

Assumptions - making them explicit

LEFT-HAND COLUMN Activity

INTRODUCTION

Some cultures are more open than others when it comes to expressing inner thoughts and feelings. Most situations have a "subtext" of unspoken thoughts - the kind of conversation we are accustomed to keep inside our heads. This was illustrated in the film *Annie Hall*, when Woody Allen and Diane Keaton meet at a party and the verbalized conversation between them is subtitled with their private, internal thoughts. Needless to say, the open conversation and the private ones are quite different, but it is interesting how their non-verbal communication reveals some of their inner thoughts.

Of course, there are inner thoughts which it is better not to reveal, but often it is the inner conversation which directs our actions, and for that reason we need to find ways of expressing the subtext openly, and encouraging others to reveal theirs. Senge, 1990 (The Learning Organisation), describes a technique called *The Left Hand Column* in which you select a specific situation where your interaction with a person does not seem to be working. You write out a sample of the exchange in the form of a script on the right-hand side of the page. On the left-hand side you write what you are thinking but not saying at each point in the exchange. For example:

WHAT I'M THINKING

I don't think that's his opinion - I bet he's got it from the physiotherapist.

I've spent a long time with Mr Sahid and I know he wants to go home.

You feel guilty because you sent Mr Greaves home too early and he died.

You don't think much of domiciliary services, do you?

And I wish you wouldn't interrupt me like that.

I don't suppose you've wondered what he might feel like as the only Asian man in the home...

Where would you like to spend your last days?

This is a terrible decision, but you're more powerful than me so I'll keep quiet.

WHAT IS SAID

Dr J: In my view I think Mr Sahid would be better off in residential care.

ME: I'm not sure Mr Sahid sees it that way

Dr.J: He'd be at considerable risk left in his own home.

ME: Well, we've got good domiciliary services and they've told me....

Dr J: Unfortunately, they can't be around all the time, and he'd get company in Oakbrook Home.

ME: Well, they do give a comprehensive service. And I'm not sure how "at home" Mr Sahid would feel at Oakbrook.

Dr J: I think we should give it a try - it's better than him neglecting himself at home

ME: Mmmmm.

The reason why it is important to bring the left-hand column to the surface is because it is often these hidden assumptions which influence our actions. My assumptions about Dr Jenkins lead me to pussy-foot around, and I lose an opportunity to tell him I think there is a problem.

How might I have shared my own views from the left hand column?