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An Evaluation of Coaching Theories and Models for the Needs and Culture of the University of Wales, Trinity Saint David's Library.

I am a university librarian, specialising in information literacy and skills development. Our library department has recently undergone a significant re-structure, resulting in teams throughout the library and digital services being moved and, (our customer service team) dis-banded. Whilst experiencing a profound sense of loss and dis-orientation, this situation has also given me the opportunity to explore the existing culture(s) within the university and what coaching models and theories may or may not possibly fit into this new structure.

Organisational culture is often broadly described as 'how things are done' (Buchanan and Huczynski, 2023; Mullins and Rees, 2023). It is understood simplistically as a 'system of common symbols and meanings' (Alvesson, 2002, p. 2). We are very much made aware of our organisation's strategic plans, however Drucker (quoted in Whitmore and Gaskell, 2024, p.31) states 'culture eats strategy for breakfast'. Understanding our organisation's overarching culture and how that aligns or competes with our existing departmental culture, helps us to understand the behaviour and processes in our workplace and how decisions are reached.

Before beginning to look at frameworks, it was useful to classify the overarching type of culture within the university. Completing Harrison's (Appendix 1), organisational culture questionnaire helped identify the dominant culture within UWTSD from the four power types: Power, Role, Task and Person (Mullins and Rees, 2023, p. 491). However, this classification assumes only one dominant culture, which I subsequently identified as the 'Role culture' (bureaucracy based on rationality, specialisation with defined roles and procedures), as opposed to my diagnosed preferred culture - 'Task' (flexible project teams, results focused with distributed power / sources). It does not however explain the reason why it exists, or how to possibly change it.

Schein's three levels of culture, however, is a particularly useful framework as it explains, rather than classifies how culture works at various levels. He argues how it is

a product of historical influences, evolving from the norms, beliefs and experiences of earlier organisation members (McGrath and Bates, 2017, p. 126). The levels include: the artifacts (what is observed - visible structures and practice) espoused values (stated beliefs and strategies), and underlying assumptions (unconscious, taken for granted beliefs) (Mullins and Rees, 2023, p.494). As a post 1992 university, the visible overarching culture in UWTSD is shaped by widening participation and student experience priorities. The artefacts include strategic plans, branding and formal policies as well as the usual ceremonies and rituals such as graduation etc. Additional artefacts include the language used and the myths and stories of its members (Nanayakkara and Wilkinson, (2021), whilst the espoused values emphasise student success, inclusion and excellence as per the university's mission statement to 'transform education and lives'... 'placing students at the heart of what we do' (UWTSD, 2026). The underlying assumptions and neoliberalism's effect on education (which has forced the marketisation of the university) means however, it now has to operate more like a business; driven by competition, metrics and rankings (such as National Student Survey (NSS) and Key Performance Indicators (KPI's)) (Balan, 2023). Furthermore, outcome-based evaluations such as employability and earnings, create a culture which appears collaborative, but is in fact regulated by targets, audits and line management (Balan, 2023).

The library currently tends to align more closely with the university's mission statement as we share a common service ethic; prioritising customer service, information literacy and academic support, generating a more collaborative approach and, in often relating more to the task culture noted earlier. It is still however, constrained by many of the more bureaucratic processes, hierarchal line management and institutional compliance. For example, proving value beyond the resources we provide access to, as we do not generate income (Glusker, *et al.*, 2022). There is a distinct possibility, this pressure may continue to increase in the future as our previous team integrates and is managed by other managers and teams with values that differ from ours.

The Competing Values Framework (CVF) developed by Cameron and Quinn (2011), provides a more useful way to understand this in further detail. It assumes that organisations do not always operate in a single and unified culture; instead, they

contain multiple, competing and often contradictory cultural values at any given time (Buchanan and Huczynski, 2023). These being: Clan (collaborative and people focused), Adhocracy (Innovative and risk taking), Hierarchy (bureaucratic and control focused) and Market (competitive and performance focused). These exist across a continuum, flexible to focused in one dimension; internal to external on the other.

This perspective is particularly relevant to our university where different departments, with academic, professional and support functions, operate with distinct priorities, responsibilities and practices. For example, the university may combine hierarchy and market values through formal procedures, quality enhancement, accountability, competition, and results. The library team, however, presents more like a clan culture focusing on shared responsibilities, teamwork and service, but is still subject to those hierarchal values with regards to leadership, quality and efficiency. Significantly relevant during this re-structuring process our team has recently experienced, in addition to the experiences of professional and support staff in the wider Higher Education Sector (HE) (Verhamme and Britton, 2026), the CVF further reflects the reality that any culture is dynamic and can change as circumstances change.

Whitmore and Gaskell (2024 p. 245) assert that organisations can miss the importance of culture during change and can instead focus on performance or behaviour due to short term pressures. Coaching is positively related to employee engagement and positive change (Woods Herron, *et. al.*, 2026). It can be especially useful in focusing on 'specific issues' (Connor and Pokora, 2017, p. 17) and is thus recognised as a useful and powerful tool to help us achieve results and deal with disruption (Peterson, 2018; Bachirova, Cox and Clutterbuck, 2018). Furthermore, it can be utilised to enhance resilience during these times (Schmitt, Vasquez and Pauknerova, 2024; Sipondo and Terblanche, 2024). The International Coaching Federation (ICF) defines coaching as, 'partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximise their personal and professional potential' (ICF, 2026). As a coaching novice, I prefer the simpler definition of Whitmore (1992), who said coaching is 'unlocking a person's potential to maximise their own performance. It is helping them to learn rather than teaching them – a facilitation approach' (Whitmore, 1992, quoted in Passmore, 2021, p. 7). I am both curious and interested both as a novice coach and as

an employee, to explore and evaluate some of the coaching theories and models available, in an attempt to discover which one(s) may be suitable to our current and evolving situation.

Reflecting on my (very) limited experience of coaching, I have realised I have tended to gravitate towards the person-centred approach, which focuses on growth and is grounded in the humanistic theory of Carl Rogers. He argued 'people are intrinsically motivated to grow' and develop their human potential when given the right environment (Joseph, 2018, p.53). Furthermore, people are intrinsically motivated to grow, develop and function more effectively when nurtured by the relationship between the client and the coach (Joseph and Bryant-Jeffries, 2019; Bryant-Jeffries, 2021).

In order for effective growth to occur during coaching, three conditions must be met:

- Congruence: the coach is genuine and honest thus building trust with the client.
- Empathy: understanding the client and accepting in a non-critical and non-judgmental way.
- Unconditional regard: maintains positivity without judging or evaluating.

Humanistic supporters argue that people embrace the opportunity to feel valued and heard, rather than judged and evaluated (Bates, 2015), which is especially pertinent in times of disruptive change (such as ours) and in the current climate of stress and burn out in the workplace (McHugh, *et. al.*, 2026). Historically, coaching in working environments has focused on goals, performance and professional development, through a performance focused model (De Haan and Nilsson, 2023, cited in McHugh, *et. al.*, 2026) This is now beginning to change to create a more facilitative focus which includes the emotional factors that foster or restrict development (Dias *et. al.*, 2017 cited in McHugh, *et.al.*, 2026).

The humanistic approach employs a non-directive coaching focus, where they believe the client knows themselves best and is able to make their own decisions.

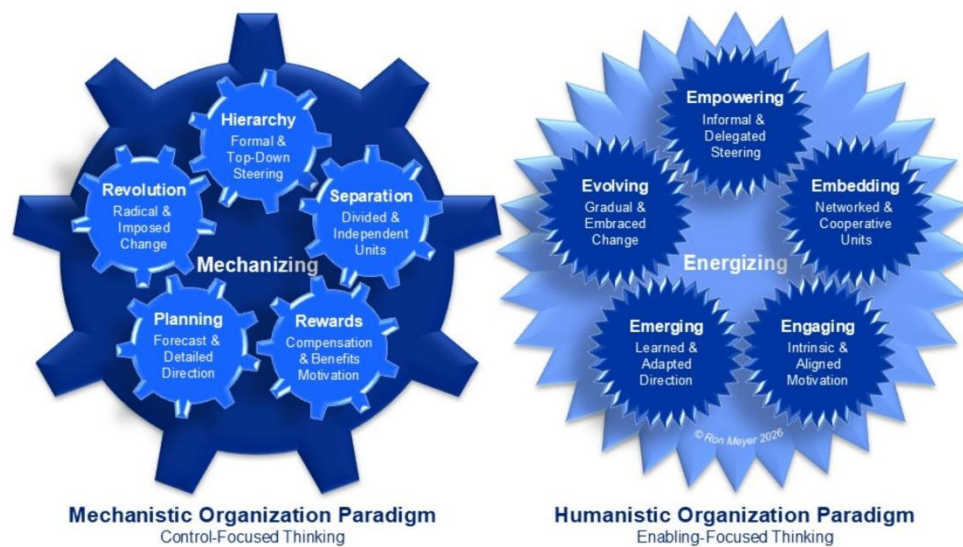
Furthermore, the coach takes the role of facilitator, rather than instructor (Bates, 2015). It thus enables the coach to understand the unique perspective of the client, before supporting the client to reach their own decisions and progress their development and

growth (Ladyshevsky, 2018), without forcing prescribed limitations and compliance (Gabriel, Moran and Gregory, 2014).

Developmental coaching is one style that can be viewed under the umbrella term of person-centred coaching but is multi-theoretically grounded (Jackson and Cox, 2018). It can be defined as ‘a process of qualitative changes in attitudes, values and understanding that adults experience as a result of ongoing transactions with their social environment’ (Taylor, Marienau and Fiddler, 2000, quoted in Jackson and Cox, 2018, p. 216). This constructivist view assumes a person wishes to move forward and increase their capacity through enacting changes in their environment; either emotionally, or through their understanding or response to their problem. Its strength lies in its aim of permanent change, whilst assuming the goals are set by the individual and not others. Though it builds confidence and self-efficacy, as you continue to learn more about yourself and your ability to self-assess your performance, it is, however, limited in its lack of a robust theoretical framework to guide implementation. (Jackson and Cox, 2018).

Humanistic frameworks seem to lend themselves well with the autonomous, collaborative, task-based values the clan-like culture the library prefers, especially in times of disruptive change, such as re-structuring. Meyers (2026) has proposed a ‘Humanistic Organization Paradigm’ for understanding how organisations function in a humanistic rather than a mechanistic way. His conceptual model aligns strongly with humanistic coaching, and the need-supportive behaviour (empathy, unconditional appreciation, trust and mutual support), essential for psychological growth and well-being, (highlighted in Deci and Ryan’s ‘Self-Determination Theory’ (SDT)), (Gabriel, Moran and Gregory, 2014; Zerle, *et.al.*, 2026).

Both the humanistic organizational paradigm and humanistic coaching prioritise the relationship; enabling and supporting people, rather than controlling them, thereby enhancing well-being, engagement and performance. It can be suggested they both treat people as the organisation rather than the resource within it; focusing on intrinsic motivation and giving purpose, contribution, safety and meaning. Person-centered, it views change as something which is done *with* people rather than *to* them (see Fig. 1. below).

Fig. 1. Meyers (2026) Humanistic Organization Paradigm

The university sector is in a constant state of change, due to financial pressures (Weale, 2026), where the apparent strategy of re-structuring, voluntary and statutory redundancies are unfortunately becoming commonplace. Humanistic coaching, with its genuineness and empathy can help re-build trust when people feel threatened by organisational change (Gabriel, Moran, and Gregory, 2014). During the recent re-structure, we were told that ‘they [management and human resources] were taking the people out of the process’, which left us feeling disassociated with the process. ‘Person-centred coaching is not about the alleviation of distress and dysfunction per se, but it is about the facilitation of well-being and optimal functioning’ (Joseph and Bryant-Jeffries, 2019, p. 136). I personally feel the experience would have been much more positive if it had been applied through the lens of a humanistic approach; being supported and empowered to engage, learn and adapt, rather than being instructed and excluded and feeling I was just a cog in the bureaucratic machine.

‘Directing and telling others what to do is a behaviouralist approach’ (Bates, 2015, p. 49). More aligned to Meyers (2026) ‘mechanistic organization paradigm’, it focuses on extrinsic motivation where the coach is in control and directs what and how the change will be implemented (Bates, 2015). Its premise is on the what and not the why. Rooted in early behavioural studies in psychology, (such as Pavlov, Skinner, Thorndike and Watson), and their research on animals, (Bates, 2015; Leach, 2018). The research

concluded that learning occurs either via classical conditioning (association) or by the operant conditioning where the 'instructor' either rewards (the desired effect) or punishes (the problematic effect) the subject -probably most widely known as the carrot and the stick method. It focuses on action plans, accountability, measurable and repeatable behaviour change. As a data informed, structured approach, it has been traditionally favoured by high pressure environments where a goal-orientated approach is prioritised, quick gains are required or rapid re-skilling is needed, such as in organisational management (Seniuk, *et al.*, 2013; Anthony, *et.al.*, 2018). As its impetus is on modifying the observed behaviour to improve performance, it is a foundational approach found in most sports coaching, where the coach is the expert and is able to identify where and how the athlete needs to improve (Anthony, *et.al.*, 2018). This can be achieved by modelling (observational learning -demonstrating the desired behaviour), behavioural rehearsal (role play and practice of desired behaviour) and environmental design (identifying triggers that lead to bad habits). It can therefore be concluded that it is best used when there are specific skills or performance gaps and a clear goal. Though useful to create baseline competencies and set observable actions and demonstrable outputs, there is a distinct lack of research of the impact of behavioural coaching outside of goal attainment (Leach, 2021).

Regardless of the coaching theory, all coaching is a process for desired change in the coachee, whether from the coachee themselves, or someone in authority. Coaching models used in coaching are neutral tools, the theory you work from determines how and why you use them - though some work better with others. It should be noted, however, that without engaging and utilising the essential core coaching competencies outlined in the ICF (2025), then no individual model will provide value.

Probably the most famous model is Whitmore's GROW model (Fig. 2.), which was developed in the 1980's and is still one of the most widely used models today. The acronym stands for (defined) Goal, Reality (check -to explore the coachee's current situation), Options (available to them) and What, When, Who, and the Will to do it (Whitmore and Gaskell, 2024, p. 110). In my coaching reflection, I believed that I had unconsciously followed the model during my session and only realised when writing up my notes; I noticed that it appeared to fit nicely into what we were trying to achieve. It's

clear structure, fluidity and simplicity allow the coach to explore other tools and techniques during each of the four stages, whereby a conversation may start with the Goal and Reality, but then move around the different steps (Leach, 2021). As both a formal and informal tool, its flexibility allows the coaching to begin or end at any stage once a task is underway (Whitmore and Gaskell, 2024).

Fig. 2. Flexibility of GROW model (Coaching culture at work, no date)



It can be described as over-simplistic and not flexible enough. I very likely felt a predisposition to the GROW model, due to its familiarity with personal development plans in my work. It is structured, logical and focuses on actionable steps towards the agreed goal. Simple in design, it can easily be embedded into personal development reviews or projects and focuses on building confidence and improving performance and productivity in your career.

The OSCAR model is described by its creators as 'simply a framework on which to hang your coaching questions' (Gilbert and Whittleworth, 2009, p. 39). An award-winning model, it has received recognition from the Institute of Leadership and Management

(ILM). It builds on the GROW model and is described by Bates (2015, p. 124) as a 'solution-focused coaching model'. Its acronym stands for Outcome (what is your destination). Situation (current), Choices (and consequences of those, Actions (coachee takes responsibility of own action plan) and Review (both reflect and review). Unlike the GROW model, its premise is that it is solution rather than problem focused, where the responsibility of the process is very much with the coachee. I resonate with the addition of the review element and feel it is particularly useful as it presents opportunities for both parties to reflect on the process, review what has or not been actioned and what steps are required to correct it (Gilbert and Whittleworth, 2009, p.38).

This evaluation is very much limited in the number of theories and models examined and my view of the culture in which I feel I experience. I have naturally gravitated to those which I feel I have had some (though limited) personal experience of.

The ethos of the library is one of customer service, support and empathy; in which we provide a fully inclusive, collaborative, empathetic and supportive environment for our students and each other. Mutual respect and trust are foundational in both our workplace as it is in coaching practice. Research (Zerle, *et.al.*, 2026) suggests trust and alliance of working tasks are essential to a successful coaching relationship and outcome. Their study found empathy was more highly valued by coachees (than coaches) in addition to autonomy and competency support. The behaviourist diagnostic style, whilst still used to some extent in our working practices and especially in human resource management (Leach, 2021), strength lies in skills acquisition, habit formation and action planning. It does not fit in so well with the 'whole person' approach and the (existing) culture of the library team, which feels more aligned to the belief that 'Human behaviour flows from a combination of events, e.g. affective, cognitive, behavioural, and spiritual... and the whole person must be addressed in the process of prolonged behavioural change' (Peterson, 2006, cited in Anthony, *et.al.*, 2018). Choosing a humanistic rather than a diagnostic coaching theory, and the OSCAR model which facilitates structure to our coaching, allows for the individualistic colours, energies and personalities of the library team to be both recognised and celebrated to 'transform personal effectiveness' (Insights, 2026).

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Organisational Culture Questionnaire (Adapted from Roger Harrison's Diagnosing Organisational Ideology).

Organisational Culture Questionnaire

Adapted from Roger Harrison's Diagnosing Organisational Ideology.

Organisations have a pattern of behaviour - a set of common doctrines, myths and symbols. An organisation's culture has a profound impact on the effectiveness of the organization by influencing how decisions are made, how human resources are used and how people respond to environmental challenges. Organisational cultures can be divided into 4 types: Power, Role, Task and Self. The following questionnaire can help identify the dominant culture in your organization and what you believe it should be.

* Instructions for completion of the questionnaire:

For each question 1-15: Give a (4) to the statement that best represents the dominant view in your organization. Give (3) to the next statement closest to your organisation's position, a (2) to the next and a (1) score to the statement that out of the four options least represents the culture of your organization.

For each question, repeat the exercise but this time give a (4) score to the statement which you believe should represent the preferred culture of your organization, a (3) to the next preferred culture, (2) to the next and finally (1) to the statement that you believe represents the least desirable culture/position for your organization.

Once the questionnaire is finished:

Add the scores for each option a -d separately for the existing culture and for your preferred organizational culture.

For example in question 1 - 15 if, under the (a) option you scored 5*3, 5*2 and 5*1 for the existing culture – the total under this (a) option is 30 for the 'Existing Culture' (see table below).

Example:

	(a) Scores (Power)	(b) Scores (Role)	(c) Scores (Task)	(d) Scores (Self)
Existing Culture	30	60 (15*4)	20	40
Preferred Culture	20	40	60	30

Whichever option a-d in the table receives the highest score under the 'Existing Culture' option represents the dominant culture in your organisation. In the example above, the existing Culture is 'Role'.

Whichever option a-d in the table receives the highest score under the 'Preferred Culture' option represents the preferred culture in your organisation. In the example, the preferred Culture is 'Task'.

Your scores

	(a) Scores (Power)	(b) Scores (Role)	(c) Scores (Task)	(d) Scores (Self)
Existing Culture	28	52	48	22
Preferred Culture	19	40	58	33

Culture Analysis questionnaire: Diagnosing Organisation Ideology*(Instructions for completion of the questionnaire: * see page 1)*

1 A good boss is:

- 3/ ② a Strong, decisive and firm, but fair. He/she is protective, generous and indulgent to loyal subordinates.
- 2/ ④ b Impersonal and correct, avoiding the exercise of his authority for his own advantage. He/she demands from subordinates only that which is required by the formal system.
- 4/ ③ c Egalitarian and capable of being influenced in matters concerning the task. He/she uses his authority to obtain the resources needed to complete the job.
- 1/ ① d Concerned with and responsive to the personal needs and values of others. He/she uses his position to provide satisfying and growth-stimulating work opportunities for subordinates.

2 A good subordinate is:

- 1 ② a Compliant, hard working and loyal to the interests of his/her superior.
- 2 ④ b Responsible and reliable, meeting the duties and responsibilities of his/her job and avoiding actions that surprise or embarrass his/her superior.
- 4 ① c Self-motivated to contribute his/her best to the task and is open with his ideas and suggestions. He is nevertheless willing to give the lead to others when they show greater expertise or ability.
- 3 ③ d Vitally interested in the development of his/her own potentialities and is open to learning and to receiving help. He/she also respects the needs and values of others and is willing to help and contribute to their development.

3 A good member of the organization gives first priority to the:

- 1 ② a Personal demands of the boss.
- 4 ④ b Duties, responsibilities and requirements of his/her own role and to the customary standard of personal behaviour.
- 3 ③ c Requirements of the task for skill, ability, energy and material resources.
- 2 ① d Personal needs of the individuals involved.

4 People who do well in the organization are:

- 1 ① a Shrewd and competitive, with a strong drive for power.
- 2 ③ b Conscientious and responsible, with a strong sense of loyalty to the organization.
- 4 ④ c Technically effective and competent, with a strong commitment to getting the job done.
- 3 ② d Effective and competent in personal relationships, with a strong commitment to the growth and development of people.

5 The organization treats the individual as:

- 1 2 a Though his time and energy were at the disposal of persons higher in the hierarchy.
 3 3 b Though his time and energy were available through a contract with rights and responsibilities for both sides.
 4 4 c A co-worker who has committed his/her skills and abilities to the common cause.
 2 1 d An interesting and worthwhile person in his/her own right.

6 People are controlled and influenced by the:

- 2 2 a Personal exercise of economic and political power (rewards and punishments).
 3 3 b Impersonal exercise of economic and political power to enforce procedures and standards of performance.
 4 4 c Communication and discussion of task requirements leading to appropriate action motivated by personal commitment to goal achievement.
 1 1 d Intrinsic interest and enjoyment to be found in their activities and/or concern and caring for the needs of the other persons involved.

7 It is legitimate for one person to control another's activities if:

- 1 1 a He/she has more authority and power in the organization.
 2 4 b His/her role prescribes that he is responsible for directing the other.
 4 3 c He/she has more knowledge relevant to the task.
 3 2 d The other accepts that the first person's help or instruction can contribute to his/her learning and growth.

8 The basis of task assignment is the:

- 1 2 a Personal needs and judgement of those in authority.
 3 3 b Formal divisions of functions and responsibilities in the system.
 4 4 c Resource and expertise requirements of the job to be done.
 2 1 d Personal wishes and needs for learning and growth of individual organization members.

9 Work is performed out of:

- 1 2 a Hope of reward, fear of punishment, or personal loyalty toward a powerful individual.
 2 3 b Respect for contractual obligations backed up by sanctions and loyalty toward the organization or system.
 4 4 c Satisfaction in excellence of work and achievement and/or personal commitment to the task or goal.
 3 1 d Enjoyment of the activity for its own sake and concern and respect for the needs and values of the other persons involved.

10 People work together when:

- ① _____ ① a They are required to by higher authority or when they believe they can use each other for personal advantage.
 ② _____ ③ b Coordination and exchange are specified by the formal system.
 ④ _____ ④ c Their joint contribution is needed to perform the task.
 ③ _____ ② d The collaboration is personally satisfying, stimulating, or challenging.

11 The purpose of competition is to:

- ① _____ ① a Gain personal power and advantage.
 ③ _____ ③ b Gain high-status positions in the formal system.
 ④ _____ ④ c Increase the excellence of the contribution to the task.
 ② _____ ② d Draw attention to one's own personal needs.

12 Conflict is:

- ① _____ ② a Controlled by the intervention of higher authorities and often fostered by them to maintain their own power.
 ② _____ ④ b Suppressed by reference to rules, procedures and definitions of responsibility.
 ④ _____ ③ c Resolved through full discussion of the merits of the work issues involved.
 ③ ④ _____ ① d Resolved by open and deep discussion of personal needs and values involved.

13 Decisions are made by the:

- ② _____ ④ a Person with the higher power and authority.
 ③ _____ ③ b Person whose job description carries the responsibility.
 ④ _____ ② c Persons with the most knowledge and expertise about the problem.
 ① _____ ① d Persons most personally involved and affected by the outcome.

14 In an appropriate control and communication structure:

- ① _____ ③ a Command flows from the top down in a simple pyramid so that anyone who is higher in the pyramid has authority over anyone who is lower. Information slows up through the chain of command.
 ③ _____ ④ b Directives flow from the top down and information flows upwards within functional pyramids which meet at the top. The authority and responsibility of a role is limited to the roles beneath it in its own pyramid. Cross-functional exchange is constricted.
 ④ _____ ② c Information about task requirements and problems flows from the centre of task activity upwards and outwards, with those closest to the task determining the resources and support needed from the rest of the organization. A coordinating function may set priorities and overall resource levels based on the information from all task centres. The structure shifts with the nature and location of the tasks.
 ② _____ ① d Information and influence flow from person to person, based on voluntary relationships initiated for purposes of work, learning, mutual support and enjoyment and shared values. A coordinating function may establish overall levels of contribution needed for the maintenance of the organization. These tasks are assigned by mutual agreement.

15 The environment is responded to as though it were:

- ① _____ ① a A competitive jungle in which everyone is against everyone else and those who do not exploit others are themselves exploited.
- ④ _____ ④ b An orderly and rational system in which competition is limited by law and there can be negotiation or compromise to resolve conflicts.
- ③ _____ ③ c A complex of imperfect forms and systems which are to be reshaped and improved by the achievements of the organisation.
- ② _____ ② d A complex of potential threats and support. It is used and manipulated by the organisation both as a means of self-nourishment and as a play-and-work space for the enjoyment and growth of organisation members.