

Greenfoods Organic Enterprise

and The Ethics of Selling Alcohol

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Carolyn is an advanced sociodrama trainee from Golden Bay, New Zealand. This article was drawn from her paper on Open and Closed Systems, completed in 2004.

Greenfoods Organic Enterprise (GOE) was formed in 1999 by people in my local community who share a vision of co-creating an enterprise founded on biodynamic principles. Their common goals are:

- ensuring an ongoing supply and variety of good quality organic food for the local market;
- providing a retail outlet in the township for local organic growers;
- promoting the benefits of an organic food supply to the general public; and
- providing employment opportunities in the local community.

The vehicle for achieving these goals is the retail organics shop. The umbrella organisation overseeing the enterprise is a Trust.

I was elected as a Trustee of GOE in July 2001, attending monthly Trust meetings and being active in committee work for the Trust until my resignation at the July 2002 AGM. My observations and experience within GOE as a closed system during that year form the basis of this paper.

I describe GOE as a closed system because

members are governed by rules and codes of behaviour restricting membership and controlling movement in and out of the system. There are many closed systems in our society such as sports clubs, professional organisations, schools, prisons, board meetings and psychodrama workshops. For instance, to belong to a political party there is a rule that members pay an annual subscription fee. Only paid up members have the right to vote on party policies. Members are expected to uphold and promote party policies and oppose the policies of other parties. The behavioural norm is to 'toe the party line' and a member who challenges this norm risks having membership revoked by the party.

There are usually consequences for anyone breaking a closed system's rules or code of behaviour. Consequences may include withdrawal of membership rights (sports clubs, professional organisations) or punishment administered by the system (schools, prisons).

The rules of GOE are an expression of the values held by the membership. GOE is made up of subgroups that include

- alternative lifestylers

- Green Party supporters and activists
- people who are ill due to chemical toxins or nutritional deficiency
- new immigrants from Europe and USA
- small scale growers of organic produce

Values common to all of these subgroups can be expressed as follows:

- *Organic food is the only safe food*
- *It's important to give people the choice to shop organically*
- *It's up to us to create and promote sustainable alternatives*
- *We value an environment free of genetic modification or engineering (GE)*
- *We must try and save the world, or at least this part of it.*

At Greenfoods Organic Enterprise the following rules and operating norms governing Members and Trustees:

- *The world works best when people who support the Shop (and Trust) have membership status.* Anyone may become a Member of the Trust by signing a membership form (no fee). Members are drawn from a pool of people who actively support the Shop (regular customers, volunteer workers, paid workers, fundraisers, advocates).
- *Active support and advocacy of organic principles is important.* Members are expected to value and advocate for organic food production methods and a GE free agricultural environment.
- *The world works best when people's personal lifestyle choices reflect a national and global political viewpoint.* It is assumed that all members support a GE free policy for NZ and the planet.
- *The guiding principles of GOE Membership are closely aligned with Green politics. Other political viewpoints do not accurately represent GOE principles or Members' views.* Members are assumed to either be a member and/or

supporter of the Green Party or at least demonstrate an alignment with Green politics and principles.

- *Power and responsibility are best shared amongst the membership. Trustees are working on behalf of all Members.* Trustees are appointed at the AGM by Members present, or interim appointments are made at the discretion of existing Trustees (up to a maximum of 12 Trustees) in accordance with the Trust deed.

- *A Trustee has a position of responsibility and accountability.* All Trustees are required to attend regular meetings and undertake committee work and other assigned tasks. Trustees can end their appointment by written resignation or by standing down at the AGM, or they may be asked to resign by the Trust in certain circumstances. All of these rules and operating norms reflect the intention of the Trust Members to promote and protect the biodynamic principles and organisational goals upon which the GOE was founded.

A Restrictive Operating Norm

GOE Trust meetings begin with a handholding circle of silent communion. The intention is to reflect on the goodwill and common purpose shared by everyone present. The value expressed here is 'only the positive energy in the group should be acknowledged'. I describe this as a restrictive group norm because my observation of this convention is that expression of the negative tele often present in various relationships within the group is discouraged.

As a Trustee participating in the circle I experienced discomfort because my actions were not congruent with my thoughts and feelings. I re-enacted my coping role of *halfhearted handholder* and fragmenting roles of *disconnected imposter* and *resentful hypocrite*. Other members also experienced discomfort in participating in

the circle. This discomfort remained unspoken within the group meetings and the operating norm continued. As a result I became aware of that a focal conflict had emerged in the system.

A focal conflict involves two opposing forces present in the group and in each group member. These are the disturbing motive and the reactive fear. The need for expression of each opposing force creates a tension within the group. The group then searches for a solution to the conflict which will reduce the tension. The solution may be either enabling or restrictive.

Restrictive Solutions

The disturbing motive present in the GOE closed system is a desire to create an innovative, sustainable and dynamic model for successful enterprise based on values of responsibility and truthfulness. The reactive fear in the system is a desire to avoid conflict and exclude any fragmenting behaviour.

The handholding circle is a restrictive solution to this focal conflict because it does not allow the disturbing motive to have adequate expression. Bringing out discomfort or challenging norms is not catered for in this convention. The impetus to grow and develop as a group conflicts with a fear of the disharmony new challenges will bring.

On a few occasions the values expressed by an outspoken subgroup have been challenged during a meeting. One member of that subgroup then spoke in a loud, aggressive manner to silence the opposition. Members of other groups withdrew into silence. In this instance the disturbing motive is the desire to have the value systems of different subgroups expressed or upheld. The reactive fear is the need to preserve personal safety and dignity. The solution the group comes up with is to leave contentious issues off the agenda in subsequent meetings so

that conflict is avoided. This is also a restrictive solution, as it does not allow the disturbing motive expression.

One consequence of restrictive solutions to a focal conflict is that difficulties and conflicts are discussed in small subgroups outside the Trust meetings. Another consequence is that subgroups with polarised values tend to develop and common ground is forgotten.

Developing Enabling Solutions

An example of developing enabling solutions to conflict in the GOE closed system occurred during a sociodrama on the expression of difference over the sale of alcohol. I initiated and directed a group centred sociodramatic enactment involving 14 trustees and shop workers. Our purpose was to develop a decision-making process to deal with the contentious issue of whether to stock and sell alcohol in the shop.

Previously the issue of selling organic alcohol had divided trustees into polarised subgroups. Discussion had deteriorated into personal attack, with no resolution. The issue had been omitted from the meeting agenda for several months. It had simmered unacknowledged on the 'back burner' while trustees and staff discussed less contentious business.

I put the alcohol issue back on the agenda and proposed that we arrange a time and place in which I would direct the group using an action method. This would be an opportunity to explore all points of view and look for a way forward. Framed as a sociodramatic question, the group's dilemma was: *How can we honour other points of view while maintaining our own strongly held beliefs?* There was agreement and a general indication of support and enthusiasm for my proposal. I felt pleased, purposeful and nervous.

Warming Up as Director

I wanted to meet the challenge of extending my directing experience to a new arena. Directing a group in the real world was new and directing a sociodramatic enactment was new.

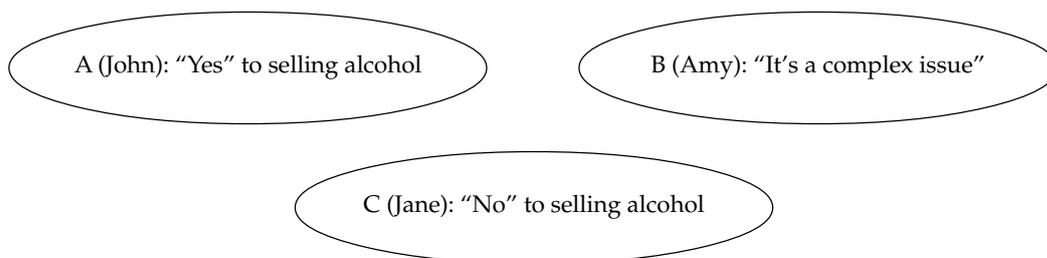
In supervision prior to the meeting, I asked Cher Williscroft to help me take up the role of *sociodrama director* more fully. We explored ideas for warming the group up to me as director and to our purpose, identifying subgroups, identifying a statement or slogan representing the views of each subgroup, producing interaction and role reversals between subgroups. Prior to meeting with the group I concretised these ideas further by writing them down, drawing diagrams and visualising myself directing different stages of the enactment.

I warmed up to my purpose as director. This was 'to encourage new roles to emerge from within subgroups and to produce spontaneity, creativity and stronger relationships'.

Group Warm-up

The enactment took place during a meeting of trustees, management and staff of the GOE. None were experienced in psychodrama. I began by asking the group for their cooperation in two specific ways. I asked that everyone participate, and that they agree to follow my directions. I got a positive and enlivened response from the group and felt encouraged to proceed.

Diagram 1. Subgroups



I identified 3 subgroups in relation to the sale of alcohol and brought a representative of each onto the stage (see diagram 1).

All participants were directed to join the subgroup they felt most aligned with. Subgroup A had 6 people, B had 5 people and C had 3 people.

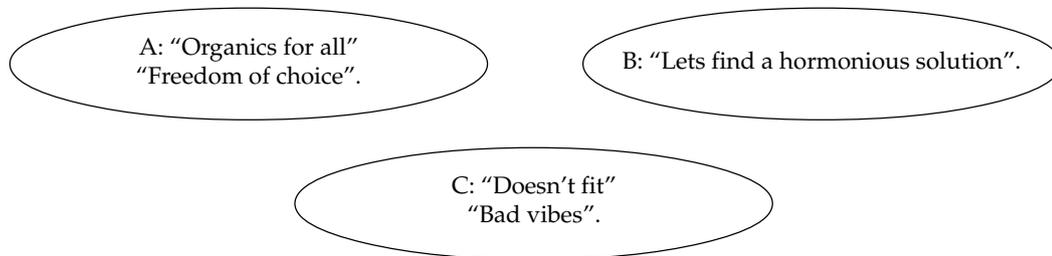
Members of each subgroup were directed to express their views within their subgroup and to produce a slogan representing their common value. These slogans (shown in diagram 2 overleaf) emerged:

- A: "Organics for all" "Freedom of choice".
- B: "Lets find a harmonious solution".
- C: "Doesn't fit" "Bad vibes".

Each group in turn was directed to express their values to the other groups. Subgroup C (No to Alcohol) expressed fear, unease and a belief that alcohol is unhealthy. Subgroup A (Yes to Alcohol) expressed values of freedom of choice and consistency with providing any organic goods marketable. Subgroup B (It's a Complex Issue) said timing, finances and harmony among the entire group are important issues.

Role reversals were directed between all subgroups, so all experienced the values of the other subgroups. During this process some new responses emerged and relationships deepened.

Diagram 2 Subgroup Slogans



Each subgroup was then directed to take up their original role and bring out a new, creative response towards another subgroup.

Role Development

Jane (Subgroup C) moved towards John (Subgroup A). She said she appreciated his views were different to hers and suggested they agree to disagree. Jane was in the role of *conciliatory peace seeker*. John's response was to make a speech about his values. He raised his voice and made himself big physically, taking up more space. John was in the overdeveloped coping role of *self-righteous soapbox orator*.

The focal conflict in the group was being expressed by John and Jane. Jane was expressing the reactive fear, wanting the group to remain harmonious and peaceful. John was expressing the disturbing motive in an overbearing self righteous manner. His response had the effect of sociometrically increasing the distance between himself and Jane. The old fragmenting role system of polarized subgroups and personal attack was again manifesting in the group. I saw an opportunity in this moment to encourage a new response from John that would strengthen his relationship with Jane and others.

I intervened with a metacommunication to John, telling him we would slow the action down. I directed Jane to express herself again to John. I directed John to listen to her, pause before

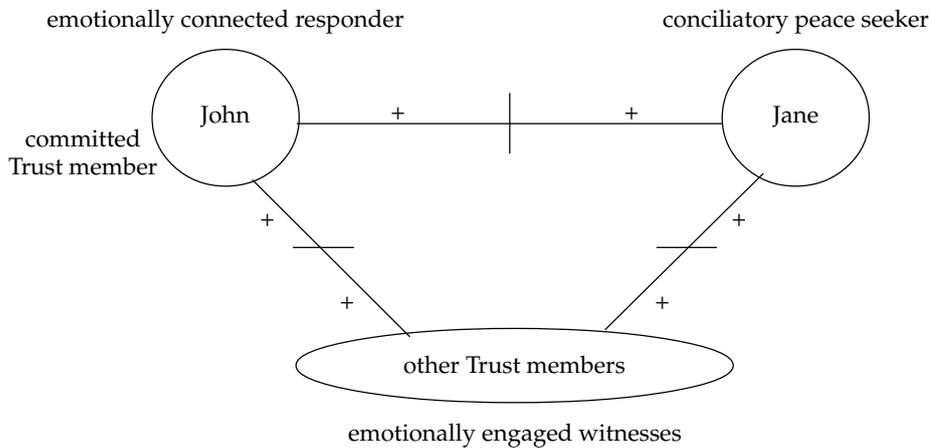
responding and stay in relationship with her.

John warmed up to being more present with Jane. I doubled him in feeling a lot of emotions coming up. He responded in a way that showed he was more connected with Jane and other people as he spoke. He had moved into the progressive role of *emotionally connected responder*. His body language softened and he moderated his tone of voice to Jane's. This is an underdeveloped role in John. He began talking in general terms about people society makes judgements about. I encouraged him to talk about his own feelings and make a personal statement. As he did he became more aware of his own emotional response, and the role of *emotionally connected responder* strengthened.

I noticed other people responding to John's deepening experience in this role. They became more emotionally present with each other and moved into deeper relationship with people in other subgroups.

John expressed his continued regard for all Subgroup C members, and all others in the Trust, whatever the outcome. He said that he would be disappointed if the decision was made not to sell alcohol, however it wouldn't change his wanting to be part of this group (the Trust). His role was *committed Trust member*. These role relationships are set out (overleaf) in diagram 3.

Diagram 3 Role Relationships



Further Movement

Two Subgroup A (Yes to Alcohol) members were determined to influence other groups to their way of thinking and didn't show a willingness to listen and appreciate others' concerns. They expressed frustration at the delay in making a decision. They did not make an emotional connection with people in other subgroups and they stood their ground. Their role was *intransigent sufferer*.

Amy (Subgroup B: It's A Complex Issue) moved into a new position between subgroups A and C. She stated she was taking up a more definite position between the two and expressed the value of 'finding harmonious consensus in an inclusive way'. Amy's role was *clear-minded initiator*. One by one each other member of Subgroup B moved to join her, expressing a similar intention of finding an inclusive outcome.

Jane (originally Subgroup C) moved towards Subgroup B, stating her willingness also to find an inclusive solution.

Betty from Subgroup C also moved closer to Subgroup B, leaving Lara alone in Subgroup C. Three Subgroup A members moved towards

Subgroup B and stated a desire to find a common solution.

As people moved out of their original subgroups to stand in a new place a circle organically formed, inclusive of everyone. Amy drew everyone's attention to the circle they had created. Many people responded warmly to this development. Amy proposed that the decision on selling alcohol, and any conditions, be made by consensus. There was a general murmur of agreement from most people and nobody spoke against it.

This was the moment when the group's purpose was met: all points of view had been experienced, movement in the system had occurred and a new way forward emerged. My purpose as director was also met: spontaneity and creativity within the group had produced new roles, and relationships had strengthened.

In the sharing phase the group responses indicated the process had been worthwhile and purpose met. Relationships had deepened and creative ideas were emerging and being considered. Several people expressed their intention to keep the issue alive and work towards a consensus decision.

Epilogue

In the weeks following the enactment much casual discussion on the subject of alcohol sales continued between various members as they met in the Shop or around town. Some time later a decision was made by Trustees to agree in principle to the sale of alcohol in the Shop. Decisions on timing and implementation were handed over to the Shop management committee. In due course a select range of organic wines and beer appeared for sale in the Shop.

Conclusion

In a closed system there is a defined set of rules governing membership. The restriction of closed system membership makes it exclusive by nature.

Roles are more clearly defined in a closed system. Role relationships are constrained by members being required to focus on the common purpose for which the system exists. Within these

constraints individual personalities can express themselves in a variety of roles, and relationships can develop between members. Conflicted relationships develop as a normal consequence of individuals having differing ideas and opinions within a larger system of common values. Resolution of conflicts must be achieved in a way that is consistent with these common values.

In the Greenfoods Organic Enterprise closed system the attitudes expressed by each different subgroup of members are consistent with the values of promoting organic food and sustainable choices, supporting Green politics and assuming responsibility for the health of our planet. These are bold and innovative values within the cultural conserve of the wider population. Expression of differing ideas about how to achieve these goals creates conflict between members. The membership collectively acts in a bold and innovative way in choosing to address the conflict by using sociodrama.

