



Responses of Methodist Ministers to Ministerial Development Review: a case for research led policy-making

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Responses of Methodist Ministers to Ministerial Development Review: a case for research led policy-making

The paper examines the responses of Methodist Ministers to the policy of Ministerial Development Review (MDR). A case is made for research-led policy making; of how important it is for the Church to pay attention to those affected by a policy, and to seek understanding of their responses from organisational perspectives. The research picks up on previous research by Professor Yvonne Guerrier working with Christopher Bond (Guerrier 2012, Guerrier and Bond 2013, Guerrier and Bond 2014).

The approach adopted in the research is based in a form of Grounded Theory (Strauss and Corbin 1998, Goulding 2002), in an attempt to hear voices of those involved. The schedule of the questions used in the semi-structured interview was adapted from that used in Guerrier's and Bond's research. 13 in depth interviews were transcribed and themes identified using NVIVO, a tool for qualitative analysis.

The findings of the research in the first place confirm previous work of Bond and Guerrier, indicating complex feelings and thoughts around perceived managerial tasks. The specific responses to the policy of Ministerial Development Review are outlined in the report under the headings of: 'appraisal and MDR', 'knowing what to do', 'finding support'. The results indicate a problem with the language of management and a wide breadth of opinion about MDR, its value and help. There also appears to be a difficulty with the relationship of an individual minister and the national Church expressed in terms of identity and a particular understanding of the Covenant relationship. The data shows an inconsistent and wide variety of approaches to how work priorities are set and support found underlining some of the reasons as to why MDR was originally implemented.

The paper suggests the need for further research that would include a more focused evaluation. Certain recommendations are made: a case for the Susanna Wesley Foundation, and for the need for policy makers to find ways of noticing how their policies have an impact on the lives they seek to support and help.

Introduction

I am grateful for the opportunity to share some of my research into the responses of Methodist Ministers, presbyters and deacons, to Ministerial Development Review. This is important for the Methodist Church and I also believe it illustrates the concerns of the Susanna Wesley Foundation. My interest in policy research arises from my studies at Manchester University and the Institute of Education in London as well as participation in the policymaking of the Methodist Church in Britain. I offer some of the outcomes of my research of the last year and make a case for academic thoughtfulness in policy making. I conclude my paper by reflecting on the benefits and challenges of the Susannah Wesley Foundation as it grows and develops.

I would like to engage with a church matter from organisational perspectives. I have found such an approach in the past has brought me into conflict with the Methodist Church. This 'awkward relationship' between the church and secular ideas lies behind much of my own academic interest today. There is I believe, an inherent distrust of secular ideas when dealing with sacred matters: for example, theological formation need not consider secular approaches to adult learning precisely because it is theological; the purpose of that formation cannot be reflected upon within a wider context of professional training precisely because it is ministerial.

During my ministry the resistance to educational reform and the need to engage with a more secular understanding of profession has modified, and MDR is an example of that change. I notice that similar changes have occurred in other historical occupations: for example, teachers have had to come to terms with different approaches to learning, reflection and the shape of their profession (Hargreaves 1994). For Methodist Ministers changes, no doubt, have emerged to some extent as a response to concerns of ministerial stress (Coate 1989, Davey 1995), but also out of a recognition of a need for more competent ministers and thus seeking new ways for their formation (Methodist Council 1994, Methodist Council 1996, Howcroft 2002) while safe guarding issues have clearly raised the stakes for the Church. Some have argued that the increasing number of older students with managerial experience has pushed the Church towards more secular models of our vocation (Luscombe and Shreeve 2002, p. 14).

Ministerial Development Review

MDR is a form of annual review that has consciously tried to distance itself from previous versions of support that had been based in a form of appraisal. Those implementing the policy understood the resistance among Ministers to strongly flavoured management approaches and worked hard to be consultative in their approach and careful with their language (IJ).

In Book One of the MDR literature the principles of the policy are laid out:

1. *A development review process that supports ministers.*
2. *A framework for ministers to engage in reflective practice.*
3. *Not an end in itself.*
4. *A connexional scheme. (Miller, Anderson et al. 2011)*

However, it is worth noting that it is a policy that:

- Has a history in appraisal
- Is a one sided change in the Covenant relationship
- Is thus 'from on high'.
- Uses secular language of review, development and reflective practice for 'office holders' who don't see themselves as employees¹. (Miller, Anderson et al. 2011)

Lenses and perspectives

The organisational theorist quite reasonably wants to look at the Church as just another organisation but the theologian would in their turn want to look at organisational theory as just another way of looking at the created order. Somehow we need to do both and use secular ideas from a theological base.

Reluctant Managers

I owe much to Yvonne Guerrier and Christopher Bond's study of Methodist ministers (presbyters) and management which is concerned with how presbyters, 'construct and develop management and leadership skills'. They suggest there is, '*at best ambivalence and possibly in some instances a resistance to notions of oversight, management and accountability among a significant proportion of presbyters* (Guerrier and Bond 2013 p. 12).

Their papers are concerned not so much with management and leadership skills as a set of competencies, but with how managerial identity is developed and sustained by presbyters. Among other concerns noted was the malleability of the presbyter's role, and the way that presbyters consistently divided their role into the areas of pastoral, management and outreach and that the pastoral side was the area with which the majority felt most comfortable and confident. They also noted the tensions in the Church in the areas of management, leadership and oversight (Guerrier and Bond 2013 p 2). Recommendations included that the Church should engage more positively in management, a view upheld in a telling quote by one of the presbyters interviewed,

¹ Supreme Court holds that Methodist ministers are office-holders, not employees. This was 13 and 14 February 2013.

They come to the church doors, take their brains out, hang them up, and come in, they mismanage the building, the property, they mismanage people. And that's their way of being holy, by rejecting common sense from the world around them (Benjamin) (ibid p. 19)

It was interesting to note that the two roles in which presbyters felt less confident were the outward facing ones - mission and management - leading to the recommendation that the Church must learn to '*recognise the legitimacy and purpose of both discourses*', and to use appropriate languages about management and when referring to the '*spiritual and the divine*' (ibid p 22).

Psychological Contract

The findings of Guerrier and Bond indicate a profound tension between the secular and the sacred, perhaps one that cannot be addressed simply by careful use of language. Another frame that might be used in this context is the notion of a 'psychological contract'. This is an area of study in industry concerned with the perceptions and feelings of mutual obligation between employee and employer. This has particular resonance within a Methodist context because of the notion of the Covenantal relationship that is used to describe the office holder status of the Methodist Minister. Christeen George outlines a 'general consensus' regarding this particular lens:

- It is promissory based in a belief about what an organisation is offering
 - It is unspoken but implied, known most obviously when broken
 - It has two sides to it, an exchange of promises between individuals and the organisation itself
 - It is shaped by individuals' perceptions
 - It can be understood in terms of needs and expectations.
- (George 2009 p.3)

Given that the most distinctive element of a Methodist understanding of Ordination is indeed the relationship with the Conference, to be in 'full Connexion', and this is marked by a Covenant, the notion of the psychological contract provides considerable potential for understanding the reaction of Ministers to new developments such as MDR and also for addressing them in helpful ways. George raises the issues of when contracts are damaged and indicates in that how organisations might become more helpful to their employees. Such a breakdown of the contract may indeed be the norm (Robinson and Rousseau 1994). Quoting Springett, George wonders if 'employees should be encouraged to develop a relational psychological contract' (Springett 2005, George 2009 p 132). This emphasis on relationships, to articulate the implicit psychological contract with an intentional effort to pay attention to those within the organisation, is worth exploring.

The literature on Psychological Contracts, particularly when contracts break down, offers a number of ways of understanding the difficulties the Church has in developing policies and implementing change. It suggests the importance of building relationships, informal and formal, within organisations, and ways of doing that.

Identity

Guerrier and Bond indicate issues around individual identity that are called into question by concerns about management. Management is identified as more than a list of tasks or competencies (Guerrier and Bond 2014 p 4). The individual identity is shaped by and shapes the wider organisational identity. It is worth noting that the idea of Management as an identity is not without controversy; Ministers are not the only reluctant managers (Brocklehurst, Grey et al. 2009). It has long been observed that this sense of identity becomes part of what constitutes our sense of order and reality (Berger and Luckmann 1971). Berger and Luckmann follow Durkheim in their book on the construction of reality, and importantly Durkheim's published work included fear of anomie expressed as suicide (Durkheim 1951). This helps understand the level of reluctance that any challenge or uncertainty about identity can raise and the Minister's self-understanding is not clear either (Methodist Council 1996, Luscombe and Shreeve 2002, Methodist Conference 2002, Methodist Conference 2004). Guerrier and Bond point out some of the challenges which Ministers face (Guerrier 2012, p 6, 7).

Alongside individual identity, but linked to it, Albert and Whetten introduce and develop the concept of organisational identity and the related concepts of dual and multiple identity (Albert and Whetten 1985). They offer a methodology for studying dual and multiple identity organisations. Dave Whetten has also reflected on his journey of faith and his academic life and the importance of both in understanding organisation. Hatch and Schultz have put together a very helpful collection of essays on organisational identity (Hatch and Schultz 2004). In that volume Barbara Czarniawska takes a constructionist perspective on organising. Her research methodology is also of interest, looking at 'narratology', which offers ways of both understanding organisation, and also of offering insights into helping them. Her use of the expression, 'dramas of institutional identity', offers a rich vein of understanding the visceral response of the Church in changing times (Czarniawska-Joerges 1997).

At the end of William Scott's book on institutions and organisation he offers what he calls a, 'sermon' in support of the cause of institutional analysis. Here he advances Philip Selznick institutional approach (Scott p 273). The values in and the values of institutions enable or perhaps disable individuals, and it matters to seek understanding and build relationships within the organisation.

Methodology

The basic approach of a semi-structured interview attempts to give a voice to those that might not otherwise be heard, it has its roots in Grounded Theory which sees itself as a theory generating method rather than simply a way of proving a hypothesis (Bartlett and Payne, Strauss and Corbin 1998). It was helpful in conducting the research that I was no longer part of the leadership of the Church, but my story plays a part in how I see and interpret things. I interviewed volunteers from a Facebook page limited to Ministers that excluded senior Church leadership from the forum². I had noticed over a number of months in the discussions a strong sense that people did not feel listened to and so I simply invited those interested to contact me to take part in a piece of research on MDR. The numbers involved in the interviews were not sufficient to attempt to get an overview of opinions of Ministers in general, but offered insight into the kind of areas that might be explored later.

Participant	Role	Year	Gender	Ethnicity
AB	Presbyter (Superintendent)	1997	Male	White
ABC	Presbyter (Superintendent)	2001	Female	White
CD	Presbyter (Superintendent)	1976	Male	White
EF	Presbyter	2008	Female	White
GH	Presbyter	2010	Female	White
IJ	Staff Discipleship and Ministries	2011	Female	White
KL	Presbyter (Superintendent)	1989	Male	White
MN	Presbyter (Superintendent)	1995	Male	White
OP	Presbyter (Supernumerary Ex Chair)	1998	Female	White
QR	Presbyter (Superintendent)	2006	Female	White
ST	Deacon	2004	Male	White
UV	Presbyter	2005	Male	White
WX	Presbyter	2010	Female	White

Before I adopted a particular schedule for the interviews I held one conversation with a colleague who had expressed an interest in the area, and agreed to my exploring questions I might use. In total 12 interviews were transcribed with a balance of men and women, longer term and shorter term service, with 11 Presbyters and 1 Deacon. I also conducted a face-to-face interview with one of the Connexional Staff involved in the development and implementation of the MDR policy that helped give me a personal perspective on the whole process. The schedule of questions was based, with permission, on the previous work, mentioned above, concerning Methodist Ministers and Management (Guerrier 2012, Guerrier and Bond 2013, Guerrier and Bond 2014). The adaptations were shaped partly by the first interview with a colleague who agreed to help me, and partly through the choice of the

² From the FB group this description, 'A group for Methodist presbyters who aren't District Chairs or Connexional Officers. A place where one can, metaphorically, kick off one's shoes before the first, sink into a battered old armchair, and chew the fat with colleagues, safe in the knowledge that it really IS "in band", and you don't have to watch what you say.'

specific focus of this project; an interest in how MDR was viewed within the wider context of how Methodist presbyters conceive their management skills.

Research Results

I was intrigued by the comment from my first interview:

'I have to honestly say that I don't really know why I was stirred in the way I was, and sometimes became quite cross and churned up because of some of the things that... the process that I was being pushed through, it felt a bit like that, and it felt as though it was in some ways almost violating my own sense of who I was and my own sense of vocation.' (AB)

I share that curiosity, why are his feelings, and those of others, quite so strong?

....it seems to compartmentalise and diminish, actually, the whole endeavour that you're engaged in, and as if it could be reduced to little chunks of this and that. It's about more than that. And I suppose, yes, I see my vocation much more in terms of seeking to be a good, worthy minister and feeling accountable to that. I feel I have a strong sense of accountability, but I don't necessarily find some of the ways in which I'm expected to go through processes by which that's checked to be helpful in doing... it doesn't make me feel particularly accountable other than to some processes which I don't necessarily see as totally in line with what I actually see my vocation and sense of professionalism to be. (AB)

Clearly this interviewee does not distinguish MDR from conventional appraisal. He feels that it diminishes him, reduces complex behaviours and attitudes to tick boxes. 'It's about more than that'.

... the word diminish is a word that I sometimes feel... that it diminishes what... you feel it diminishes the whole being of a minister. It seems to reduce it to various tasks, a more utilitarian thing rather than more about, if you like, character and... (AB)

Further interviews were mostly less negative and they seem to have picked up on the intentions and carefulness that the member of the Connexional Team refers to in her interview. This helpfulness, however, is not without comment, and the conversations also supported the finding from previous research of Guerrier and Bond, that of ambivalence to management. There is a suspicion of hierarchy, of appraisal in particular, of secular ideas in general and above all a lack of clarity as to what the policy is for and what agenda it might have.

In reflecting on the process of introducing MDR, an Ex Chair of District said, *There were one or two in the District who were suspicious, critical, anticipating conflict, all the things in any situation, the feeling that somebody somewhere is developing things just for the sake of it and what have you. (OP).*

In this paper I report my findings under three headings: appraisal, knowing what to do, and finding support.

MDR and Appraisal

The perception of MDR in relationship to other appraisal schemes is made throughout the interviews. Appraisal carries some sort of baggage for some, '*... annual appraisal doesn't take into account any form of vocation or discernment of gifts and particular skills within the ministry (MN).*

And more generally a background of difficulty with the issue:

Moving in that direction, for me, the very word professional has some difficulties, which we're all aware of, aren't we (OP)?

But is more positively felt by others, MDR is criticised for not being as robust as appraisal while a recognition is made that it does need to be different from appraisal in an employment context:

'I think it's not clear ... it's a little bit too vague. It's being nice. It's gentle, it's ... MDR is pastorally caring and sensitive, and of course every appraisal should be pastorally caring and sensitive. We are not employees of the Methodist church . . .' (CD)

It was too relaxed; it didn't really make me, challenge me or make me think and because he was not in any way connected with the circuit, there was no reference to the actual people who I was working with and who knew something about what my ministry was about. So, didn't seem very relevant really (UV).

However, for AB above, MDR is seen as no more than appraisal with its perceived minimizing of complexity and humanity. While not as robustly stated, some would have preferred the review to be even less prescriptive and managerial. In answer to the question, 'if you didn't have to do MDR what would you do?' The response was,

'What would I do? I think I would rather have maybe a person or a small group that I just meet with maybe a few times a year and just talk things through.' (ABC)

A recurring theme was the lack of training and consistency for those conducting MDR. Here the experience of the policy that intends not to be a crude form of appraisal is experienced as such because it is done badly.

Indeed the lack of training is noticed by IJ with the emphasis on the quality of the resources provided in lieu. The following quote from an anguished interviewee who had previously experienced appraisal before becoming a minister.

My first time, I looked at my preaching and got people to give me feedback on some of my services, and that was really useful. Last year, which was my second time and so we set up meetings for the churches, really, to say what

they wanted me to do, and that wasn't very useful at all, because they came up with everything on earth, really... wanted me to do absolutely everything. And I spent the rest of the year just feeling stressed because I couldn't get the stuff done. So that didn't really achieve very much at all. (EF)

The reflection, indicating again a poorly done MDR, was that it was simply an unimaginative engagement:

... my sense in the form that it's done is that it's just done to tick some boxes.[....] So, no, I'd rather not be doing something that was ticking boxes. I'd rather be doing something that was about my development. (GH)

The sense of ticking boxes is associated with appraisal outside the Church, but MDR is also seen as distinct from that failing:

Sometimes that (appraisal) could feel like tick-boxing, because they weren't actually saying how can we develop you? It was just a case of confirming that all the staff had been through a process. . . .(GH)

And in answer to the question about appraisal's similarity to MDR the answer makes it clear

'It's not like MDR because MDR is deliberately supportive. It's not linked to your next pay rise or your future promotion or whatever categories the annual appraisals fed into (GH).

The history of MDR, its roots in other forms of reflective practice do continue to shape people's perception of it and its agenda:

Well, I would go back further than MDR really because MDR is the child of the ministerial self-appraisal scheme really,..... it was mooted initially by people who were concerned that there were ministers who were, in common parlance, swinging the lead rather successfully. (KL)

The roots of a policy do shape how people perceive it, even though the policy makers have made efforts to move forwards. The experience of the policy is shaped by the same dilemmas of the holy and the secular, of God and mammon:

I think what happens is we fall between, well, several stools, but we fall between the stools of management and pastoral management model and pastoral model. We want to be professional, we want to be recognised as a genuine profession as opposed to a calling, if you like. (KL)

Knowing what to do

A key question in the Guerrier and Bond research is, 'what do ministers do?' The distinction made between a vocation and a profession, or an office holder and an employee gets expressed in a preference for pastoral or preaching tasks rather than management or outward facing roles. MDR offers a way of discerning an answer to this question. Uncertainty about priorities or purposes in ministry show through in the interviews and the lack of clarity about roles and responsibility flows through into a lack of clarity about how

MDR might fit in. For example a vocational role might need a spiritual director (EF) or a professional practitioner might need appraisal (CD).

A minister with only a few years of travel is honest enough to say, *I don't know what I'm supposed to be doing as a minister. I know that there are things that I'm supposed to do because they happen, such as leading worship, such as engaging with particular groups in the Church, and supporting pastoral encounters or pastoral care. I know what's in the ordination service. I suppose that's how I know (WX).*

But that same sense of being driven by outside concerns is also expressed by a much longer serving one . . .

'I have diary that determines what I do' (CD)

I look at my diary and what it says I'm supposed to be doing, I do. How do I know what I'm supposed to be doing? It's taking from a lot of different things. So, you take it and you gradually build it up, so you look at what's not been happening and what needs to happen (UV).

There is a suspicion that policy makers are aware of this lack of clarity and wonder if Ministers might become more professional in their approach.

I think that those who want to shape the policy of the church and give it some coherence wanted to make that look more professional than some of our ministers aren't doing their job properly (KL).

There is circularity in comments about work being driven by diaries, or simply by a sense that,

'I guess I do what I, kind of, think ministers of churches ought to be doing' (ST).

Within a secular approach to prioritising, there would be some requirement to know what your job description is and what is the overall purpose of your present employment. The interviewees reflected the lack of clarity about both these matters and indeed their complexity.

Some of it is gut instinct, some of it is fire-fighting, something comes up and you have to deal with it. (QR).

The mixture of 'we do what we do', some reflection with colleagues, and responding to events is a theme that repeats. There is clearly a business behind the 'how do you know what to do?' response, even a sense of urgency and stress, but throughout a lack of clarity which spills over into a lack of sureness of how MRD might help. EF's sense of simply being given a list of more things to do, doesn't seem to address the more crucial sense of discernment of role or purpose.

Finding support

IJ describes the care taken in developing a policy that is intended to be helpful, and the resources quoted above indicate the way the MDR positions

itself as part of the way that the Methodist Conference seeks to support its ministers (Miller, Anderson et al. 2011). That support is needed to cope with the complexities and challenges of ministry is evident throughout.

Interviewees were asked in various ways where they got support. The answers were shaped by why they thought they were trying to do, and what they understood as their role or identity. A minister with a clear sense of working with others responded with, '*My Circuit Leadership Team (KL)*'. However, there was a clear sense that this quite secular response, was modified by a deep understanding of what ministry was about, '*I have an administrator who understands all the various nuances because her Dad was a minister and her husband is a minister, so she understands (QR)*'.

I found this an interesting response; the acceptance of support in a way that perhaps any one working in a complex role might seek, but the recognition of 'all the various nuances'; a need for those that accompany to understand the specific issues of ministry was underlined by another, '*I have a group of people that I got ordained with, and we keep in touch by phone and Internet with each other, and we also meet up quite regularly (WX)*'.

For those who did not resist MDR specifically or the idea of engaging in more secular views, there was still the clear idea that ministry was different and inside knowledge mattered. To some extent then, there was a caution about the outside providing the support that all recognised they needed. The outside implied not only outside the Church, but perhaps even from the national church itself; thus the desire for individual choice even in a Connexional policy.

I think people have to be able to choose their own supporters, in a sense (ST).

While acceptance of MDR emerges as a consistent theme, there is also a sense that the whole might be located more helpfully within either a more spiritual framework, or specifically a more Methodist framework.

How would he improve it? I think he would spend a great deal of time focusing on the individual minister's walk with God in that you remember the meeting... the class meeting questions which were very searching in terms of your own personal walk with God (MN).

Asking the question, 'If you didn't do MDR, what would you do; this answer indicates a broad understanding of what kind of support, professional or otherwise, the Church might offer which would represent a much more general answer?

That would depend on the topic. I have a spiritual director anyway, so I talk to her, but that's different, somehow, because MDR is more about professional development (EF).

Discussion

The findings support the quantitative research of Guerrier and Bond; the reluctance to engage with secular discourse, that there is a significant lack of confidence in management tasks and the perception of the multifaceted role of minister as existing in quite discrete areas. However, the experience of MDR among this group was overall good. For some this was because it wasn't managerial but pastoral, for others, it did offer a welcomed rigour and accountability to their role that they appreciated as a form of appraisal. The sheer breadth of opinion suggests that the MDR people experienced was various, and comments about the lack of training and understanding of MDR need to be taken into account. Those interviewed seemed to indicate that MDR was more positively received than the more general view of management. However, I am still struck by those that found it intolerable, and by those who felt it was indeed too pastoral to be helpful.

The policy set out to distance itself from too much management language and to a large extent among those interviewed this worked, but even so that intention was not fully understood or experienced. The questions raised by Guerrier and Bond therefore still exist, which specifically in this research are concerned with how we might develop and implement an acceptable form of support for Methodist Ministers that is both robust enough to encourage and support personal development and embedded enough within the narrative of Church to be accepted.

1) Responses to MDR and Appraisal

The 'covenant relationship' suggests both explicit and tacit understandings of how an individual relates to the Connexion. The tacit agreement that has existed, that we get on with things as trusted ministers, seems for some to be have been broken. It is no longer an 'office holder' doing what they are trusted to do, but an employee being supervised by those above. The organisation's identity with 'office holders' in 'full Connexion' changes into just another organisation with methods of control. The language difference isn't enough, and the suggestion of Guerrier and Bond that we need to be effectively bilingual has to be only a starting point of dealing with the issue. A more relational form of the Psychological contract needs to be explored (Springett 2005, George 2009 p 132). The language of appraisal embedded in notions of the Church as community, a reshaped narrative not just a re-coding of ideas.

2) Responses to questions of knowing what to do

The challenge of setting priorities and making choices in daily ministry is clearly a wide spread issue for Methodist Ministers. Given that there is neither a clear job description nor a clear set of identifiable outcomes, knowing what to do puts pressure on a minister's sense of being, their integrity and courage. Both the lenses of organisational identity and the psychological contract

suggest ways of understanding and perhaps developing MDR in a helpful way. The discomfort of broken psychological contracts and the dissonance between an organisation's apparently changing identity and the individual's sense of being help towards an understanding of the reluctance to engage with MDR. A healthy relational contract would allow individuals to frame their roles and responsibilities in less individualist ways. John Wesley would no doubt argue that MDR should be about 'watching over each other with love'³.

3) Responses to the issues of finding support

The Methodist Ministers questioned all expressed their need for support, usually 'knowledgeable' support, even when they felt considerable antipathy towards MDR as a way of providing it. What was notable, however, was the wide range of support that was needed and the wide variety of ways that need might be met. Spiritual, emotional, professional support and simply friendship were all expressed as important. It was also not clear from the responses exactly where they saw MDR fitting into such a range of needs. It felt in some ways, even to some who appreciated what was being offered, as an alien and secondary level. Perhaps this is inevitable, but it would be interesting to explore the kind of explicit or implicit contract that could be offered where a whole person's ministry was supported in a more unified way. What is there in our relationship as an organisation or in our narrative as a movement that would offer something of the effective support for which a need is clearly expressed?

Next steps

The observation above that MDR has been reasonably well accepted needs to be more thoroughly explored. While I suggest the policy has been thoughtfully developed and implemented, it is also clear that more listening needs to go on. Policy itself needs to be driven by careful listening and reflecting. Research matters, and reflecting and making sense of that research demands a number of lenses other than a purely ecclesiological/theological one.

A more thorough evaluation, and one focused on outcomes if possible, is needed as the policy beds in and develops (Schalock 2001). At the time of writing this paper not all Ministers have in fact had a review, and the time is ripe for a thorough evaluation. There is much right about the policy, its careful work in development and its intentions to move away from a less acceptable form of managerial and hierarchical approaches to reflection, have borne fruit. Not all have noticed, nor will be likely to. However, there are some questions that this initial 'paying attention' raises. The breadth, almost confusion, about MDR needs to be looked at and understood. Is it a matter of poor communication, or perhaps, and more likely, the lack of consistency and lack of training of those who have conducted the interviews?

³ February 23, 1743, John Wesley set out the rules of the Methodist societies -"a company of men, having the form and seeking the power of godliness, united in order to pray together, to receive the word of exhortation, and to watch over one another in love, that they may help each other to work out their salvation."

How might those involved be trained better? How could we develop our ‘covenant relationship’ with a greater emphasis on relationship within the ‘psychological contract’.

The importance of the Susanna Wesley Foundation

My final reflection is to underline the importance of the SWF. This is in the first instance because it matters that the Church finds ways of paying attention to those affected by its policies. We need to listen more. It also matters that the Church engages with such research from a variety of lenses and these include those from organisational/management thinking, educational/formational theory as well as theology. However others, too, would benefit from research into the Church. The Church has, over a long period of time, struggled with issues that also affect the secular world; if we are seen as simply another human organisation, we are one that has been around for many years. It is not only theologically driven policies that struggle with professionalisation; other historical professions have found it difficult as well, and raise similar questions of values and humanity. In William Scott’s book on institutions and organisation he offers what he calls a ‘sermon’ in support of the cause of institutional analysis. He advances Philip Selznick institutional approach (Scott 1995 p 273) with its emphasis on the rich values and potential of institutions. This is a humane and positive view of organisation that resonates for me and encourages me to commend the Foundation to you. Beneath human toil and sweat, of paths compacted by the persistence of human endeavour, there are still values and hopes that are undiminished. Gerhard Manley Hopkins writes ‘And for all this, nature is never spent; there lives the dearest freshness deep down things.’ It is these deep down things that are worth exploring within a secular frame of organisational study and with an eye on Church as organisation and revelation.

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