



SECRETS AND SPIES: A CASE STUDY IN EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT

Woodnewton Insight Paper 1

James Humphreys

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Introduction

Concerns over espionage in the early 1960s led the UK Government to implement a concerted effort in education and awareness amongst public servants and others with responsibility for state and industrial secrets. Developed jointly by the Security Service and the Central Office of Information, it used a range of media, from posters to film, to support training and education programmes across the public service. Although not formally evaluated, it provides a valuable point of comparison for modern approaches to employee engagement and cultural change; particularly in respect to security and information assurance.

Reds Under (and In) the Bed

In the late 1950s, Britain found it had a 'spy problem'. A succession of trials, defections and other scandals revealed how far the intelligence agencies of the Soviet Union and its allies had succeeded in obtaining British military, scientific and industrial information.



John Vassall: one of six spies jailed in 1961

Alan Nunn May and Klaus Fuchs, jailed for leaking information on atomic projects; Harry Houghton and Ethel Gee, who sold naval secrets and were given 15 years; John Vassall, blackmailed into espionage through compromising photographs, and George Blake, who spied out of conviction or for revenge; anyone from a Royal Navy clerk to a Foreign Office mandarin, it seemed, was at risk of being turned, willingly or otherwise, into a traitor. In 1961 alone, six spies were jailed for a total of 137 years. And when a mock-Tudor detached residence such as 15 Cranley Drive, Ruislip could be exposed as a Soviet spy-nest, where was safe?

In May 1961, the Government appointed Lord Radcliffe to chair an inquiry into Security Procedures in the Public Service. The Radcliffe Committee had plenty of material to study. As well as those cases that had reached the newspapers or the courts, there were many more known only to the Security Service and the wider intelligence community. These included 'near misses': Embassy staff, for example, who had been 'burnt' by the Russians but instead of giving in to blackmail, had revealed their minor sins to the British authorities. Knowing that its conclusions would remain confidential to government, the Committee was free to be blunt about the true nature of the threat.

The early 1960s were a time not only of huge public concern about infiltration by Soviet agents – heightened further by the Profumo Affair – but also a wave of popular interest in spies in films, novels and television programmes. These combined glamour and paranoia in equal measure: an intriguing backdrop to Radcliffe's work; but also a set of cultural reference-points that those responsible for implementing the Committee's recommendations consciously emulated.



North by Northwest (1959); Dr No (1962); The Manchurian Candidate (1963); The Ipcress File (1965)

The Radcliffe Report

The Report was published in April 1962 and made wide-ranging recommendations about security classification, vetting, security in industry, and physical and document security. But though forming the final section of the Report, in some ways the most important section was that on training and education. As the Report itself concluded:

“The biggest single threat to security at the present time is probably a general lack of conviction that any substantial threat exists. This attitude of mind can be overcome only by a sustained and skilfully directed educational effort in the right quarters.” (Paragraph 115).

The need for a sustained effort arose from the difficulty of connecting the lurid world of spies and trials from the day to day routine of compliance with security procedures. As the Committee concluded:

“When something dramatic happens, as in the Portland case, the whole subject springs momentarily to life: but for the rest it seems remote and unreal.” (Paragraph 116)

The Committee took the view that training and education should apply on two levels. First, there was the training of civil servants or military personnel in the specific role of Security Officer: that is, with full or part-time responsibility for ensuring security in their own department, agency or other unit. This work would be the responsibility of the Security Service (MI5) and would include a short introductory course, some months of experience in the field, and then a refresher course. Significantly, this training was seen as having three components:

- Insights into the nature of the various threats to security
- Persuasion that the challenge posed by these threats made the role of Security Officer a worth-while one
- Instruction in the necessary techniques to ensure security



Viscount Radcliffe at the Inquiry

The second level of education, in contrast, would be the responsibility of departments or other parts of government (or even businesses handling classified material), with the Security Service providing advice on training techniques and providing suitable materials. The Report challenged the notion that discretion about security matters would breed good security, arguing that “...despite the very real difficulties that attend plain speaking, the traditional veil will have to be lifted.” (Paragraph 116). The Report did not specify how the education programme for the wider public service should be executed, except to say:

“It is very important that this material should convey an adequate sense of reality to every listener.” (Paragraph 116).

The Report was warmly welcomed by the Government: and these conclusions formed the remit to the Security Service to lead on its implementation.

Implementation

The Radcliffe Report itself, now declassified, provides a clear statement of the committee's views. When it comes to implementation, the evidence trail is more fragmentary, particularly when considering what different actors thought, rather than said or did. But enough has been released to allow a picture to emerge of how the Security Service approached its task.

The last of over one hundred recommendations in the Radcliffe Report was that:

“A programme of security education for the public service generally should be drawn up.”

At the time, the Central Office of Information (successor to the wartime Ministry of Information) was responsible for ‘publicity’ across government. COI hosted a meeting on 20 September 1962 with representatives from the departments with most responsibility for implementing this recommendation. This group was formalised as the Working Group on Security Education, with a membership comprising the Treasury, War Office, Foreign Office, Home Office, Ministry of Aviation, and COI. It was chaired by the Security Service.

Acting on advice from the COI, but also drawing on contributions first of the Working Group and then of others with relevant experience, products were developed to shape and to support the plans of each department: primarily a set of posters, a booklet and a film.

Posters

The COI were commissioned by the Security Service to produce a series of posters on different practical aspects of security, such as keys (“Miss Huxtable”), routines for closing up an office at night (“What Every Girl Should Know”); and secure disposal of documents (“Waste Bin”). There were also some more conceptual treatments on issues such as the cumulative effect of apparently minor security lapses (“Little scraps...”). All carried the endorsement ‘Issued by HM Government’ and most but not all used the slogan ‘Keep our secrets secret’. Each batch of posters was vetted by the Working Group, which was concerned to encourage take-up in Departments and also for feedback on their effectiveness.



Security posters produced by COI for HM Government under the strap-line “Keep Our Secrets Secret”

The Working Group followed the advice of Mr Hutchings of COI that as “...no one poster would have a universal appeal and all quickly lost their impact, the policy should be to produce a steady flow of posters some of which would always stress the same basic themes.” (12 November 1963). Within a few years, over a hundred security posters of various kinds were produced. These introduced new themes and new visual styles. There is also more stress on security in the round, built up from a variety of elements such as physical security, personal security and records management.

Booklet: *Their Trade is Treachery*

Perhaps the most inspired piece of work was the booklet produced for circulation to civil servants. The eye-catching colour cover and dramatic title – *Their Trade is Treachery* – set it aside from run-of-the-mill government guidance. But the content was even more unusual, reading like security guidance penned by Ian Fleming. The impetus for this came from the Security Service, who (without informing COI, who were working on their own draft) made use of the services of “...a member of our staff who is a successful author in his spare time...” (5 November 1963) to draft the booklet. Though it is not impossible that Fleming may have been responsible, a more likely candidate is the writer Chapman Pincher, who though not overtly in the Security Service’s pay was well-connected with that world and used the same title in a later book published under his own name.



Chapman Pincher receives the “Journalist of the Decade” award in 1966 from Harold Wilson.

The pamphlet’s tone is journalistic and hard-hitting, and makes use of the very cases – Vassall, Blake and the rest – that had led to the Radcliffe Inquiry in the first place. One hundred thousand copies were printed for distribution across the public and armed services, firms undertaking secret work on government contracts, and allies in NATO and elsewhere. The booklet received positive press coverage in the Times (2 October 1964) and elsewhere, including an article by Chapman Pincher in which he describes it as ‘more like a paperback thriller on Communist subversion’.

Film: *Persona non Grata* (1962)

This was a 55 minute film charting the progress of a Soviet Bloc spy-master seeking to recruit a journalist, a Civil Servant and a RAF Sergeant. It was directed by David Eady and produced for use on security training and education courses for staff having access to classified information, wherever possible supported by a talk emphasising the points made in the film. It was made available by purchase or hire from the COI’s Central Film Library.

Leaflets

Each department was free to adapt and extend the materials provided by COI and the Security Service. The UK Atomic Energy Authority, for example, produced a special six-page gatefold leaflet which summarised the need for security awareness. This used images from *The Trade is Treachery* and information and quotations from the Radcliffe Report; but took the opportunity to link it specifically to the UKAEA, for example through emphasis on spies who had worked in the field of atomic energy.

Insights

The Radcliffe Report and the files in the National Archives share a language and outlook far removed, at least on the surface, from modern thinking about internal communications, employee engagement or cultural change. But when ‘translated’, these sources contain significant insights of continuing relevance. The specific sections on training and education, and the analysis and recommendations in the rest of the Report, have some implicit assumptions:

- Rules are only as good as the level of compliance;
- Compliance depends on communication and engagement as much as on surveillance and enforcement; the papers on the implementation phase of the campaign stress the need for relevance, so that rules and guidance are linked directly to their own working life;
- Collective compliance is as important as individual compliance;
- Rules, processes, physical environment, training and discipline have to be considered as one in designing an effective system for security;
- The morale of those responsible for security has a direct impact on the effectiveness of the systems they administer: keeping security officers motivated is one of the stated objectives of the training programme.

Impact

There is no record of a formal assessment of the effectiveness of the campaign. It is true that the ‘spy problem’ receded in the second half of the 1960s; and while it would be reckless to attribute this solely to the campaign, it would also be unreasonable to reject entirely the work of the Radcliffe Committee and those who implemented its recommendations.

The work of the Working Party set an approach to security education based on three pillars:

- Training sessions incorporating a film and supported by the Security Service
- A booklet and posters to inform and remind
- The ongoing work of Security Officers to encourage and educate as well as to supervise and discipline



The Men from UNCLE displaying good security awareness

The approach remained current into the 1990s, though adapted to the changing threat (such as the rise of Republican terrorism) and changing technology (such as personal computers). With the fall of the Soviet Union in particular, security education appears to

have lost its perceived relevance: until reawaken by the loss of child benefit database by HM Revenue and Customs in the autumn of 2007 and other information and security breaches that followed.

Implications

The crisis of confidence in security in the early 1960s has clear parallels to the rise in public concern over the security of information from 2007. For government, the challenge was similar: how to persuade millions of people responsible for handling information to follow the rules, day in and day out, when there was no visible threat. The response in the 1960s was intuitive but could fairly be described as ‘sound’ (a word Lord Radcliffe himself might have favoured). In particular, it shared responsibility between the ‘experts’ in the Security Service and those with the most direct responsibility for security in departments, agencies and even laboratories and factories.

The response to current security concerns on Information Assurance and also physical and personal security must also be one that combined systems, technology and people. In the case of the HMRC data loss, the question was not one of rules but of enforcement and compliance. The aim is now the creation of a ‘compliant culture’ in which everyone in the public sector responsible for data and other forms of security is not only aware of the rules but believes that they should be followed – and as a last resort are prepared to impose this view on their colleagues. The techniques already being considered are those used in the 1960s: training sessions, refresher courses, pamphlets and training films. We might expect the return of the security poster to office notice boards, and even perhaps the recruitment of a spy novelist to help give the campaign some glamour.

James Humphreys
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Woodnewton Associates Limited
4 Staple Inn
Holborn
London WC1V 7QH

Tel: 020 7242 1133
Fax: 020 7242 1144
info@woodnewton.eu
www.woodnewton.eu