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RESPONSE TO COMMENTARY

Effective workplace culture: the attributes, enabling factors and consequences of a new concept

'Towards a *complexified* notion of workplace culture'

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We would like to thank our commentator on two counts, first, for the positive feedback provided about the readability of the paper – something we have strived to achieve, as the ideas described are complex to explain, and have tested us over many years!! Second, for challenging us on a number of levels which provides us with an opportunity to reflect on our processes and the outcome framework resulting, as well as the language we have used. We hope this will result in greater clarity for us all.

As researchers who are also practice developers working within a critical science approach we are steeped within the practical world of cultural change in the workplace. We work with multiple constructed realities on a daily basis as well as complex interactions between different stakeholder groups, the interventions we use and the contexts in which we work. This in itself means that we may be working to assumptions that we may be unaware of, assumptions that will be more obvious to our commentator or other external reviewers of this work – we therefore value these being brought to our attention if this is indeed the case.

We would therefore like to explain the approach we have taken in a little more depth and identify some of the contradictions and dialogical issues we ourselves were aware of that underpinned our approach but which we did not explore within the paper in depth. We would then like to explore some of the challenges posed by the commentator in the spirit of ongoing development.

We felt a clear and transparent commitment to sharing our values and beliefs in this work, something we presented on Box 1, for two reasons. The first reason relates to our understanding of methodology captured by the following quotation:

> *'Methodology is best understood as the overall strategy for resolving the complete set of choices or options available to the inquirer. Far from being merely a matter of making selections among methods, methodology involves the researcher utterly - from unconscious worldview to enactment of that world-view via the inquiry process'* (Guba and Lincoln, 1989, p 183)

Methodology we consider is concerned with values, beliefs and assumptions, as this provides both the guiding strategy for a study, and its methods, tools and techniques (although the tools and techniques of one methodology may be used within another). Guba and Lincoln (1989) consider that the intention of the researcher using the tools and techniques will influence how they are used; it is therefore necessary that the researcher should know from which worldview he or she is operating,

because no research approach is value-free.

This then brings us to the second reason we shared our values and beliefs which relates to our understanding of the impact of human interests as described by Habermas (1974), who proposes that different kinds of knowledge are shaped by and interwoven with different human interests. For these reasons, the assumptions of a researcher who is working collaboratively with others, needs to be made explicit: to ensure the researcher is aware of them for the purpose of critique; and to allow the reader to judge how these assumptions may have influenced the research process, as endorsed below:

> *'Paradigm issues are crucial; no inquirer, we maintain, ought to go about their business of inquiry without being clear about just what paradigm informs and guides his or her approach'* (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, p 116)

However, we suspect from our commenter's feedback and the use of the Niessen et al. (2000) that we probably share a common understanding about the pivotal role of methodology. So our reflections need to focus more on whether there are contradictions between our values and our approaches, our approaches and language and also whether we were aware of these contradictions in the processes used.

The commentator suggests that there is a dissonance in two areas; the first is between the approach that we have taken to develop the framework and the resulting framework itself; the second relates to the language that we have used and how the framework would be used in practice.

When selecting our specific approach to concept analysis we were very aware that early approaches to concept analysis were heavily criticised because of their ontological and epistemological assumptions about the nature of concepts and theory, based on positivist premises that were rigid and prescriptive. This is why we chose to use Rogers' concept analysis approach which is located in a socially constructed and evolutionary view that recognises concepts develop through use. This philosophical view aligned with our own values, beliefs and experiences and also the language that went with it, specifically the use of 'enabling factors' rather than for example, 'antecedents' which was the language associated with the positivist approach.

Through the four stages we used to generate the framework, we endeavoured to come to some common understanding of the complexity of effective workplace culture through ascertaining how the construct was used through dialogue and discussion. All the concepts within the framework itself are socially constructed and nearly all could benefit from a similar process of developing shared meanings as they too are social phenomena. In a way the processes we have used to construct the framework mirrors the process of sense making that we use when working with practitioners in the workplace – it starts with practice, it draws insights from the evidence base and returns to practice to be used and reflected on in a constant praxis spiral. So our intention was to develop a framework based on social constructions within different contexts.

We can appreciate though that through some of the language we have used in the paper we may have registered contradictions to the reader. This contradiction being; a flexible approach to its development and use on one hand, and a more rigid view of the resulting framework with its implied relationships on another. For example, the structured framework may at first glance give the impression that an effective workplace culture can be developed if the attributes are attended to by developing the enabling factors, linearly. Our intention was not to convey that if one of the values isn't realised in practice (e.g. leadership development) then that culture cannot be considered as an effective workplace culture. Maybe this apparent contradiction could have been addressed by more

'fluid/flexible' use of language e.g. there is evidence that the values are being 'lived', in word and deed, to a greater or lesser degree.
How we have structured the concept analysis framework into separate parts, may potentially have given the impression that by attending to attributes/enabling factors separately/linearly will ultimately lead to the outcomes. In which case, maybe we should have highlighted this point in our paper; that is, developing an effective workplace culture is not linear, due to the very (complex) nature of culture, which is dynamic and relatively fragile as 'the way things are done' is influenced by many factors and agents. This point is echoed in our commentator's view that the framework may have reified an abstract construct treating it as if it were a concrete, real event, or physical entity.

But here lies a paradox for us as researchers and practice developers, working in a constantly changing and evolving world, that need to understand the relevance of an abstract and non-tangible construct such as culture to everyday practice. In our efforts to stay true to an evolving research process, but also make sense of this for others by conveying key components in a tangible way so as to pragmatically help those in the workplace, we may have conveyed a more rigid understanding. But then this is the criticism of all heuristic devices/tools – they are just tools that can aid discussion and improvement when used by skilled facilitators who are confident with using them flexibly but not too literally. In addition there is another paradox in Benner's (1984) understanding of novice and expert practitioners, novice practitioners need structure, but experts can use tools saliently and intuitively and don't need to be as systematic as novices to reach the same conclusions in relation to complex assessment processes.

Maybe, with hindsight we could have placed more emphasis on stating how complex culture development is, as it also depends on the nature of the context and the starting point in relation to how the framework may help. There are many different profiles on a continuum of effectiveness for workplace culture and these profiles may look different in different contexts at different times.

So, although we can be strongly assured that an effective workplace culture will not happen by accident, we cannot be equally as confident in saying that using the tools and the framework will guarantee its development as key factors include how the framework is used. Maybe we could have brought this more to light in the section 'changing workplace culture' e.g. although we offer tools and processes to enable the development of an effective workplace culture, based on different sources of knowledge, there are no guarantees as culture is a social phenomenon and therefore prone to the sometimes whimsical acts of humans. Team configurations may change; the circumstances of individuals may change, which may affect their wellbeing at work and therefore culture, especially in relation to leadership; the organisational context may change too and exert pressures on the local workplace culture etc.

In terms of understanding our sense of workplace culture from the perspective of enactivism we need to be clear what is meant by this movement. Drawing on Proulx's (2004) description and explanation, enactivism differs from behaviourism and natural selection in that decision-making is an *internal dynamic* situated inside the agent *rather than the environment*. As agents, internal dynamics are construed from experiences of living (in) the world — that is, of coming from our historicity and personal knowledge out of which everything is construed, interpreted and understood. These internal dynamics, in turn, enable potential triggers in our environment to be perceived and so if the triggers in the environment are not 'seen' we cannot be 'affected' by them.

The effective workplace culture framework enables triggers that can be perceived collectively and collaboratively to be identified and attended to by facilitators of change and clinical leaders, although the triggers may vary, look different in different settings and be apparent at different times.

By describing the framework as a 'black box', the commentator creates an image of a 'less malleable construct'; however, this is not how we view an effective workplace culture. It may be more helpful to think instead of 'workplace culture' as the entity that moves towards or away from being 'effective'; this movement being influenced by the presence or absence of the enabling factors; and the degree of movement also varying. For example, a team may identify its workplace culture as 'ineffective' if measured against the attributes, but over time, the team uses the framework to guide itself towards becoming more effective, ultimately resulting in a large amount of change/movement; or alternatively, a team may assess their culture as 'effective', but recognise that there will inevitably be changes over time e.g. staff changes, that may impact on the effectiveness. However the systems that are in place will ensure that these changes/movements will be much less significant.

Whilst recognising that culture is dynamic and developing culture is complex and complicated, for practitioners in practice, who are very pragmatic and/or may be at different positions on Benner's continuum, the approach of increasing awareness of triggers may be more useful than a complex narrative that tries to describe in detail the relationship between the parts and whole. We have intended the paper is useful for practitioners (the ones who create and are affected by the workplace culture) as well as researchers interested in taking this framework, the relationships between the concepts and its underlying philosophical premises further. However we would love to receive narratives about teams attempting to develop their workplace culture into one that is more effective fundamentally focussed upon enabling increased effectiveness in person-centred care. The concept framework will help them find a starting point, and then help them unpick and analyse their experience. These analyses would then help refine and elaborate the effective workplace culture concept, developing it further.

We conclude with lessons learnt about the power of language and the skill required to ensure that language mirrors philosophical intent. We continue to recognise the need to make our assumptions clear in terms of the frameworks use. However we believe that the underlying premise of the framework is about recognising the role of a core set of values that need to be experienced by key stakeholders. This will not be achieved unless the values are embedded in social norms and patterns of behaviours through both workplace and organisational systems. We agree with the stance – it is people who make culture, and the internal relationships shape what the culture will look like and 'the way things are done around here'. Cultures can never be controlled and effective workplace culture is a path made while being walked through a collaborative process.

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