aims, then they can be changed – ideally by the people who are themselves using these targets. And just as targets can be flexible, they

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<sup>6</sup> Joanna Chrzanowska, personal conversation, May 2010



can also be qualitative. Tim Blackman describes a constructive use of targets in which:

...targets are not regarded as reliable or valid ends in themselves but are re-framed as tracers picking out the key features of change as it happens. Employees become agents of change alert to the feedback messages that these tracers send, modifying their own behaviour with the understanding that outcomes are *co-produced* between themselves, colleagues and customers, with the resources each brings to the interaction.

([www.radstats.org.uk/no079/blackman.htm](http://www.radstats.org.uk/no079/blackman.htm))

However, the word 'target' has itself become contaminated through association with different organisational disasters. Targets have become the 'bogey man', often without a true understanding that it is the way in which targets are conceived, set up and used that is to blame, not the targets themselves. It is, after all, *people* who design targets and implement them. Targets themselves are innocent! In order to avoid having to clarify myself whenever I use the term *target* throughout the rest of this paper, when I refer to targets I mean the rigid, quantitative, end-point style of target I referred to at the beginning of this section – unless I state otherwise.

As a broad generalisation, simple targets are appropriate for simple objectives. However, few objectives in today's organisations are simple. John Kay in his brilliant book, 'Obliquity' (Kay 2010) sets out to convince us that complex goals are best achieved indirectly. He explains:

In general, oblique approaches recognise that complex objectives tend to be imprecisely defined and contain many elements that are not necessarily or obviously compatible with each other, and that we learn about the nature of the objectives and the means of achieving them during a process of experiment and discovery. Oblique approaches often step backwards to move forwards (p4). Problem solving is iterative and adaptive, rather than direct (p9). High level objectives are typically loose and unquantifiable – though this does not mean it is not evident whether or not they are being achieved (p41). The criteria of achievement are constantly redefined by great achievers (p77) (Kay 2010).

Kay goes on to give fascinating examples of how, in complex situations, oblique approaches can achieve greater success than direct approaches. I do not have the space to do justice to his arguments here; it's worth reading the book.

### 3.2 Targets in practice

Targets are not a recent phenomenon, although undoubtedly the emphasis on targets has increased in intensity over recent years. I first remember



becoming aware of the effect of targets in the late 1980s. We were carrying out a research project with a vehicle rescue service; helping them to implement a culture change programme. 'Putting Customers First' programmes were very fashionable at that time.

We started with individual interviews with Members of the Board, examining their shared objectives and the areas of conflict; trying to thrash out an agreed policy. We then worked our way down – or up - the organisation, depending on your perspective, eventually spending time shadowing service patrols that were sent out to rescue stranded motorists and, hopefully, repair their vehicles or tow them to a garage. We travelled around with the patrols for several days. One of the great advantages of this type of shadowing is that you are, on the one hand, a novelty and therefore it is easy to get people to engage with you and tell you lots. On the other hand, you quickly become one of the crew, so they forget that you are there observing and noting their behaviour. Both positions are useful.

At that time, the vehicle recovery organisation had implemented a customer pledge; they would aim to reach stranded drivers within an hour. This became a marketing goal and was also linked to employee targets which formed the basis of the staff bonus system. In turn, different rescue organisations competed in terms of who was most effective in meeting the targets. Competitors promised shorter waiting times.

Does it sound reasonable that recovery services should measure their performance in terms of the speed with which they arrive with the motorist? Of course it does. Every motorist's wish, when they break down, is that the rescue service arrives as quickly as possible.

Well, that is not exactly true. Every motorist wants their car repaired and on the road as quickly as possible. Quite a different thing. The target that senior management had set did not take account of wily human nature. Human beings are endlessly inventive, creative – and sometimes Machiavellian. A target often becomes a challenge, especially when, inconveniently, it is unattainable.

Service patrols could not always get the appropriate rescue vehicle to the stranded motorist within an hour. For instance, if the vehicle needed to be taken to a garage for repair, then a tow truck was required. However, tow trucks were not always available. Staff were mindful of their bonuses and the advertising claims of the company. This put pressure on them to achieve the unachievable. The solution was fairly straightforward. If the appropriate vehicle was not available, they would send an alternative vehicle out to the motorist and ensure that it arrived within the hour - regardless of whether or not it had the appropriate equipment on board. So, a mechanic on motorbike might be sent to a motorist who needed a tow truck. The target was met, but the hapless motorist might have to wait another hour or more before the needed tow truck arrived. Ironically, this could mean an even longer wait for



the motorist than it would have done if no 'fill in' vehicle had been sent. In this case, meeting a target, which was designed to improve customer satisfaction, actually had the effect of providing poorer customer service. This may seem amusing now, as we chuckle at the ingenuity of the service patrols – though it was probably not a great joke to the stranded motorist at the time.

### 3.3 Targets can kill

Being stranded by the side of the road is inconvenient, but not life threatening. However, the effects of misaligned targets are often much more serious. The UK audience will be very familiar with a recent scandal within the NHS at Mid-Staffordshire hospital. According to the Times Newspaper<sup>7</sup> 400 deaths were linked to “appalling care” at the Trust.

“Patients were routinely neglected or left ‘sobbing and humiliated’ by staff at (the) NHS trust where at least 400 deaths have been linked to appalling care. An independent inquiry found that managers at Mid Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust stopped providing safe care because they were pre-occupied with government targets and cutting costs.” (The Times, 25<sup>th</sup> February 2010)

In case the report above is mistaken for an instance of journalistic excess, it is worth including an excerpt from the Mid-Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust Review of 29<sup>th</sup> April 2009, which investigated the case. Sir Ian Kennedy, Chair of the Healthcare Commission stated:

*“This is the story of appalling standards of care and chaotic systems for looking after patients.”*

The executive summary in the government report which investigated Mid-Staffordshire NHS Trust continues:

*“A central theme of the failures at Mid Staffordshire Hospital Trust appears to be an over-reliance on process measures, targets and striving for Foundation Status at the expense of an overarching focus on providing quality services for patients.”*

How did it come about that an organisation which was set up to help sick people is allegedly responsible for the death of 400 patients? The hospital staff weren't evil people. They didn't set out to do people harm. So how is it possible that targets could instil such a degree of group-think that no-one questioned – or even dared to question - what was happening? I cannot fully answer to that question. My supposition is that it was a mixture of fear and compliance with what had become cultural norms; that these factors induced a degree of myopia and mechanistic adoption of the rules. Targets certainly played their part. If you have any doubts that ill considered and badly

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<sup>7</sup> The Times, 25<sup>th</sup> February, 2010



monitored targets can have destructive effects, you need look no further than this case. Mid-Staffordshire NHS Foundation Trust may be an extreme example, but sadly it is not an exception.

Mike Williams, an ex-CEO of an NHS Trust, turned academic, describes the double bind of dealing with conflicting targets during a Norovirus epidemic at an NHS Trust hospital. Staff were required to juggle waiting time targets and also targets for emergency admissions. However they could not reduce patient demand by cancelling elective patients for fear of breaching other targets. They could not close the hospital although staff were also catching the virus, which put further pressure on resources. The fear of breaching targets, even in an emergency situation, meant that common sense could not prevail. (Williams, 2010)

You might say, *'Ah well, the targets were wrongly set in the first place. If the targets had been client centric, if the goal had been 'better care for patients', then these awful consequences would never have happened'*. There is some truth in this argument, but it is a dangerous path to follow because the assumption is *"if only we find the perfect target we can stick with it and all will be fine"*. But situations change. Life is messy and complex and it is likely to become more so. Most decisions in life are, essentially, "qualitative" and increasingly we are required to react, communicate, and think more quickly and in an improvisational manner within organisations as well as outside them. Targets can only ever be steers, useful for pointing us in broadly the right direction. If we believe that targets on their own hold the answer to efficient and effective organisations, then we are on course for disaster.

### **3.4 Problem Solving within the Police Service**

I want to talk now about a project we were asked to carry out a few months ago with the Royal Society for encouragement of the Arts, Manufacturing and Commerce (RSA) and the National Policing Improvement Agency (NPIA). Our role was to explore how problem solving within the police service might be improved. The exploration was conducted from the perspective of organisational psychology.

This was quite a daunting brief. We had not worked with the Police Service before and there was something of the 'teaching your grandmother to suck eggs' about it. In addition, there was a limited budget and we were attempting to serve two different masters - the RSA and the NPIA – each with quite different perspectives and styles.

To give a brief background: Structured approaches to problem solving have been used by the police for decades and there is clear evidence that systematic problem solving increases the likelihood of reducing crime and disorder. The question, therefore, was why these problem solving frameworks were not used more frequently. What were the cultural and organisational



factors that discouraged the police from employing them – and how could this be changed?

We carried out intensive research with police officers and the general public in three areas of the country; a mixture of extended face to face interviews, group discussions, shadowing the police on drug raids as they broke down doors (including helping to carry a hefty sniffer dog over broken glass so he could do his job without getting glass in his paws!), police briefings, arrests, interviewing suspects...We talked with police officers at a number of levels, from Chief Inspectors to PCSOs. We also talked with agencies such as the Fire Service and NHS who worked in partnership with the police.

This was one of the most interesting projects we have ever been involved with and there was a huge amount of data that came out of the project. Along with two other research teams, who were working independently, but in parallel with us, we presented our findings and recommendations in a day long Symposium comprised of around a hundred and fifty police officers and academics in November 2009. A full report of the study is due to be published shortly after the election.

For the purposes of this paper, I am going to focus solely on the ways in which targets operate within the police service. Our study was exploratory. However, it was extensive enough to highlight some of the ways in which targets can pervert their intention and this perversion has similarities to the way in which targets can be seen to operate in other organisations even where, as in the case of the vehicle rescue organisation, the nature of the business is quite different.

Problem solving was our focus, so were looking at targets within this context. Very quickly it became clear that ‘problem solving’ meant different thing to different police officers and/or in different situations. Broadly there were three different interpretations of ‘Problem Solving’:

- (i) **‘Problem Solving’ is the job of the police.** Therefore all of the activities that they are involved in can be considered as problem solving. This was the loosest - and therefore the least useful – definition, because it encompassed all police activity and there was no way of differentiating between *good* and *poor* problem solving.
- (ii) **Problem solving was defined as a way of meeting targets.** From 5 March 2009 the only national police target set by the UK government is to increase public confidence by 15 percentage points<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, the police service is still driven by targets. There are many reasons for this, including the need for senior officers to prove their effectiveness and the fact that officers themselves are evaluated in terms of meeting targets, rather than successfully solving problems.

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.community-safety.info/56.html>



It is easy to see the parallels with the vehicle rescue organisation. As I discuss later, problem solving when approached as a means of meeting targets, risks achieving the target but not solving the problem.

- (iii) **Creative problem solving** which is directed towards understanding the problem and deciding on the best way of addressing it in order to solve the underlying issues as well as the problem symptoms. This approach often involves:
- broad analysis of the problem and its context
  - identifying the root causes as well as symptoms
  - ideally changing the conditions that prompt recurring crime
  - multi-agency (probation services, fire services, local council etc) activity – where appropriate
  - looking at the problem from different perspectives
  - assessment of the effectiveness of problem solving approach so that there can be iterative learning, shared with colleagues
  - persistence over the long term

The most common problem solving model employed by the Police Service is SARA – or more sophisticated versions of SARA – Scan, Analyse. Response, Assess.

It is pretty clear that approach (i) is too unstructured and hit and miss to be more than randomly successful. Approach (ii) may be appropriate when the problem to be tackled is straightforward, easy to define and easy to measure in terms of the success or otherwise of the outcome, for instance, directing traffic away from a burst water main, reducing the level of littering or dog fouling. Approach (iii), however, would seem to be the most relevant approach when problems are complex, multi-faceted, when they are difficult to define and when they have developed over time. Given that these factors are well known within the police service, the question was, “Why do police not automatically adopt a SARA style approach when the conditions above demand it?”

There were a number of reasons identified in the research, but the two that I want to focus on here are:

### **Fast Culture**

The Police Service is built around quick response and clearly this is a necessity and an organisational priority. Many officers are attracted to the Service because they like this style of working – and police training amplifies this style, especially within Response Teams whose role it is to respond quickly in emergencies.



However, 'Fast Culture' encourages quick fixes; dealing with symptoms rather than underlying causes, which can work against problem solving, e.g. as in teams *doing and being seen to do* rather than achieving a long term solution. Most importantly, a more reflective, analytical approach is often not rewarded within the Police Service. *Status and recognition often come from meeting targets, not solving problems.*

This is a hard nut to crack, particularly amongst police teams that are trained to react quickly and effectively in emergencies.

### **What gets measured gets done**

This is an area where there is more scope for cultural change. Currently, if a crime is not defined or if it is not defined as a priority, or if it is not measured by a target, then it is unlikely to be detected and addressed. *A crime without a target may not exist.*

Perhaps the most poignant illustration of this is the way in which drugs were viewed in one area. It was clear that drugs were a problem; I had accompanied drug squads on raids, in which they busted and arrested drug dealers. Nonetheless, the mantra within the particular Basic Command Unit (BCU) was "There are no drugs in xxx". I kept hearing this refrain and eventually I cornered one officer. Reluctantly, he explained. "We have no drugs in xxx. If we had drugs, we'd need a drug squad. We can't afford a drug squad. If we had a drug squad, we'd have targets. If we had targets we wouldn't meet them because there is no way of controlling the drugs. Drugs are the root of most crime, but there is nothing we can do about it." The best solution therefore, was to deny the existence of drugs. No drugs. No targets. No problems.

In this way targets can both influence the definition of crime and also determine whether or not that crime is considered worthy of prioritising. Targets are insidious. They can work against effective problem solving.

### **Discouraging professional judgement**

A police officer called to a 'domestic' generally has two choices. He/she can arrest the suspect, charge him (or her), and take him into custody even if this is against the wishes of his partner (who has called the police). This may involve a night in jail, time off work, a criminal record and other repercussions. In this instance, the police officer will have followed the rule book, met a target, but will probably not have exercised much professional judgement.

Alternatively, he could talk to the offender and the complainant, consider the context in which the incident occurred, evaluate the severity of the incident, establish if it was a first call out, seek assurances of no repeat incident etc – and then make a decision not to charge the offender on this occasion. However to do this makes the police officer vulnerable. He has a victim, he



has a crime and he has a suspect, but he has no tangible outcome. He has to log the incident as an unsolved crime and this will not look good on his record – or that of the BCU targets. In this instance, targets act as a disincentive for the officer to use his judgement and to take ownership for solving the problem.

Emphasising rules, rather than principles, encourages a mechanistic response. Officers could not use the experience, skills, intuition and knowledge they had honed over years. Given that most of our judgements involve emotional and bodily, as well as intellectual, input aren't we missing a trick here? As John Kay (2010:168) puts it, *“By downplaying genuine practical knowledge and skill in pursuit of a mistaken notion of rationality we have in practice produced wide irrationality – and many bad decisions.”*

### **Meeting the target may not solve the solution**

A group of teenagers hung out in a patch of ground near a high wall. On the other side of the wall was a Mercedes garage, housing a collection of expensive cars in the forecourt. At some time during the evening, the teenagers started throwing bricks over the wall. The bricks hit the cars and caused considerable damage. This happened roughly once a week. Each time the police were called. Sometimes they caught one or two of the young people, but this did not deter them for long. After a while, the trouble would start again. This went on for months.

Then a Senior Officer decided to investigate the site. He asked, “Why are all these discarded bricks lying around?” No one knew. They cleared away the bricks and the attack on the cars stopped. He had asked the obvious question. He had realised that the attacks weren't premeditated but the spontaneous actions of bored teenagers. Of course, it is likely that the group would find another site, or do something equally anti-social, but it did break that particular cycle of repetitive criminal behaviour. Quick fix responses (police repeatedly being called out and arresting/cautioning a few teenagers) which contributed to the police targets but did not provide a long term solution, had been converted into creative problem solving – which did solve the anti-social behaviour – at least locally.

### **In summary**

Targets serve purposes; applied to simple goals, targets may be *good enough* to assess the effectiveness of achieving those goals or to gain some measure of productivity. Managers traditionally use targets to measure sales, bonuses, and so on, or to justify their role, their behaviour and their success to their senior manager or the general public. Targets give an illusion of control. But more often than not targets (at least as the sole method of evaluating) do not serve the purpose they ostensibly set out to serve, especially when we are dealing with complex situations. Targets are too linear, too unforgiving, and unable to account for iterative processes of exploration, reflection and decision making. Essentially targets, on their own, are too crude and



reductionist to help us to make sense of our complex world. So what to do? Do we abandon targets? Do we look for alternative or complementary approaches?



## 4. Exploring qualitative ways of steering and evaluating productivity in organisations

It seems clear to me that a greater emphasis on qualitative ways of steering and evaluation within organisations is likely to improve working practices and performance. However, as discussed earlier, qualitative methods need not be in opposition to targets. I am suggesting a Yin-Yang approach, in which both qualitative and quantitative evaluation is necessary to the completion and balance of the whole; qual and quant are comrades not protagonists.

Starting from this position we can then ask, “What can qualitative thinking – Qualitative Mind - contribute to this debate? For me this question opens up two areas that need to be addressed:

- (i) What do we mean by Qualitative Mind and how can we transport it into organisational development?
- (ii) What new thinking of a qualitative nature is happening outside research that may be relevant to the development of qualitative thinking within organisations?

Let’s briefly explore each of these issues.

### 4.1 Bringing Qualitative Mind into organisational development

I want to concentrate for a moment on the nature of the *Qualitative Mind* – as I understand it. I see this phrase as a wonderful embodiment of what we *are* as qualitative researchers, as well as what we *do*.

My current understanding of Qualitative Mind is summarised overleaf. This may be incomplete, you may not completely agree with it, but it is probably good enough for the moment. In my view, these are the key qualities, the mind-set, that we adopt when we are engaged in qualitative research at its best. These are qualities that, as a profession, we have honed over decades. Of course, qualitative researchers do not have a monopoly on these attributes. However we have practiced and developed them with discipline and rigour and, I believe, we could usefully employ them more widely.

The classical research model tends to view research as a linear, staged process. Data are gathered like ‘things’ or ‘findings’, then sifted, categorised and sorted before being presented to the client in a structured and logical way as ‘Conclusions and Recommendations’. In practice this is not the way in which Qualitative Mind – or indeed, as neuroscience is increasingly telling us *any* mind - works.



## What is the Qualitative Mind?

- A way of interacting and making sense of the world
- Being a participant not an observer
- Helping to define the problem (process consulting model)
- Accepting that knowledge evolves
- Curiosity, openness and engagement
- Using all our facilities; intellect, feelings, beliefs,
- Encouraging creativity and diversity
- Looking for patterns/connections
- Iterative learning
- Improvisational; able to incorporate information/adapt to change
- Above all, **reflexivity, rigour and discipline**

*“Living life as inquiry”* (Judy Marshall)

Qualitative Mind, reflected in the way in which qualitative researchers work, needs to take into account of how people think, feel, act in *practice*. Humans do not have separate compartments for emotion, feeling and thinking. These are all hopelessly muddled up together and we cannot easily disengage them. Our understanding of the people with whom we are researching (clients, consumers etc), needs to incorporate the messiness, contradiction, illogicality, creativity and so on that makes us human. And at the same time, as researchers, we need to be able to make sense of this chaos, so that it can be communicated to others – our clients – in ways that will enable them to communicate with their target audiences. This is a hugely skilled task.

Perhaps the most important aspects of Qualitative Mind, as I would see it, is its capacity for emergent thinking; the process by which the brain makes meaning, second by second, *in the present*. Our brains are structured in such a way that we cannot just absorb data without influencing its content. The brain automatically makes meaning. That is its job. In practice, as thoughts, feeling, hypotheses spring into our minds, we may backtrack to re-evaluate and shift our previous thinking, move forward, then back and so on. The emergent processes of Qualitative Mind can be pictured as more of a spiral or a series of iterative loops, like a spring, rather than a series of clearly defined staging posts.

And actually, when we think about it, these are exactly the skills that are needed within modern day organisations. In a world in which uncertainty is increasingly a constant, we need people who have considerable knowledge



and skills *but who can also improvise well*. We tend to think of improvisation as a weakness, a lack of planning. It can be exactly the opposite in a situation in which planning is of limited value because the future is unknowable. Acting *appropriately* in the moment, being able to take on board the importance of history, context, the current demands, and future expectations – with accuracy and confidence - is increasingly an essential skill and the definition of effective leadership.

Look at the ongoing (as I write) political elections in the UK. Extraordinary things have happened. Against all expectations, the Liberal Democrats - third party - shot to lead position (according to some polls) on the back of a live television debate. All the parties, including the Liberal Democrats, were shocked. Just weeks before the election, after the plans, the speeches and the rhetoric had been prepared, they all had to be torn up. The landscape has changed radically. The parties have been forced to think *on the hoof*, to improvise, to re-position themselves in relation to the other parties. And, in a neck and neck race, I would predict, that the party that can improvise most convincingly will be the one to win the election. This Qualitative Mind at work.

## 4.2 The Learning Organisation

There is a very interesting link here. The attributes that I sketched out in relation to Qualitative Mind overlap to a large extent with the work that organisational guru, Peter Senge spelt out twenty years ago in his influential book, 'The Learning Organisation'. Senge's views, whilst very compelling at the time, seem to have faded from view with the rise of the target culture. He described the Learning Organisation as:

...organisations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspirations are set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole together.

Senge (1990:3)

Senge, who described himself as an idealistic pragmatist, focused on introducing systems theory into organisations and bringing human values into the workplace. In our hard nosed age, it is easy to dismiss these sentiments as over-idealistic. However, we have only to glance at the state of some large organisations to understand the need to explore alternatives. It is not only the misaligned targets that often drive organisations but also 'group-think', a mentality that can be observed within some sectors of the banking industry – and which makes it seemingly impossible for them to understand public fury over their behaviour.

The dimension that, according to Senge, distinguishes the Learning Organisation from more traditional organisations is the mastery of certain



basic disciplines. Senge defines five dimensions that together contribute towards the development of the Learning Organisation.<sup>9</sup> These are:

- **Systems thinking:** This is Senge's conceptual cornerstone. He stresses the importance of understanding and addressing the whole organisation and the interrelationship between the parts. Senge – and more recently, and very eloquently, John Kay (2010) – talks about how managers frequently apply simplistic frameworks to what are complex systems. We tend to focus on the parts rather than seeing the whole, and fail to see organisation as a dynamic process. Therefore, a better appreciation of systems will lead to more appropriate action<sup>10</sup>.
- **Personal Mastery:** 'Organisations learn only through individuals who learn. Individual learning does not guarantee organisational learning. But without it no organizational learning occurs'. (Senge, 1990:139). Senge viewed personal mastery as the discipline of continually clarifying and deepening our personal vision, of focusing our energies, of developing patience, and of seeing reality 'objectively'. This, he believed, went beyond competence and skills. He saw it as involving spiritual growth, in which people lived in 'a continual learning mode', but never 'arrived' (Senge 1990:142) This concept of personal mastery is akin to much psychological thinking, such as Carl Rogers (1961), whose thinking shaped much early qualitative work, or the psychoanalyst, Eric Fromm (1979). I would argue that much of qualitative analysis follows the same process.
- **Mental Models:** These are 'deeply ingrained assumptions generalisations, or even pictures and images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action' (Senge 1990:8). Donald Schon (1982) calls them a professional's 'repertoire'. Often these deeply ingrained assumptions are so 'obvious' that we do not even notice them. They become 'functionally invisible' (Shotter, 2003). In order to change our behaviours or attitudes we often need to challenge our mental models; to 'turn the mirror inwards' and scrutinise or view of the world whilst, at the same time, being open to new ideas.
- **Building Shared Vision:** Many years ago at Campbell Keegan, we worked for a large fmcg company. Every time I climbed the stairs to their reception area, I would burst out laughing. Over the door, bold and unchallengeable, was the statement, "You are now entering a total quality zone". I viewed the statement as a rather crass attempt by senior management to impose shared vision on employees from the outside, rather than growing it from within. That is not the shared vision

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<sup>9</sup> [www.infed.org/thinkers/senge](http://www.infed.org/thinkers/senge)

<sup>10</sup> Some management thinkers, such as Ralph Stacey (1996, 2003) would take issue with the notion of systems thinking, arguing that it implies a bounded world and, as such, no emergent change is possible. Whilst I would agree, in principle, the distinction is unnecessarily complicated or the purposes of this paper.



that Senge talks about. He describes shared vision as, “*the capacity to hold a shared picture of the future we seek to create*” (1990:9). Often this vision is created as a by-product of intense involvement in what we do (Kay, 2010) and attempting to impose or hothouse a shared vision may prove difficult. Although shared vision may be difficult to define, it is nonetheless very tangible. We have all had the experience of entering a company or group of people where there is such a vision. They exude a sense of purpose and passion.

- **Team Learning:** Senge regarded team learning as ‘the process of aligning and developing the capacities of the team to create the results its team truly desire’ (Senge, 1990: 236). He argued that, when teams work together, not only can there be good results for the organisation, but members will grow more rapidly than could have occurred otherwise. This does not assume that all team members necessarily agree with one another.

Some management theorists have criticised Senge’s thinking. He has been accused of naivety and few large organisations can be identified that come close to this model of organisation, though some would claim it, and many aspire to it. It is often deemed unfeasible within a capitalist system, in which financial priorities are overwhelming<sup>11</sup>.

Since Senge wrote *The Learning Organisation* in the 1990s, there has been a groundswell of interest in organisations from the perspective of complexity thinking which reinforces the notion of Qualitative Mind and which provides theory to underpin a qualitative way of working (Keegan, 2006, 2008, 2009a, 2009b). In addition, the web explosion and the related emphasis on co-creation, both within and outside research, has prompted – and in some cases forced - a re-consideration of more egalitarian approaches within organisations and also between organisations and their customers.(Keegan, 2009c, Leadbeater, 2008)

These trends, coupled with the shock of recent city collapses, loss of confidence in the UK government and target scandals within government institutions, have forced a reassessment of the mental models that we unthinkingly adopt when making sense of our world. Linear, reductionist, short term mental models may be comforting in the short term but they cannot help us to understand the complex, dynamic, unpredictable world that we now inhabit. Maybe the time is right to re-visit a more humanistic, holistic and qualitative way of looking at organisations and, indeed, the world at large.

Fostering Qualitative Mind within large organisations - one that rewards employees for building a learning organisation - seems to be essential in order to balance the target culture. This is no mean task. Whilst it is relatively easy to develop a learning organisation within small companies – and many

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<sup>11</sup> For more detail see [www.infed.org/thinkers/senge.htm](http://www.infed.org/thinkers/senge.htm)



qualitative researchers have been fortunate enough to have worked in such environments – it is difficult to sustain within large organisations. Hierarchical structures, procedures, rules and regulations are easier to implement and sustain, even if their effects are sometimes negative.

## **4.2 New thinking outside research**

Ironically, at the same time as quantitative targets have been hotting up and spreading throughout government organisations and large commercial organisations, behavioural psychologists has been contributing some very interesting scientific research on the way in which we make decisions and the role of conscious and unconscious processes in decision making. Whilst target culture encourages mechanistic approaches to achieving organisational goals, behavioural psychology and neuroscience have been uncovering just how non-linear, complex and (below) conscious awareness our thinking really is.

### **(i) Contributions from neuroscience**

Neuroscience is making huge contributions to our understanding of our minds and brains. According to some cognitive neuroscientists, we are conscious of only about five percent of our cognitive activity, so most of our decisions, actions, emotions, learning and behaviour are dependant on the ninety-five percent of brain activity that goes on beneath our conscious awareness (Zaltsman, 2003:50).

Some experts, such as psychologist Professor Adrian Furnham (1999:5-10) would dispute the scale of unconscious activity. Nonetheless, there is general agreement that, although we believe that we make considered and conscious decisions most of the time, neuroscience proves this to be false. From the beating of our hearts to breathing, walking, shrinking from spiders, crossing the road without getting run over, we rely on our bodies to do the work for us, without our conscious awareness.

### **(ii) Gladwell's theory of 'Thin Slicing'**

Malcolm Gladwell (2005), in his best selling book, 'Blink', discusses the concept of the 'adaptive unconscious'; not be confused with the 'unconscious' described by Sigmund Freud, which is an altogether different concept. The 'adaptive unconscious' makes it possible for us to, say, turn a corner in our car without having to go through elaborate calculations to determine the precise angle of the turn, the speed of the car and its steering radius. We operate on 'automatic pilot', aware of what is happening, but not on a conscious level.

Gladwell describes the 'adaptive unconscious' as that part of our brain that leaps to conclusions. We are all familiar with the sensation of 'knowing something' but not knowing how we know it. We use this ability all the time.



We make a judgement on someone within seconds of meeting them and often we are proved right. Gladwell reports on an experiment to explore this phenomenon. College students were shown three two second videotapes of a teacher they had never met, with the sound turned off. They were then asked to rate the teacher's effectiveness – which, apparently, they could do without difficulty. He discovered that their ratings were essentially the same as evaluations of those same teachers made by their students after a full semester of classes. Watching a silent two second video clip of an unknown teacher was sufficient for students to accurately assess the teacher.

In a different context, we are crossing the road and suddenly see a car heading straight towards us. What do we do? We do not rationally evaluate the risk. Instead, our 'adaptive unconscious' makes an instant evaluation of the risk and our body reacts immediately to avoid danger. Afterwards, we may wonder how we reacted so quickly. If we had depended on our rational brain, we would probably not be here today.

How does our brain do this? Gladwell describes his theory of 'Thin slicing' or 'A little bit of knowledge goes a long way'. Our brain responds to a myriad of details in the situation which our conscious mind is simply not aware of. This detail may arise partly from our intellect, but it will also include input from our emotions, intuition, and bodily reactions. In fact it is a 'whole body', not just a rational, 'from the head' response. We leap to a decision or have a hunch. Our unconscious has sifted through the situation in front of us, discarding everything it considers irrelevant whilst homing in on what really matters. Gladwell claims that our unconscious is so good at this that it often delivers a better answer than more deliberate and exhaustive ways of thinking.

In everyday life, we move back and forth between our conscious and unconscious modes of thinking, depending on the situation. Neither our rational thinking nor our understanding based on 'thin slicing' is infallible; we have all experienced situations when our 'snap decisions' have proved disastrously wrong. However, by using both modes and emphasising one over the other according to the situation we can, hopefully, get the best of both worlds.

Our conscious mind takes up so much of our time that it is easy to forget the importance of what happens below conscious awareness.

### **(iii) The importance of emotion in thinking**

Reinforcing Gladwell's views, Portuguese neuroscientist Antonio Damasio emphasises, in his fascinating book, 'The feeling of what happens' (2000) how the brain knows more than the conscious mind reveals. Neuroscience is now confirming what many psychologists, psychotherapists and qualitative researchers have believed for decades; that consciousness is simply the 'tip of the iceberg' and that all sorts of activity which crucially affects our decision making goes on beneath conscious awareness.



What really does challenge our cultural preconceptions, however, is Damasio's assertion that emotion is a necessary component of reasoning. We tend to dismiss emotion as somehow 'lower order'. We talk about *controlling emotion, having a rational conversation* and criticise those who are *over-emotional* or *cannot control themselves*. We distrust our emotions because we feel they are unmanageable and we cannot always understand where they come from. Uncontrolled emotion is seen as child-like and unpredictable and we have been taught to distrust what we cannot logically understand or control.

On the other hand, we think of rational, considered thought as being *higher order* brain activity; the most effective way of communicating and an aid to effective decision making, especially within a work context. It is regarded as the evolutionarily peak of our communication abilities.

However, this is simply not true. Damasio's research suggests that having either too much or too little emotion interferes with rational choice. Too much, we can accept, but too little? This seems counter-intuitive in our individualistic, rationally focused culture. It would not seem strange in many Eastern cultures, in which emotion and logic are not set apart as adversaries.

According to Damasio 'emotion probably assists reasoning, especially when it comes to personal and social matters involving risk and conflict' (Damasio, 2000:41-2). He suggests that emotion helps with the judgement aspect of decision-making. It provides the emotional intelligence which helps our reason to operate most effectively. It may seem rather paradoxical in our society that, in truth, we cannot make rational decisions without emotional input. However, Damasio is at pains to point out that emotion is not a substitute for reason and those emotions should not be allowed to reign unchecked. He concludes, 'well-targeted and well-deployed emotion seems to be a support system without which the edifice of reason cannot operate properly' (Damasio, 2000:42).

This thinking presents a very fundamental challenge to the notion of targets as an effective method of evaluating complex patterns of behaviour within organisations. Targets are concerned primarily with conscious thinking and generally ignore the below conscious mind. Relying on targets as a way of understanding or steering human behaviour is therefore dangerous territory unless we are clearly aware of their limitations and effects.



## 5. Developing qualitative productivity

It is easy to *talk* about The Learning Organisation and about fostering Qualitative Mind within organisations and the world at large. Putting these ideas into practice is another matter. If there are so few organisations that have successfully done this, then is it simply affectation to imagine that such an organisation is possible? We could of course look at smaller organisations that we could identify as having characteristics of The Learning Organisation, but the issues, structures, layers of communication and so much else is different between large and small organisations, that it would be difficult to extrapolate. I want instead, to share with you a project that we were involved in a few years back. This was a very deliberate attempt to develop Qualitative Mind and Learning Organisation culture within the target driven environment of the NHS.

### 5.1 Working with a Mental Health Trust

The organisation was a Mental Health Trust in East London. Like other NHS organisations it was heavily target bound. However, the Trust was fortunate in that it had a very enlightened CEO who was keen to implement a leadership programme for all the senior managers in the Trust<sup>12</sup>. He was worried about the managers' work loads – as indeed were the managers themselves. There was the pressure of targets in addition to silo working, which was exacerbated by the geographical dispersal of different Trust units across the borough. This often led to duplication of effort and to limited and confused communication. Different units were suspicious of one another.

Senior managers acknowledged that targets were useful, but nonetheless believed that meeting targets often distracted them from what they considered to be their 'real job', which was looking after their clients. They felt 'judged' by targets, whereas they felt personal satisfaction when they helped their clients. There was ongoing tension between these two objectives. After much discussion between the CEO, John and me, we decided to implement a leadership programme which aimed to increase networking and shared learning, to provide support for managers who felt isolated and unsupported, and to help them to deal more effectively with the target pressures.

The senior managers were keen to reduce work pressure and work more productively. However, they balked at the anticipated time commitments of the leadership programme. They had all been on various leadership training courses over the years, with varying degrees of success, and the prospect of being involved in a programme for almost a year, with 2-3 day stints every month was simply overwhelming. How would they make time to meet their

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<sup>12</sup> ...and John, one of the senior managers in the Trust had been on the same doctoral programme as I was on at that time – Management/Organisational Change from a complexity perspective.



targets? However, the CEO was adamant. Every senior manager, without exception, was required to attend.

Over the course of the year, we engaged in a wide range of activities. To discuss these activities in detail is outside the scope of this paper and breaches client confidentiality. However, an important aspect of the programme was to establish working networks across the Trust, allowing managers who worked on similar projects to build working relationships, share experiences and act as co-workers, where possible. Over time, the managers developed and shared strategies. They learnt from one another how and what to prioritise. They developed strategies which helped them to satisfactorily deal with targets. They learnt who to go to for help, when needed. Outside speakers introduced new ways of thinking about organisations and the participants explored how these ideas might be useful in their particular situation or in specific contexts. Action learning sets of 4-5 participants were created and they met regularly outside the programme days.

At one stage, all the members of the Trust Board were invited to join the programme for the day and to talk with the senior managers. The Board members were visibly anxious as they entered the room. As with any hierarchical organisation, there was some ongoing friction between layers of management. The senior managers were forthright and sought to discuss a number of key issues. It was a tense and difficult time, but the Board Members were open and receptive, acknowledging the issues that the senior manager raised. Gradually both sides relaxed and by the end of the day each side claimed that they had gained a better insight into the position of the other. It was deemed to have been a very useful encounter by all of the participants. It also sowed the seeds for networks to extend to and from the Board, so that they became more engaged with the senior managers, better understood their concerns and could work jointly with them, where necessary.

To summarise the outcomes of the programme: As might be expected, there were some individuals who felt the programme had not been useful, but these were a small minority. The majority of participants had formed networks that were still operating six months after the programme had finished. Although their workloads had not reduced, they felt more relaxed. They had colleagues they could call on if need be. Perhaps the most interesting feedback was that they felt better able to meet their targets *as well as* serving their clients well. Quantitative measures and Qualitative Mind had – to an extent - been successfully integrated; the whole had achieved more than the sum of the parts.

## 5.2 Defining Qualitative Productivity

I am conscious that, if I am to argue that we need qualitative productivity as a counterbalance to targets – the yang to balance the yin of targets, then I need to be clearer about what I mean by – or at least offer a tentative version of – qualitative productivity. I am using qualitative productivity to mean the



outcomes that result when we are engaging Qualitative Mind; it encompasses the way in which we interact with the world and how we think, feel and act. Sociologist, Judy Marshall (1999) expresses this more succinctly when she describes it as, 'Living life as inquiry'.

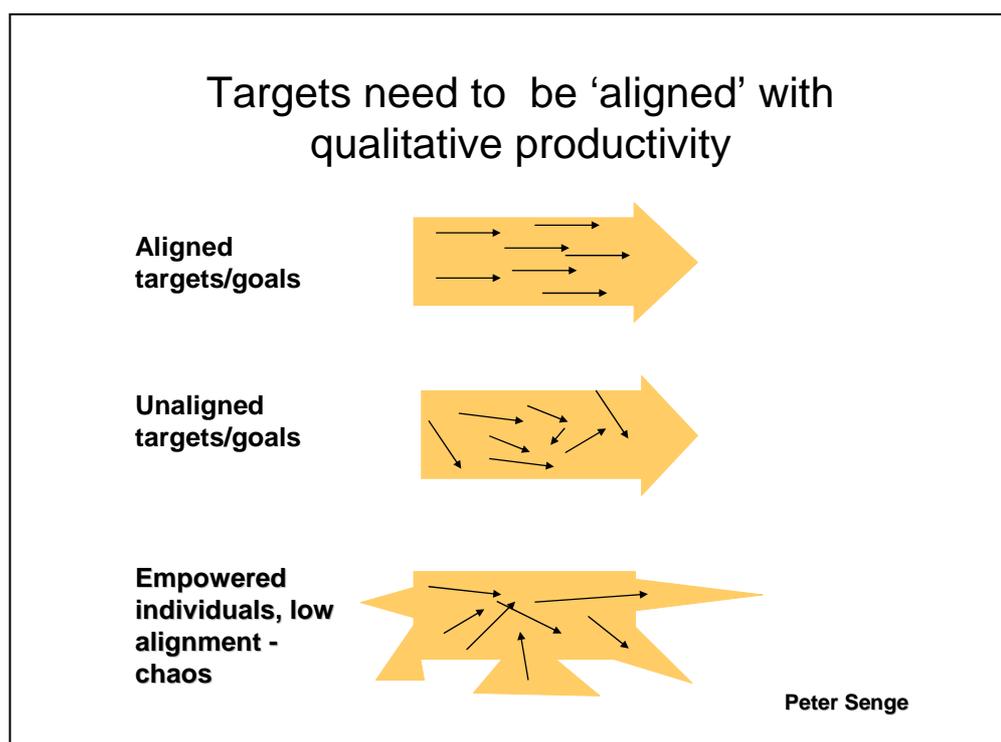
Qualitative Mind is typically characterised by:

- Productivity that is recognised even if it cannot be measured
- Shared team goals and objectives originating (at least in part) from employees
- Employee networks that facilitate creative problem solving
- A sense of 'flow', excitement and enthusiasm
- Openness, creativity, flexibility in thinking
- Willingness to listen to people's ideas and build on them
- Improvisation based on experience, skills, knowledge

And much more...

### 5.3 Integrating qual and quant approaches

In order to work well together, groups need to be aligned so their energies are working in the same direction. Similarly, to work well, quantitative targets and qualitative productivity need to be in alignment, as they became – to a significant degree - in the example of the Mental Health Trust. Generally this requires a mixture of self organisation by employees and benign leadership. These are not new ideas. Lao Tzu describes this benign leadership as 'the invisible hand'. And this was 500BC.





In some organisations where quantitative targets are operating, qualitative productivity is also being actively promoted. However, in many cases qualitative and quantitative measures are not integrated. The lack of integration between quantitative targets and qualitative productivity often means that they are experienced as conflicting objectives – either-or rather than both-and. Target setters and those interested in qualitative productivity may see themselves in opposition. Where this happens, the ‘lowest common denominator’ is likely to be the result, rather than achieving ‘more than the sum of the parts’. We see competing forces, rather than Yin-Yang balance.

Alternatively, working together, ensuring that both aspects of productivity are aligned is likely to produce a more effective and efficient outcome. Peter Senge illustrates these differences between a situation of alignment, lack of alignment and – worst of all options, empowered individuals with low alignment. In this latter situation the result is generally chaos.



## 6. In Conclusion

This is a working paper, intended to explore the role of Qualitative Mind within organisational development. It proposes that many large organisations have become fixated on targets as a way of measuring performance because it is a simple measure, easily understood and, it is believed, easily acted upon. As a steer, especially in simple situations, targets can offer useful guidelines.

However, targets are crude measures and often not useful – and can sometimes become extremely destructive - in complex, changing organisational environments. This is particularly true of service organisations such as the NHS, the education system or the Police Service. In these organisations demand cannot be easily anticipated or controlled (e.g. by refusing hospital admissions, restricting school numbers, refusing police services). These organisations are in a constant state of dynamic interaction with the communities they serve. A flu epidemic, a riot, a terrorist attack, bullying in a school can disrupt the best laid plans. Situations are emergent and require a style of monitoring and reaction which is in accordance with this emergence.

Targets are predicated on the notion of a rational and mechanistic mind that will work in a systematic and unquestioning way to achieve targets, usually set by other people, but not necessarily deemed sensible, appropriate or attainable by the person nominated to achieve the targets. However, the evidence of how targets are handled by those on whom they are imposed shows that they are frequently treated in anything but a 'rational', accepting manner. Targets assume the future is predictable for all systems<sup>13</sup>. Again, this is clearly an unsound assumption.

At the same time, new thinking in neuroscience and psychology underlines the importance of whole-body knowing, below conscious awareness and the essential role of emotion in effective human functioning. This thinking presents a very fundamental challenge to the dominant role of targets as stand-alone measures for gauging organisational performance.

I am proposing that we need to introduce the concept of Qualitative Mind within organisations; mobilising the considerable skills developed within qualitative research. These skills are sorely needed within many large organisations. I would position Qualitative Mind as acting as a counterbalance to target driven culture. However, this approach will only work effective if targets are integrated with Qualitative Mind and considered to be one half of the whole - each reinforcing the other. Unless they are conceived and introduced in this way, so that they are aligned in their purpose, they will revert to competing models; either-or rather than both-and.

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<sup>13</sup> [www.radstats.org.uk](http://www.radstats.org.uk)



There is a lot of work to be done in order to develop a harmonious balance between quantitative targets and qualitative productivity – and also in expanding the notion of Qualitative Mind. However the benefits of achieving even partial success are likely to impact not only on organisational efficiency and profitability, but also on the development of healthier organisations. By this I mean organisations that are largely comprised of individuals and groups who feel they are contributing, who are more engaged in their work, who are healthier and happier.



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