Guest Editorial:
The Contributions of Elliott Jaques

Elliott Jaques is known for his contributions across a wide range of areas but not generally by the same people. Those in the management area over the last three decades often know little about his psychoanalytic contributions. Those in the psychoanalytic field recall his still very influential article, “Social Systems as Defences against Persecutory and Depressive Anxiety,” which appeared just two years after his major rift with the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations, the institution he helped to found a decade earlier together with a scion of other great figures, including Wilfred Bion, Jock Sutherland, John Rickman, Eric Trist, and John Bowlby. Members of the British Psychoanalytic Society may recall his presentation of his seminal paper, “Death and the Mid-Life Crisis,” which, of course, contributed the term “mid-life crisis” to our modern lexicon. (Another major term “culture” was first used in its organizational culture sense by Jaques in the title of his 1951 classic, The Changing Culture of a Factory.) He was close to Melanie Klein and edited her Narrative of a Child Analysis. He was scientific secretary of the British Psychoanalytic Society, instigated research there, and contributed psychoanalytic essays in Creativity, Work, and Justice. However, a myth developed among psychoanalysts that Jaques finally descended into the mires of “management” and sociology, and left psychoanalysis for good. A great mind was seemingly lost to psychoanalysis.

But nothing could be further from the truth. Jaques always maintained his interest and use of a psychoanalytic perspective, though not of an “applied” psychoanalytic perspective. Nor was psychoanalysis his exclusive standpoint. For Jaques, psychoanalysis always meshed with sociology and social structure and was never reducible to it. Ironically, those working in management were often unaware of Jaques’ psychoanalytic work, nor the extent to which his constructs were involved with psychoanalytic ideas. Much of the inspiration behind Jaques’ contributions throughout were ultimately similar inquiries to what inspired psychoanalysis: a scientific quest to understand human nature within its psychological, social, biological, and philosophical contexts.

From the 1940s Elliott Jaques made major contributions in the social sciences, management, psychoanalysis, psychology, economics, relationships,
values as well as the understanding of work and capability. Jaques’ intellectual
career spanned 70 years and a wide range of types and objects of investigation.
They need to be seen as part of an individual whole which could never neatly
categorize the world into distinct fields that could be understood without
reference to others. He was a polymath, a “renaissance man” in the pantheon of
great thinkers such as Freud.

This issue of the *International Journal of Applied Psychoanalytical Studies* is the
first of two special issues devoted to the contributions of Elliott Jaques. This issue
includes articles by people all of whom worked directly with Jaques over a number
of periods, together with an important hitherto unpublished article by Jaques on
trust and a timeline of his contributions, which is an important resource. The
next Jaques special issue will include articles about the key points of his approach,
his philosophy of time, the nature of group processes, information complexity,
industrial fairness, and the application of his work in the field.

My article “Who was Elliott Jaques?” gives an overview of his approach, the
career of his ideas, and contributions in the context of his life, and my own
experiences emerging from a close study of his work together with many very
lively discussions with him across many domains.

The eminent British psychoanalyst and historian, Pearl King, was a contempor-
ary of Jaques who studied and worked with him in both the British
Psychoanalytic Society and Tavistock Institute. Her memories of Jaques draw
on this rich and dynamic period in London.

Then we offer Sir Roderick Carnegie’s recollections of the early days of the
Australian mining giant Conzinc Rio Tinto of Australia (CRA). Jaques’s close
work with Sir Roderick, who was Chief Executive Officer of CRA, and CRA
provided arguably the most important sustained application and development
of requisite organization in the world.

Dr Aldo Schlemanson’s involvement with Elliott Jaques spanned thirty
years that ranged from work with Jaques as a doctoral student at Brunel
University to project work together in Argentina. Kathryn Cason, Dr Alison
Brause, and Professor William Spelman’s article, “Does the Smart Guy Win?
An Individual Capability Model for Predicting Presidential Elections,” provides
new and fascinating data and constructs about the relationship of capability
and the US presidency. These data attracted considerable attention before the
2004 US presidential election. This is the first detailed published presentation
of this material.

Elizabeth Watson, a police chief who worked with Jaques on problems of
policing and how to solve them, describes her encounter with Jaques and the
ideas of requisite organization and how they help.

Professor Stuart Twemlow, Editor-in-Chief of this journal and President of
the International Society of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies, reflects and
reviews Jaques’ (2002) final *magnum opus*, *The Life and Behavior of Living
Organisms: A General Theory*, which sums up where he had reached in his life’s
work on the broadest philosophical scale.
An early previously unpublished article by Elliott Jaques, “On Trust, Good, and Evil,” simply defines and explores some central concepts. The Timeline gives an overview of how Jaques’ concepts changed and developed over decades in various domains.

I wish to thank Kathryn Cason, Elliott Jaques’s wife and closest co-worker during his last 20 years, for her invaluable advice, support, and enthusiasm in helping to bring these two special issues together in such a meaningful and valuable way. Stuart Twemlow has always been there with excellent and prompt responses and suggestions – in fact, he suggested the idea of doing these issues to me in the first place! Working with both Kathryn and Stuart demonstrates yet again how enriching, meaningful, and philogenic sharing work can be.

Freud compared the contributions of psychoanalysis to the legacy of other great thinkers, Copernicus and Darwin, who confronted our narcissism. Copernicus suggested that the earth was not the center of the universe and Darwin proposed that we were descended from the apes and not the angels. Freud believed he had dealt the greatest blow by asserting that the ego was not even master in its own house. Like Copernicus, Darwin, and Freud, Elliott Jaques was, as Freud said of himself, a thinker who has or should have “disturbed the sleep of the world” (Freud, 1914, p. 21).

Culminating in The Life and Behavior of Living Organisms, Jaques went still further in confronting our individual and collective presuppositions about the nature of human nature and of life itself. The kinds of issues he raised are far-reaching and, whether or not his assertions are valid or true, they merit further discussion and investigation. In this spirit, I hope that these special issues are a contribution towards a fruitful debate.

REFERENCES


Douglas Kirsner, PhD
Faculty of Arts
Deakin University
221 Burwood Highway
Burwood
Victoria 3125
Australia
(douglas.kirsner@deakin.edu.au)