Working into the Future: Building Individual and Organisational Culture Beyond 2020

The 2020 symposium focused on how organisations can best equip themselves for working into a complex future where industries and professions are interconnected globally, technologically and are interconnected through diversity in and between our organisations. In addition, the importance of connectedness to the local community becomes evident. Twenty-twenty was a year where we have twenty years of experience in the twenty-first century with many indications of what is to come. The context includes environmental issues, workforce diversity, political and technological changes. Internally we need to address organisational governance, leadership capabilities, stakeholder engagement and organisational culture.

What are the capacities that will enable organisations to thrive in the future? Many of these are intangible, not easily measured, yet critical to the health and success of an organisation. For instance: the capacities to work with diverse and complex differences between people and ideas; the capacity to withhold judgement and reflect on processes alongside the capacity to make informed decisions and act decisively; and, the capacity to see and work with the interconnectedness between the organisation, its purpose, tasks, people and context.

NIODA's 4th annual symposium keynote speaker, Dr James Kranz, was joined by 22 paper presentations and eight panel members, many of which are featured in this document. The Symposium was tremendously directed by Professor Susan Long. Symposium Committee Members Jennifer Burrows, John Gibney, Fiona Martin, Sally Mussared, Jenny Smith and Fiona Stewart worked together to create this memorable live interactive online symposium, with 149 attendees, connecting from across the globe.

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The financial services; A jewel in the crown or poison chalice

Ajit Menon

Organisational Consultant, Blacklight Advisory Ltd, UK

Ajit is an organisational psychologist and consultant with a specialist background in leadership, behavioural and cultural change. He has worked within the financial services globally in the areas of organisational culture and change. He is a process consulting expert adept at working with groups experiencing transition and change. He is also an experienced workshop facilitator with extensive expertise in helping groups solve complex problems and in the running of creative design processes. He has worked with senior teams and executives as a coach and consultant globally. He has also taught Organisation Development at the London School of Economics.

Introduction

Good morning or good evening depending on where you are in the world. I am excited to present some of my thoughts, research and experience of working in the financial services and also to hear what you have to say in relation to this.

I have spent much of my working life either in or consulting to financial services firms in the UK. At the time of the crash I was an industry worker and worked alongside many financial services professionals who did not seem to fit the archetype of the 'greedy banker' that was the popular narrative of the time. I also grew up with a father who was a banker whose values and behaviours were diametrically opposite to what I was reading and hearing about. The industry does not exist in a vacuum and is a part of a complex system which involves UK society.

What makes the industry unique is that money is the commodity of transaction and this in itself causes various dynamics, both within the industry and for those who are viewing it and consuming its products from the outside.

In the years following the crash the industry has gone through remediation, fines and large-scale restructuring. However, some of the behaviours that were highlighted as a cause of the crash were still surfacing in the industry. As recently as 2016 it was found that a record £31.6 billion of car loan debt exists in the UK and analysts are predicting that these subprime car loans could be one of the triggers for the next financial crash (Collinson, 2017). In terms of context as well the Financial Conduct Authority, the UK's conduct regulator found:

- Only 3% of UK adults are unbanked
- Large propositions of adults use consumer credit in urban (77%) and (68%) rural areas
- 3.1 million adults have high cost loans in the UK
- 31% of adults do not have a private pension provision
- 57% of UK adults have no or less than £5000 of cash savings
- 16% of UK adults rate themselves as highly knowledgeable about financial matters

So, contextually this is an industry that is central to our lives.

Judgements can be made based on fact and observable data. However, what if not all the data is observable? If the cause of the crash was indeed greed and hubris, then why is it that structural solutions such as changing reward mechanisms or policies have not been enough to regulate and manage behaviour? Additionally, what if the behaviour we have witnessed is not only limited to the financial services industry but is a product of the wider system within which the industry exists?

Methodology and Approach

This is a small, modest study and not a large-scale analysis with a representative sample of the UK industry of society. This was a study for depth and not for breadth. What it intends to do is to throw up some questions and bring into consciousness some of the unconscious material that is potentially at play through individual narrative interviews. It is my hope that this study will provide a lens with which to view the culture of the industry, how it is formed and what impact it has on individuals who work there. And, lastly it brings up some ideas for systemic interventions. This is not to say that structural ones are not required; these ideas could complement them.

6 participants were selected who held different roles in the system. Of the sample four were from the firms, specifically from the various sectors, trading, banking and insurance and two were selected from the regulatory group. In depth narrative interviews were conducted with each participant. Data was then analysed using a grounded theory approach.

The financial Services; a phantastic object?

I studied Indian history growing up in India, and one story that captured my imagination was the story of the great Koh-I-Noor diamond. The Koh-I-Noor is a 196-carat diamond that was once touted to be the largest in the world. The story that I remembered from my school days and other popular narratives were that the British stole the diamond from the King of the Punjab. When I travelled to London and I had the immense pleasure of viewing the diamond on display at the Tower of London. I was disappointed by what I saw. The story of the diamond I grew up with had conjured up a fantasy of an object so precious and so mysterious that the real thing did not do it any justice. This experience made me really curious.

The story of the Koh-I-Noor is far from peaceful. The earliest records of it date back to the 13th century when it was mined. In the 1500's the Mughal ruler Babur had it in his possession. In his diary he notes that the diamond is valued at two and a half days food for the whole world. After Babur's death the diamond begins an often-bloody journey passing hands through various Indian and Persian rulers. It adorned the famous Peacock Throne, the throne of the powerful Mughal empire in India belonging to the emperor Shahjahan. Shahjahan was later imprisoned by his son Aurangzeb and the diamond was taken by him to Lahore in modern day Pakistan.

It was then plundered by Nadir Shah in 1739 in a bloody and savage looting and was then taken to Persia. From there the diamond travelled back to the Punjab to the kingdom of the Sikh king Maharajah

Ranjit Singh. The diamond then passed down through his family leaving a trail of bloodshed behind. It finally landed up with the boy king Maharajah Duleep Singh who was barely five years old when he was anointed and became the owner of what was then one of the most coveted gemstones in the world. Following betrayal and bloodshed within his inner circles and a lost Anglo- Sikh battle, the Maharajah found himself signing away the Koh-I-Noor to the British in return for protection. The diamond was then transferred to the British empire and presented to Queen Victoria. It remains as a possession of Britain today as a centre piece in the monarch's crown.

When I read the history of the stone, one recurring theme became very evident. It was an object that was deemed to give the possessor all they wished for. However, once they possessed it, they carried the burden and misfortunes that came with it. The logico-scientific tradition would not believe in the existence of the curse of the diamond. However, possessing the diamond does not always fulfil the imagination of what possessing it would be like.

I was left with a number of questions; What drove people to covet the diamond? It was not only financial gain as the diamond also gave them status. Secondly, once possessed, what happened to the owners of the diamond that led them to behave in particular ways?

In many of their works, Tuckett and Taffler have used the idea of the phantastic object to describe financial instruments (Taffler & Tuckett, 2003; Tuckett, 2011). In psychoanalysis, phantasy is the driving force behind human subjective experience. It is an imaginative process of fulfilling conscious or unconscious desires. A phantastic object is one whose qualities are determined by an individual's unconscious beliefs or phantasies about that object. This is based on an unconscious process where the object fulfils the subject's every wish by possessing it (Taffler & Tuckett, 2003). This idea is useful to form a narrative of what would possibly be going on in the FS industry and the wider system. Much of this does not seem dissimilar to those who chased after and finally owned the Koh-I-Noor.

The phantastic object

The City of London is a well-known area in the capital that is associated with the financial services industry and has for long known as the world leader and the epicentre of global finance. The mythology of the City is:

> *"...a destination paved with gold, a place to make fortunes and to rub shoulders with the successful and the powerful." (Kahn, 2017).*

In terms of the phantastic nature, what emerged was that it was able, at some level, to fulfil some of the conscious and unconscious desires that individuals held. Some saw this as a destination **to engage in cutting edge, innovative work.**

Another admits that what the industry meant to him was an **ability to double his salary**. He switched over from the public sector and was drawn to the industry due to the salaries that were offered.

Others were drawn by **status, success or the draw of an industry where anything was possible**. The phantasy that was conjured up by the financial services has at some level fuelled the decision to join the industry for most participants in this study.

Finally, there was also a desire for **security**.

Could it be that the industry served as the Koh-I-Noor for UK society; A gemstone worth possessing in order to establish and maintain control and status on the world stage? In the late 1980's when London was falling behind other global centres such as New York the Thatcher government changed the stock market rules. This led to the Big Bang, a dramatic increase in market activity which once again reinstated London as the leader of the financial services globally once again.

An interesting theme in the interviews were the strong belief systems that individuals held. Whilst I understand major conclusions cannot be drawn from such a small sample, we can probably generate a hypothesis that suggests that individuals do not primarily join the industry to do wrong. Often those who get into trouble get cast off as 'rotten apples' but this is only to attend to part of their stories.

For example, let me bring up the case of Kweku Adoboli, the UBS rogue trader who was imprisoned in 2012 for having lost $2.3 billion dollars of UBS's money. Adoboli was described by his university friends as someone who always wanted to do good and work for the community, he was in. And, this was something that Adoboli carried into his work life at UBS as well. There is a story where a senior manager came to him to say that he had forgotten to book a trade, and this would cost them $1.5 millions of losses. And, Adoboli did all he could to help the senior manager re-coup the losses.

The participants in this study have spoken about finding meaning in their work and being driven by a strong sense of purpose. The reported value systems pointed to a strong sense of purpose, strong beliefs around doing the right thing and finding meaning in the work they do. So, a question I am left with is that my participants, like Adoboli, held strong beliefs on right and wrong, yet Adoboli ended up in the position he is in now. What was different between the two and what was in the culture that

created the conditions for Adoboli to engage in the behaviour he ultimately did? What differentiates him from my participants

Maintaining the phantastic nature

As an object of phantasy, the industry is afforded a certain status in the system. In order to maintain this status, it needs to hold on to its phantastic nature. This is where I believe culture comes in.

Of the many definitions of culture out there I find the one espoused by Edgar Schein the most useful. He says that culture is:

In this framework, basic assumptions are the untold, unconscious ways of engagement that everyone lives by that adapts and evolves over time as the group deals with adapting to its external environment whilst managing its internal reality. These are unconscious codes of conduct as compared to the explicit

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values of the organisation. The idea of the basic assumptions here is that they are unconscious but are powerful in determining how things are done in an organisation.

The most interesting part of this definition is how culture is transmitted and passed down to new members who join the groups. No matter how you join the group, the basic assumptions get unconsciously transmitted to you in order for you to survive within the system. Any contravention to these basic assumptions will lead to excommunication. These get unconsciously 'taught' to new members as the 'correct way' to think and act within this group context.

Could it be that individuals who join FS (whether regulators or firms) are already primed by their valency to join and be part of the phantastic system? Once they join, are the unconscious dynamics so strong that they are forced to act within this culture or lose the phantastic object that they have longed for unconsciously? In this way could it be that the culture of FS strongly determines how individuals act within the system and any contravention of these basic assumptions lead to the individual being annihilated? For individuals who have yearned to possess the phantastic object, do they then engage in various defensive behaviours in order to reduce their anxiety of persecution and loss?

The following dimensions of the culture are hypotheses formed based on the findings of this study. They are in no way conclusive based on the sample size of this study. However, they help to form a compelling argument around the dimensions of the culture in FS in the UK.

Setting up strong boundaries

The Financial Services is notorious for putting up boundaries. The UK government's 2016 Social Mobility report showed how barriers to entry in Investment banks were high. They were so strong that people were judged by the colour of the shoes they wore and were precluded from jobs on this basis. These barriers to entry extend themselves to social class and sometimes even gender. High performing derivative traders at the French Bank Societe Generale were recruited from elite French engineering and mathematical schools. They were known in the 1980's as 'les moines-soldats' - the soldier monks (Luyendijk, 2015).

In this study one theme that emerged was the complexity of the financial services. I began to wonder what this complexity served to function. For example nearly 17 million UK adults with motor insurance do not know what 'no claims protection' means (FCA, 2017). There seems to be two roles this plays. Firstly, it serves as a sort of boundary where FS is so complicated that only a certain segment of the population can understand what it is all about.

Here the idea of complexity of the FS is described as being experienced in the whole system. If FS acts as the object of phantasy in society then the easy access takes away the mysticism surrounding it. I wonder if this is an unconscious process that is played out by the system to maintain the unattainable position of the phantasy.

8.1.2 Entitlement and invincibility

The history of the Koh-i-Noor shows, that the owners of the diamond made as much use of their power and status as they could when they were in possession of the gemstone.

Stein has talked about a culture of mania and how this led to the financial crisis in 2008 (Stein, 2011). In his work he suggests that major ruptures in western society caused considerable anxiety amongst leaders. These leaders then responded to this through manic and omnipotent defences. This process contributed to the culture and set the conditions for the crash.

I want to extend this argument with the idea that the way the industry is positioned in the wider system sets the conditions for a culture of invincibility to emerge. When one joins the industry there is the phantasy of attaining the phantastic object. There then ensues a period of euphoria, a feeling of victory; the feeling that 'I have made it'. The phantasy becomes the reality for individuals once they cross the boundary.

In the following excerpt the participant is describing his actions following a question from senior executives. He was asked to look into his manager's trading book as there was a feeling that his manager was not performing. This allowed the respondent to exercise his omnipotence and show up his manager, leading to his downfall.

This invincibility does not need to come out in an arrogant way. However, the texture of the narratives suggests a feeling that the regulatory space could also experience this sense of invincibility as they police the industry in order to keep it in check. They seem to be suggesting a sense of superiority where this group is ultimately in charge of protecting consumers and ensuring the industry is working in a safe way.

8.1.3 The primary anxiety; persecution and survival

One of the features of this environment is the strong push for performance. For an object to become phantastic, it needs to attract the phantasies of the beholder. In terms of the industry, it is my hypothesis that this phantastic quality serves a purpose and enables the system to survive. The system engages in certain unconscious processes in order to preserve its phantastic qualities. What I mean by this is that, as described before, the system engenders desire in individuals around various dimensions such as status, power, wealth or success. Individuals then become dependent on the system in order to fulfil their conscious and unconscious desires.

This dependency also creates an anxiety of loss or a survival anxiety. The feelings of 'If I am not good enough, I will be out' are in the system. This is constantly reinforced through leadership messages, reward systems and the popular narrative. The environment becomes one of high pressure and stress as individuals are constantly battling with the need to defend themselves against the anxieties of survival and persecution. These anxieties may be heightened and have different intensities depending on the role that one performs.

The organisation becomes the idealised object, which can get split into two parts; a. the ideal and gratifying and b. persecutory. This is confirmed by gratifying experiences like the payment of financial incentives or the opportunities that one gets in the industry. The anxiety of persecution is experienced through deprivation and pain, the biggest of which is losing one's job. The anxiety of persecution due to poor performance is high in these organisations. The Script (Berne, 1961) of 'I am not good enough' becomes insidious where employees are relatively rated against each other in performance management processes. The anxiety of persecution is born from this i.e. *7 am not good enough, so the organisation is going to kill me off'*. This could then lead to other cultural artefacts that are seen and experienced within the industry. The primary anxiety then is a persecutory one, survival anxiety.

Firstly, there is a fear of making mistakes. Whereas in the financial services fear of failure could possibly be a mechanism of control that contributes to the persecutory anxiety. You can see from the quote in green

Secondly, this leads to a feeling that 'no one is safe' which means the need to protect oneself is high in this environment. Moving from the individual to the overall system, from a systems psychodynamics perspective, a phantastic object is infallible and cannot be vulnerable. Mistakes are therefore seen as a sign of weakness, one that the phantastic object cannot afford in order to maintain its phantastic qualities.

The impact on behaviour (individual behaviour)

The anxiety of losing the phantastic object (that they seem to have acquired) may lead individuals to ensure they can benefit from it as much as possible while they can. Especially since individuals' positions are fragile, **the need to cash in, in the immediate, is high**.

Another feature of individual behaviour in these circumstances is **turning a blind eye** (Steiner, 1985). The denial of reality occurs in various forms across the organisation where individuals turn a 'blind eye' to behaviours that are inappropriate. There are multiple situations where individuals have turned a blind eye to activities that were dangerous and fraudulent yet highly profitable (Menon, 2018). I have personally come across instances in the industry where individuals who have been ignored though displaying a range of behaviours from bullying to sexism largely because they are 'bringing in the money'. These individuals carry the burden of performance and are unconsciously rewarded by being allowed to behave as they wish.

In Gary's quote, the 'Fred' he speaks about is almost untouchable due to the 'value' that he brings to the firm. The perception of adding value enables the individual to be idealised by the organisation and in turn could give rise to invincible feelings in the individual perpetuating bad behaviour that gets tolerated by the group as the individual is the idealised object.

More recently in 2019 allegations of sexism and bullying have emerged in the Llyod's of London business. An independent survey carried out by the Banking Standards Board found that approximately 8% of staff have seen harassment over the past 12 months. However, these actions have gone

unreported and unspoken of. It was reported that up to 22% of people in the organisation have ignored this sort of behaviour in the organisation (BBC, 2019).

Influences on group behaviour

Exploring complexity as a defence

I have already suggested that complexity here enables the industry to strongly reinforce its boundaries. It therefore enables the perpetuation of the phantasy of the object and helps to maintain its phantastic, almost unattainable qualities.

Secondly the complexity also helps individuals within to defend against the anxiety of persecution. Where only a small number of people have the capacity and capability to deal with the complexity, these individuals get protected against the annihilation as they are needed by the organisation.

Could it be that teams and organisations unconsciously or consciously create this complexity as a way to deal with the survival anxiety? It helps to manage the anxiety of annihilation by creating indispensability of capability that becomes crucial to help organisations navigate complexity.

The role of activity and frenzy

A key feature of the environment has been described as energy and speed. This has been a consistent theme in the interviews. The idea that activity and frenzy are related to performativity - "if I'm busy I'm important, I'm valued"

Extreme work environments are a response to the volatility in the environment. They have been described as environments where the stakes are high, the significance of decisions and their consequences are high and bad decisions are irreversible (Hirschhorn & Horowitz, 2014). One may argue that this may not be the case for someone who is not front-line staff or for say a bank teller in a small branch in the rural countryside. However, is this activity and frenzy a defence against the anxiety of annihilation? The idea that engaging in a manic consumption of tasks would somehow shield from the anxieties of persecution.

Desensitisation of money

In Menzies-Lyth's study, the nurses created complex systems and processes to protect them against facing the anxiety that was associated with working with terminally ill patients. In FS, money becomes a commodity of transaction and members of the industry may be able to distance themselves from this value by becoming desensitised to it. The purpose it serves is to enable them to manage their anxiety that they are transacting in such large sums and the consequences of something going wrong are unfathomable.

This desensitisation goes even further than the transactions that individuals are engaging in. For example, in the following quote where the system is able to inflate the value of a commodity (the individual employee in consideration) in order to deal with the anxiety of loss.

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It is also perhaps how at a retail bank level tellers, cashiers and phone operators are able to deal with large cash transactions without hesitation. They distance themselves from the value of the transaction and see it as numbers on a screen in order to deal with the anxiety of handling large volumes of money.

Bringing it all together

A number of structural remediations have been put in place since 2008 in order to manage and control behaviour. However, more recently the Financial Conduct Authority published a compendium of essays where they outline the requirement for:

"…a shift from linear thinking about culture and conduct to a dynamic, systems perspective" (FCA, 2018).

This calls for an approach that moves away from the traditional cause-effect thinking - greed and hubris caused the crash - to a more systemic one. In order to better understand the complexities of this industry an interrogation of the inter-dependencies of the various parts of the system and their impact on each other need to be considered. I would like to propose two lines of thought as possible intervention measures in addition to what the industry is engaging in.

At an individual level: Demystifying the phantastic object

From a very young age I had the privilege of learning albeit informally, from my father around the financial services system. I learnt very early on about savings, about credit and about money management. This has helped me throughout my life and the financial services has been second nature to me. I believe this has done two things, it has helped me to be less dependent on the industry for personal decisions, in the long term I have been able to prepare myself and my family for the future and, it has also demystified the FS world for me.

It is dangerous that we rely on a system that we don't fully understand or know about. I have employees who work for me who are just starting out their career and have opted out of the auto-enrolment pension scheme as they cannot see the benefit of getting a pension pay-out 40 years from now when what they need is the cash now. This goes to support my argument that regulation is not always the answer. Regulatory measures have forced employers to offer pension schemes to employees on an opt-out basis. However, if employees are unable to understand the benefit or have a long-term view, they will not engage in saving for their future.

Perhaps financial capability should be taught from a young age. This does not mean the basics of accounting, maths or even financial planning. What I mean is helping to build the capability of the next generation to engage in a service that is integral to their lives and that will impact them forever. FS is not just for the elite. As participant Linda says: "Young people are in debt as they begin their adult lives". Understanding how this works will also help to bring the industry closer to the consumer or the future consumers. It will help to debunk the complexity and the fantasy of it that has been built up around the industry.

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More importantly this could create a more responsible relationship between the industry and society. The manic consumption that we saw pre-crash came with dire consequences. However, the dynamics of the situation were such that consumers were unable to see or ignored these consequences for the short-term benefits that they offered. Limiting access to credit will force individuals underground and create a resurgence in unregulated credit products such as payday loans. Rather than regulate behaviour post-facto, which is treating the symptom, we should shape behaviour through building capability to tackle the root causes. Providing society with the means and resources to make informed choices and decisions will lift it out of the victim, dependent position. This will enable more considered choices especially in terms of personal impact of financial decisions.

At an organisational level: connecting with purpose and values

In my consulting work I have spoken to many executives and asked them what the purpose of their organisations was, and many have said "we are a commercial organisation and we exist to make money". I question whether making money is an outcome rather than a purpose. The British

Academy's recent work has shown how a focus on capitalism has guided UK organisations away from their core purpose. They argue that strong corporate purposes are about solving the problems of the people and the planet and not the pursuit of profit.

"A corporate purpose identifies how the company assists people, organisations, societies and nations to address the challenges they face, while at the same time avoiding or minimising problems companies might cause and making them more resilient in the process" (Mayer, 2019). I have worked with many graduates who are entering the workforce in the FS industry as a part of a graduate programme that my firm curates. I have noticed over the years that more and more younger members of the workforce are seeking out the organisation's purpose and checking to see if it aligns with their personal sense of purpose. Climate, environment and equality are seen to be higher priorities than a large reward package and a bonus.

From a FS firm point of view the definition of a clear larger purpose and an alignment of individual goals will be a key factor in managing some of the dynamics we can see. If individuals are constantly checking everything, they do against the purpose of the firm this should allow them to self-select behaviours that contravenes the purpose. If profit is the only motive, then it fuels the omnipotent manic behaviour we have seen. Measurement of only profits generates the survival anxiety I have discussed before. Whereas an alignment of performance, investment, impact and culture to the achievement of the purpose will create a more positive intrinsic motivation rather than a persecutory one. Purpose recognises the interdependent relationship with key stakeholders rather than a dependent one (Goshal & Bartlett, 1999).

Aligned with the definition of purpose is the concept of values. This brings me back to the Scheinian concept of basic assumptions that form the bedrock of an organisation's culture. In previous chapters I have explored the way in which these unconscious assumptions play a critical role in the development of the culture. These unconscious ways of behaving are pervasive and are also unconsciously passed down

through the generations of the organisations. For me what is missing from the current narrative of change interventions is the connection back to core values. Value sets are guiding principles, they allow all employees to have a clear understanding of the expectations of behaviours.

Purpose helps to paint a picture of the higher order goal or answers the question of 'Why are we doing what we do?'. Values on the other hand enable individuals within the organisation with an understanding of 'How do we need to be and behave with each other in order to achieve this'. One cannot regulate for values; they need to be understood and become a part of the normative behaviour in the organisation. Value sets that are static are just that, unliveable. Firms must spend time in defining clear value sets with their employees. They must then create the environment where employees can be held to account for contravening these.

Purpose and values are two key areas that I believe organisations need to work on to deal with some of the dynamics we have seen play out and that have been discussed before. A clearly articulated and defined purpose along with a set of lived, embedded values will create the parameters and boundaries required for appropriate behaviour in FS organisations. These mechanisms will counteract the systemic forces at play discussed before as they clearly outline the behavioural expectations for participants in the system.

Conclusion

The story of the Koh-I-Noor diamond has been a guiding light through this research project for me. It reframed my thinking around the history of the diamond and its fate culminating in British ownership. Themes of persecution, villains, victims and heroes are key components of the story as it has been in this research study. The narrative has everything from 'bad bankers', the 'rescuing regulators' to, as one of the participants put it, 'insurance as a fourth emergency service'. As with every good story, it is easy to be seduced into the drama and to vilify and focus on certain characters in the narrative. What this paper is trying to do is to raise an awareness of the different parts we all play in what is a complex, interconnected and interdependent system.

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"Mapping the Unconscious". Culture or Tragedy? A psychosocial program of Social Dreaming Matrix with refugees and immigrants.

Domenico Agresta

President of the Centre of Clinical Psychology and Psychosomatic Medicine, Italy

Domenico Agresta, formerly Trustee of the Gordon Lawrence Foundation, now a member of Social Dreaming International Network. He works with SD studying Rites of Passage, Religious Rites and cultural contexts. He is a clinical psychologist, psychotherapist, group-analyst and psycho-oncologist. He is the President of the Centre for the Study of Psychology and Psychosomatic Medicine (CSPP) and studies the correlation between mind and body, links to anthropology and group processes using dreams icons.

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With regard to migration, Italy is a country which is strongly influenced by its morphology and geographical position. Today it is a natural border of the European Union with a daily involvement in the recovery and management of hundreds of migrants coming from the Mediterranean migration routes.

In the last few years this phenomenon has increased considerably causing complex internal and external political conditions in countries bordering on the Mediterranean area. This situation has undoubtedly been worsened by the war in Syria and even more by the political instability in Libya brought about by the fall of the dictator Ghedaffi. 123,000 refugees arrived in Europe in 2019 compared with 141,000 and 185,000 who crossed the Mediterranean in 2018 and 2017 respectively.

This condition has forced the various governments of the countries involved to take measures to receive the migrants. The migrants arriving on the Italian coasts are mainly from Libya, but contrary to what is commonly thought, they are not Libyan citizens but rather migrants from many different countries. Recent data suggests they are from Bangladesh, Algeria, Mali, Nigeria, Sudan and generally all the countries that make up Sub-Saharan Africa. Unfortunately the people reach Libya only after a long journey which may take years after facing dramatic conditions like the crossing of the Sahara Desert. Many of them are forced to suddenly leave their villages without anything after witnessing acts of violence and the deaths of their loved ones.

Unfortunately the fall of the Ghedaffi regime led to great political instability in which various factions seized control of parts of the territory. The country fell into a deep crisis and a civil war. The foreigners were subjected to terrible acts of racism and were deprived of their jobs and those migrants who continued to arrive in Libya found themselves stuck in a trap without any means of escape. The various "governments" have taken advantage of this situation to use the foreign immigrants as goods of exchange with the governments of European countries and many groups of people smugglers have exploited the business provided by the desire of the migrants to cross the sea and begin a new life.

In this condition thousands of people have been crammed into improvised boats and abandoned off the Libyan coast in the knowledge that they would be saved by NGOs or European governments.

Who receives them and how

The countries of Europe have, both out of obligation and choice, taken responsibility for the migratory pressure. Obviously much depends on the policies and ideologies of the countries as well as their geographical position. In any case Italy, being a border country, has always been a destination for many migratory routes. In addition an international regulation signed in 2003 by the members of the European Union known as the "Dublin regulation" has had a great influence on European immigration as it limits responsibility for the migrants to the first country in which they arrive. This decision has made it

difficult to redirect migratory flows within Europe and as a consequence reception policies have also had to be modified.

The migrant who reaches the Italian coast after being picked up and saved by the Italian authorities has to make a formal "request for political asylum". This procedure gives him the status of "asylum seeker", a condition which will remain until he receives an answer from the state commission which will examine his request. If on the one hand this status allows him to have access to the rights of a citizen, on the other it puts him into a kind of bureaucratic "limbo" which can be very frustrating.

The request does not always have a positive outcome as it depends on various factors. If the answer is positive, the applicant assumes the status of "refugee" receiving a stay permit and the possibility of living a normal life in the host country. However, this condition is only one of many possibilities. There are various forms of international protection with different types of rights and duration of status.

The condition which undoubtedly makes the difference is the duration of the stay permit which, in the most favourable of cases, has a duration of 5 years with the possibility of renewals, but there are also forms of protection which offer 2 year permits or even 1 year. It may take the commission years to reach a decision and during this time migrants stay in reception centres while awaiting the outcome. The waiting for an answer, social isolation, economic difficulties and the absence of normal living conditions for an individual complicate the psychological state of the migrant.

What is the UNHCR

The UNHCR (the agency of the United Nations for refugees) organizes various systems of protection using ministerial institutional networks. It controls and monitors the reception of asylum applicants. Migrants who arrive in Italy are inserted in reception centres like the CAS (Special Reception Centres) which accommodate the refugees for the time needed to solve problems regarding the application for asylum and to carry out the various medical visits. After an initial period in a CAS, the applicant is sent to a SPRAR centre (system of protection for asylum seekers and refugees).

These centres provide not only accommodation but also a series of services which have as their general objective the integration and protection of the migrant and are a direct emanation of the UNHCR. This supervision imposes on these institutions the obligation to offer a high quality service which responds above all to psychosocial needs. In Italy the SPRARs are set up by Municipalities situated throughout the national territory and often provide an excellent service.

The "Social Dreaming Matrix" (SDM) Project has been implemented in a context which already provides a series of high quality services. The migrants who belong to the SPRAR are defined as "Beneficiaries" since they benefit from a number of services like legal support, educational support, health support, cultural mediation, document support, professional tutoring, social support and obviously psychological assistance.

Project Beneficiary has many rights as well as the support of numerous professionals who collaborate with the final aim of integrating the beneficiary. The SPRAR project in which we carried out our work is situated in Roseto degli Abruzzi, a seaside town on the Adriatic coast. At the time of our activity there the SPRAR had 50 beneficiaries who stayed in "apartment groups" located in the town.

The organization of the residences has this characteristic because it aims to concentrate on the independence of the people and their integration into the territory. The migrants are guests of the SPRAR for a limited period of time which varies according to legal and bureaucratic conditions. On average the time allowed in the system of the Municipality of Roseto degli Abruzzi is one year, at the end of which the beneficiary has to provide for himself completely. Therefore he goes from a condition of total assistance to one of total autonomy. The end of the project is thus a key date for the migrant as it is when he receives the outcome of the commission and his documents.

During their stay at the SPRAR centres the beneficiaries take part in integration projects, like theatre workshops and voluntary work for the community. Such initiatives are purely voluntary. Not all the guests of the centres are allowed to work as this possibility depends on their documents, but as well as board and lodgings the guests receive a small subsidy for personal expenses called "pocket money" which on average amounts to 1.50 euros a day. Any expenses related to health, job seeking, training or activities useful for integration are covered by the project. It is clearly a very valid model of integration and reception which, however, presents problems in the absence of psychological and educational work and an empathic relationship.

The frustrations linked to the total absence of freedom are converted into somatisation or often acts of aggression. Conditions which can be described as depressive are very common. Any kind of technical inconvenience which may occur in the management of the migrant's stay (delays in receiving pocket money, differences in the submission of documents, food quality etc..) may become a reason for feelings of anguish and agitation.

SDM is a psychological device which transforms the thinking of dreams using free associations, thematic amplification and systemic thinking in order to create links, find connections and liberate/generate new thinking. Social dreaming was discovered by G. Lawrence in the 1980s when he was the director of the Tavistock Institute of Human Relations in London. Using his knowledge of history and anthropology, Lawrence hypothesized that it was possible to dream socially (considering the dream a manifestation of the social environment in which we live) and that dreams could illuminate the shared social context (in the same way that Freud hypothesized that dreams, during an analysis, can illuminate the unconscious life of the individual who describes them.

"Mapping the Unconscious" is a research and psychological assistance program for refugees and immigrants in Italy. The use of the SDM is the first element of this program. The program follows three levels of observation and action: the three ethnologies - inspired by Marc Auge's studies (M. Auge, 2014) as structural elements of this plan to put the idea that we are working in a non-place -while we are creating new anthropological places- and the theory of "anthropopoiesis of dreams" (Agresta D., 2015) as a methodology to find a correlation between building and being born twice: in body and in imaginary

(dreams icons). We can say that human beings use their culture to be built, raising the question of human models to be adopted in their lives and in their societies.

The experience of the SDM in the field of ethnopsychoanalytical research and in particular in the field of history and immigration has enabled us to make important observations on how the matrix takes shape, what it is and what it represents in terms of the collective unconscious and hence the social unconscious. The Matrix creates culture: it is thus foundation element. From the rite or rituality, from the dream to the building of an identity and culture, the step is short.

It's a fact that every social group builds and creates rites and myths of origin with the aim of establishing, representing and controlling its own identity. The rite of passage represents the possibility for a people/ group/ individual to define its own anthropopoiesis and the way for the researcher to define its anthropopoietic function. As a consequence the study of a rite of passage within a social group is nothing more than the question which we ask ourselves when faced with the close and well defined relationship of the impossibility to respond to the problem of life and death except in terms of the study of the group, the psychosomatic dimension and hence the imaginary collective. The study was carried out using the device of the SDM and the identification of oniric icons as fantasmatic constituents and therefore constitutive bases for the Collective with regard to its relationship with the territory and its history (Agresta D., 2019). In these terms the SDM is presented as a tool which enables us to identify the foundation myth of a culture.

We assume that the migration and the voyage from the origin to a *new worl*d is a rite of passage. At the same time we can suppose that this process is very traumatic and between trauma and memory we can think that we are working with a subtle difference. When could we talk this *memory* and when *trauma|*

> *"I dreamt that I was swimming in a very big ocean with no directions or ideas. I tried to call my parents but it was impossible. I cried until I was near the coast and I became a baby"*

> *"Iwas in a dark place even if i was feeling better. I knew that I was in a other place, not my town, but my bod[9] was without power, energy, i felt my self like a machine not a human body"*

> *" I felt like when i was child. But suddenly i was in a big dark room and I couldn[9]t see anyone. I was sure there were people but when I moved around the room I only saw bodies that i didn[9]t know. For me its the same when someone dies in my town, when i was child i was really scared to this those bodies. I felt the same.*[991]

Reflecting on this Freud distinguished between memory and trauma: memory is the mnestic trace of an event; the trauma consists in the investment of this trace which transforms the trace into an eziological event. It is only as a memory that the event becomes a base for eziological elaboration, since it is on the mnestic trace that the psychic or pulsional excitement flows. Ultimately it is thus the pulsion which transforms the memory into a trauma (Menarini R. 2007).

In the SDM Community can observe many levels of existence thanks to the shared field and the free associations. The shared unconscious of the social dreaming is the way to analyze the constitution of a

myth. Bion (1992) talked about a myth as a "non-common sense" in relation with the problem of thought and the creation and its function for a group. In this case, Bion starts with the conception of the a function that makes it possible to transform the sensory impression into suitable material into the dream thought. Bion advances the hypothesis that the thought of the dream so transformed, we can say represented, is used as a material to produce, at social level, the myths. The myth therefore has to do with a community aspect that derives from shared sensory experiences. Sensory experiences that draw on unconscious elements that, as such, have not undergone a transformation, and therefore, following the Bionian construction, they have not found a "sense" yet. In our opinion Social Dreaming Matrix reveals this function on the basis of the hypothesis that the dream is formed in its potential for social action blewed it up into the drama of the rite of passage.

The Matrix is a container but it is above all a psychosensorial experience with an affective base which leads to the formation of a "structure process" that can be defined as the building of meanings by means of dreams. It enables us to represent "ideal anthropological structures" - or to facilitate the representability of them - and so, in terms of group processes, give maximum facilitation to the capacity of the collective to dream and then to accesses into knowledge.

With a SDM we can be able to described and stay on the threshold -liminality space like in a rite of passage- and observe the process of building and making memory. In this sense, according to Bion (1992):"to what extent is myth-making an essential function of a? It may be that the sense impression has to be transformed to make it suitable material for dream-thought, but that it is the function of dream-thought to use the material put at its disposal by a, the units of dream-thoughts so to speak, in order to produce myths. Myths must be defined; they must be communicale and have some of the qualities of common-sense-one might call them common non-sense" (pag 192). Using SDM means creating a space suitable for the observation of those dimensions because the dream brings the levels together.

Dreams, icons and free associations

We feel it is interesting to refer to a concept of Marshall Sahlins (1985) regarding the possibility of observing inter subjective aspects which are present and observable in history like the "structure of the conjuncture". Sahlins states that the "structure of the conjuncture" is the practical creation of the cultural categories in a specific historical context, expressed by the action of historical agents, including the microsociology in which they interact. The Author sustains that this modality of observation is fixed neither on the question of de facto social organization nor on the so-called underlying "social structure". In this way, according to Sahlins, we will avoid the risk, implicit in our ingenuous phenomenology of symbolic action, of seeing only a more attractive version of the ancient contrast between the individual and society (ibidem).

In fact, the Matrix is a container and a psycho sensorial experience with an affective basis which is determined in the formation of a structure process and which can be defined as the building of meanings by means of dreams. This is our basis with reference to what we have defined as the "structure of the conjuncture". This dimension is linked to the process and to the structural dimension in

itself and for itself, an aspect equally fundamental in understanding how the dream is also a system of thought.

In our work with the Matrix with immigrants and refugees, in fact, we observed that although the temporality perceived is ad infinitum, it is built, through connections and by means of free associations between dreams, as a transgenerational current historical present. In this sense the Matrix is expressed as a double foundation myth (Agresta D., 2019). The past, the present and the future are now visible in the images as an iconic dimension of the dream or in the hypertheme of the Matrix itself. The work is to build ego identity starting from a no-place to a new place. It's a work about biography and to biological one.

Now if the dream is in the Matrix and the Matrix contains the dream, it goes without saying that in the collective mental experience they are the same thing. In fact the dream and the matrix now create a transgenerational and hence transformative space.

"I was walking outside my little town and i saw my family and my friends try to call me to stay with them. I was scared because I had to go "

"I dreamt about my wife who had been dead for 11 years. We talked and chatted about this and that and she asked me how the children were. I felt happy and at a certain point she said to me: " Wake up, you have to go ". I Felt anxious and didn't want to wake up ".

" My family said goodbye and I saw all of them like shadows. Soon my body became cold and I was sure that I had to come back to speak with them and try to help their life. It was hard because I had only a little bag with me and not a big one.

The Matrix is now a place in the mind which is formed by a concept through which the Collective proposes a work hypothesis. It is a dream too. This is an observable dimension during the associative work performed by the Host as it is a "dimension without space and time (transpersonal)" which, through the saturation of the matrix, appears as if it were photographed in a segment made visible in a mental dimension which is nothing more than the dream itself.

The phenomenon refers to what Rene Kaes defined in terms of group forms of the psychic, which, in turn, are manifested in the experience that the subject has of himself with regard to his personal identity. It is the notion of group foundation of the identity.

In work with the SDM, the Matrix assumes the function of patterns and unsaturated experience and is thus transformative. The interpretation would make the work saturated, regarding how the work is carried out in this original device. The translation and the passage between the visible and the invisible - the semiophoric function of the dream - comes from the creation of the theme in the Matrix, in its form

and identification of oneiric icons, that is of mental objects which express the psychic intentionality of dreamers. The icons, as mental events, are potential symbols.

As the Matrix by means of dreams is a complex representation which is repeated and modified in time (Agresta D., 2015) - even though it keeps its foundation dimension at the basis of its creative process - the network of dreams and its multiverse of meanings is a complex construction of social thought. The dream in the Matrix is thus an attempt to free a personal and/or collective history from the ties of an unavoidable future, that is from symptomalogical predestination. This is why SDM represents ideal models of action and observation of the social environment in terms of conflict or in terms of a work hypothesis. The associative link is a representation of a possible semantic field to be transformed in terms of the solution of conflicts in the culture of belonging. In this way the Matrix observes its very creation of the Identity.

Working on free association we build a semantic dimension of the dream and therefore translate into a cultural object a new dimension which puts the visible in touch with the invisible (semiophore).

Therefore there is a real collective dimension and a creative-symbolic one. In the model proposed here the concept of the icon explains in what sense foundation aspects of the mind are constituents of culture. The icon is a sacred structure since it represents the creative dimension of the collective soul which expresses the sacred mystery of origins. The oneiric icon is a mental form or a visual content of an image, which expresses a pure metaphorical potential and, like the artistic icon, is an allegory implying the psychic realities hidden behind sensitive appearances. These pychic appearances are nothing more than manifestations of the unconscious, the mediator between the mind and the body, the single and the group and the mind and culture.

A peculiarity of the icon is its capacity to visually build the object or psychological theme it represents and originates from since it possesses an identical nature and substance. Being a construction it has a symbolopoietic symbolic nature and is thus a transformative dimension which manifests itself, in the here and now of the group, thanks to the constellation of the associative contents (Giovannini V.; Menarini R., 2004). Therefore we mean an "anthropopoiesis of the dream", a psychic and corporeal process by which the symbolized body becomes a narrative and builder of thoughts (Agresta D., 2015). The function of the icon, identifiable in the matrix, enables us to study these phenomena of the mind. The icon connects the body to

the context then to history. According to Menarini (2007) we can say that in other words, a temporal dimension (history-memory) takes the form of a spatial dimension (body-instinct) and then it is characterized as a trauma: an etiological happening that no longer belongs to the consciousness, but to the unconscious.

The symbol takes the symbolic form that hides something painful no longer placed in history, because history is sunken in the unconscious.

Thanks to iconic meanings, the mental field of the collective becomes a matrix of mental models. As an expression of the unconscious and the repressed, the dream thus becomes a place of signification of

events in formation proposing, through iconic images, elements to understand what is in being, something which does not exist yet but which finds in icons a space from which it can develop and express itself.

The work we had with refugees and immigrants was like a rite of passage a new place where different cultures started to share and to explore new possibilities through the dreams. The dream provides the link between the conscious observer (embedded in his or her system of language and culture) and the unknown, spontaneously organizing system of thinking that is the human ecological niche. This ecological niche is the background of the feelings present in the dreams

Biography:

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In medias res .... In the middle of things

Estelle Fyffe

Former CEO, annecto, Australia

Estelle has worked across a range of community social services, education and public sector settings, in various roles including with experience as a psychologist, staff educator, CEO and Board Director. She holds postgraduate qualifications in psychology and management and has particular interests

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in innovation and human systems. Estelle is a member of the Australian Psychological Society, the Australian Human Relations Institute and the Australian Institute of Company Directors.

Background paper for Panel Session 9 September 2020, Reflective Practice in Organisational Life, NIODA Symposium 2020, Working into the Future: building individual and organisational culture.

Why have I chosen this title?

In mid-August 2020 I stepped away from the role of CEO of annecto, a not for profit organisation that I had been with as the CEO for 16 years. It was time to move on and at the same time I felt in the middle of a journey, both personally and with the organisation. At the time a colleague observed that we all leave in the middle of things, in the middle of a journey, in the middle of a story, and referred to the phrase 'in medias – res.' It resonated.

When I was invited to join this panel as part of the NIODA Symposium 2020: Working into the Future, I had mixed reactions. I felt somewhat daunted at the prospect of sharing some of my story of attempting to introduce reflective management practice into annecto, and simultaneously welcomed the invitation at this point in my journey, to reflect on the story. As I have worked on this paper I have become more aware that one of the privileges of being the CEO over an extended period has been to experience how long the tail of events are in the tale of an organisation.

By reflective management practices I mean approaches and techniques to encourage managers to reflect on their experience, actions and emotions to inform continuous learning. It sounds so simple!

Overview of this presentation:

1. Introduction to annecto and to why I chose to introduce reflective management practices.
2. What was tried, what happened, what I learnt at different stages in the annecto journey.
3. Some current personal reflections.

As CEO my tasks have been to ensure that the organisation delivers on its purpose, meets regulatory requirements and remains financially sustainable. In other words, my journey and this presentation is not as a researcher of facilitator but from the perspective of a CEO seeking approaches to invest in that will enable the organisation to thrive.

Introducing annecto:

annecto is a not for profit social services organisation currently operating mainly in the disability and community aged care sectors, legally constituted as a membership - based association and registered Australian body. The choice of the name *annecto* was the final step in a merger of 5 community associations operating in the north-western suburbs of Melbourne. Three of these organisations involved services for people with a disability and their families, one provided alternatives to aged care nursing home placement, and one which focussed on information and disability policy advocacy. All were fiercely opposed to congregate care institutions and were leaders in their time in advocating for and establishing alternatives. The preceding merger process had been extended and rocky attended by

perceptions of the spectres of financial collapse and loss of trust. The presence of the spectres had been most keenly felt by the members of the largest of the merging organisations, which had been established in the 1950's as one of the earliest Australian alternatives to institutional placements for babies and children with a disability.

As of June 2004 annecto was directly assisting approximately 300 people in north- western Victoria, mainly in the metropolitan area, provided additional After Hours back up to people who may or may not be using other annecto services, employed approximately 200 staff and had an annual revenue of approximately $12M.

As of June 2020 annecto, inclusive of a recently merged entity, Merrimu, was directly assisting approximately 4000 people plus approximately 4000 contacts monthly providing occasional assistance through 'annecto After Hours,' employed approximately 800 staff plus contractors, operated in Victoria, NSW, ACT and Queensland, and had an annual revenue of approximately $56M. The theme for the year in the annual report to be released later in 2020 will be *Journeys*.

Why was I interested in reflective management practices?

From my work experience prior to taking up the role of CEO at annecto I had formed the view that many services for people who were potentially disadvantaged created a 'them' and 'us' distinction between the so called helpers and those to be helped, emphasised deficits rather than strengths and had the outcome of keeping those to be 'helped' in devalued roles. I had also formed the view that how the people working within various roles in an organisation and the system behaved to each other would be reflected in how the people in less powerful roles, including clients, were treated.

What I observed of annecto in 2004 was essentially a collection of activities being delivered according to program guidelines produced by government, with little application of the considerable amount of research -based information about disability, ageing or management. Staff and indeed most clients and other stakeholders cared deeply about the organisation. The majority of staff were working very hard in the sense of the energy that they put in, but they were locked into reactive practices. Being reactive was encouraged by the government reporting processes which focussed on the negativity of incidents and complaints, with little to no analysis that could lead to learning. There was a persistent fear, right through to the Board, that the organisation would not survive financially.

And it was my job to provide leadership in doing something about all this!

The branding process which I led to complete the merger was highly consultative across a range of stakeholders and included a focus on the identifying a shared aspired purpose, or primary task, of the organisation before any decisions on options for names. With a high level of engagement this was determined as being 'committed to quality of life and realising an inclusive society' and the name 'annecto' was chosen as meaning connect (Latin). This seemed like a good start.

At the outset I hoped that by encouraging staff in key roles to reflect in some way on their work and practices this would enable them and the organisation to escape the treadmill of the current practices

and would build the ability of staff and the organisation to work out new practices that could lead to better outcomes for people using the services as well as for staff. I made the assumption (which I still hold) that good outcomes for people will enable growth in scale and scope and will do this in a more grounded and sustainable way than chasing growth for its own sake.

Some forms of reflective practice were familiar to me from my previous work and studies. I had worked as a psychologist, had post-graduate qualifications in psychology, education and mental health, and had completed a Masters in Innovation and Services Management through RMIT. I had long believed in the importance of recognising emotion (emotional labour) in the workplace and had long been uncomfortable with the ability to visualise, imagine, and think in a non – linear way, being seen as opposed with the ability to work with logic, facts and numbers, rather than both being important, and potentially able to be combined.

But I had never seriously tried to work with this as a manager and had never previously held a management role with the formal authority of a CEO. Introducing reflective practice did not sit with my (then) mental model of the CEO's role and it took some experimenting and courage.

Some early attempts:

I tried to create permission and some space for some staff to think of other ways the work could be done. This was not easy when the widely held perception was that as unless staff time was totally devoted to direct service delivery the organisation would fail, and there was no time to look at doing things differently. I was tentative and had limited success.

Action Research: - cycle - (plan -act- observe- reflect):

- I did manage to obtain grant funding to pilot a new model of Community Living with 5 people with an intellectual disability. Grant funding was obtained for this project. The project was successful in terms of outstanding enduring outcomes for the participants, and in building the skills of the particular staff who were involved in the project. I was unable at the time to work out how to resource other projects to build new models using action research or how in other ways to get action research more widely adopted. (Some years later another and well- resourced project was conducted that was informed by this pilot, and this subsequently influenced annecto's strategy and growth.)

Organisational Role Consultation:

- A program of Organisation Role Analysis was designed by RMIT, Creative and Sustainable Organisations (Susan Long and Wendy Harding) to enable annecto managers to undertake in depth examination of their roles as given by others and taken up by themselves, and of the related system dynamics. The consultation included each participant doing a role drawing which they discussed with the group. The drawing that I recall most clearly was done by the (then) Finance Manager, a quiet man with a rather dry sense of humour, of a large water tank with a lot of taps, characters turning on each tap so that the water flowed out and himself depicted as

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continually moving around turning off the taps. As I recall the group found this something of a revelation and communications with "Finance" improved.

The participants found The Organisational Role Consultation at that point in time to be helpful in understanding what was influencing their roles and work and in building more open relationships with their colleagues.

Re -allocation of Resources:

- The organisational structure that I inherited had the heads of the various service delivery activities all reporting directly to the CEO. I wanted a structure that allocated resources differently so that they and the CEO's time were not so tied up in the current direct service delivery practices, and set up a structure with three direct reports to the CEO, Services, (the largest area), Resources and Development, and Finances. This was not very successful, and a power struggle developed between the Services and the Resources and Development teams. In retrospect perhaps this was inevitable as the creation of this structure was probably experienced by the service delivery teams as a loss of power and, in retrospect, insufficient work was done at the time of how the managers leading these teams, and the teams themselves, would work together. However, the creation of this structure did set in place the precedent that some of the organisation's funds would be invested in roles that were not direct service delivery but aimed to improve capability and processes.

Action Research: - cycle - (plan -act- observe- reflect):

- Because of government requirements the organisation needed to establish a continuous quality improvement (CQI) management system. What a great opportunity, I thought, to establish this within the Resources and Development Team, using an Action Research model. The CQI system aimed to include consolidated information on incidents, complaints and improvement suggestions which could be analysed to inform learning and improved practices. An experienced quality management professional with strong interpersonal skills, a deep understanding of the sector and experience with action research was employed to lead this work.

Success was limited. Staff delivering services did not want to report complaints or incidents; there was extreme avoidance of any reflective discussion that might lead to learning; service deliver staff were unrelentingly critical of the manager leading this work.

On reflection (in retrospect) my hypotheses are that (1) the power struggle between the 'Services' and ' Resources and Development' teams was being played out and (2) staff found it distressing to engage with exploring complaints and incidents as this was counter to their feeling and aspirations that they were doing ' a good job' on behalf of their clients.

The quality management lead left having established the basics of the CQI management system and having put in place a 'Feedback' system for complaints, complements and improvement suggestions.

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It subsequently became apparent that service delivery managers had accepted the need for a quality system more than had been apparent, and the next quality system lead obtained much more buy- in from staff. annecto progressively established an integrated quality management system across all jurisdictions and complaints and incidents are in the main well managed. However, the feedback system and embedding of learning at the local levels from complaints, incidents and ability to learn has still not in my view been fully utilised.

I confess that I was feeling daunted at this point and did not pursue reflective practice with annecto managers for some time.

Strategic Conversations and participatory/distributed leadership:

By the 2010-11 financial year annecto was assisting approximately 2500 people directly and more than 5000 through After Hours back up, mainly in north western Victoria, employed approximately 400 staff plus contractors and had annual revenue of approximately $24M. The theme for the year's annual report was Emergence through listening, sharing and connecting.

During the year opportunity for annecto to sponsor a visit to Melbourne by Meg Wheatley had introduced the concepts of complexity theory, of an organisation as a self -organising living system and the dimension of fear, courage and vulnerability to the annecto Board, management, and some annecto members. Those participating had found the ideas energising.

With government reforms in aged care and disability imminent but unclear, it was time to review the organisation's strategic directions.

The Board Chair at the time introduced annecto to Toke Palludan and Monica Moeller of Interchange (Denmark) and their work in the Art of Hosting Conversations that Matter.

With the full support of the Board, we took up the opportunity to work with Toke and Monica on:

- Strategic conversations (conducted with over 800 people) to refresh the annecto strategic directions.
- Training for staff in various roles, and Board Directors, in using 'Art of Hosting' Methods.

Art of Hosting Methods are described as ways of harnessing the collective wisdom and self- organising capacity of groups of any size. Based on the assumption that people give their energy and lend their resources to whatever matters most to them – in work as in life – the Art of Hosting blends a suite of powerful conversational processes to invite people to step in and take charge of the challenges facing them. www.artofhosting.org

Through the work with Interchange annecto was introduced to collaborative practices of:

- Powerful questions and conversations that matter
- Appreciative Inquiry
- Open Space Technology

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- Story Telling
- World Café
- Pro -action Café
- Circle
- Flow Game
- Harvesting
- Graphic recording.

This work was highly successful and energising in engaging and upskilling people across annecto. There were some exceptions to the engagement – staff who preferred a more authoritarian style of management found the methods disturbing.

The strategic conversations commenced with a World Café, (which we called a World Picnic as the more than 200 people who registered could not be accommodated if the venue was set up café style), followed by several focus groups and individual consultations. A strong message from people using annecto's services was that they wanted us to assist them to live within their communities, and not to see them just as the clients of a Disability/Aged Care Service Provider. We were reminded that people's lives are much larger than the space service provider organisations occupy.

Following the strategic conversations, the annecto purpose was amended to *Connecting individuals and communities to realise an inclusive society*.

annecto practices were changed to consciously adopt:

- Person Centred Thinking and Socially Valued Roles; people contributing to solving social problems rather than being the problem– as well as taking on roles and responsibilities that enables meaningful participation and contribution to their community
- Inclusion – people having opportunities to participate and contribute to housing, health, education, transport, employment, written and digital communication, recreation and leisure.
- Story Telling – using individual and collective stories to inspire and teach us, as well as inform us what the future might look like.

These practices were intended to apply across the organisation, not just to service delivery practice.

Those continuing annecto staff and Directors who participated in *Art of Hosting* training have continued to use the methods, particularly powerful questions, circle practice, story- telling and graphic recording. Senior management meetings have continued to include space for reflection and to include checking in and out as standing items on meeting agendas. Unfortunately, annecto has not continued to invest in training in the suite of collaborative practices to the level that would have been, and still would be, useful.

My personal reflections in retrospect are that the annecto Board, management and I became distracted from the value of investing in these practices through the following:

- Something very strange happened at Board level whereby the idea of having powerful conversations became destructive of others, by losing the context/container of collaborative processes. The Board became wary of reflective practices, although they were not entirely rejected.

- The tsunami of government reforms through community aged care and the NDIS meant that the spectre of not surviving re-emerged and provided a massive distraction.

- Sufficiently skilled and trusted facilitators were not readily available.

Participatory or distributed leadership:

Strategic conversations and training based on Art of Hosting was also the point in annecto's journey and my journey as a CEO when we started to engage with the ideas of participatory or distributed leadership.

By participative leadership was understood shared decision making between levels of responsibility, and the idea of shared meaning within the organisation or community.

The idea of participative leadership developed into an idea of distributed leadership whereby leadership is seen as a function across a group or organisation rather than sitting with a leader- followers dimension. In other words, the actions of all individuals at all levels is seen as integral to the organisation's success. Another impact of a move to distributed leadership was an emphasis on leadership development across the organisation and its systems.

annecto has continued to develop what distributed leadership means for annecto, which has not been straight forward. For example, adoption of a concept of distributed leadership by myself led to a flatter and practices that were consciously less 'command and control' and more 'consultation and consensus.' This was not well accepted by all of the then senior leadership. Distributed leadership also raised some challenges with accountability expectations and methods.

Managing through major changes:

In the 2015-2016 financial year annecto had assisted approximately 2000 people directly and more than 3000 through After Hours back up, employed approximately 400 staff plus contractors, had an annual revenue of approximately $31.4 M, operated in Victoria with small teams in Broken Hill and Western Sydney, and was preparing to expand in metropolitan Sydney and open in ACT, Dubbo, Kempsey (NSW mid north coast) and southern Queensland. The theme for the year/ annual report was *The renaissance of customer- centricity.*

By early 2017 annecto was experiencing challenges in managing the demands of moving to the 'market' environment of the NDIS and aged care while distance managing increasing numbers of staff teams. Silos were forming and the prospect making the required changes in practices was looking grim.

At this point annecto engaged with NIODA (Wendy Harding, Brigid Nossal, Rob Ryan) to work with 21 senior staff on a two day workshop (Feb 23 & 24) on the question: How can annecto management

organise, adapt and work together to enable annecto to be agile, to thrive and contribute to inclusion outcomes in the 'new world' of changing government policies and rapidly developing technology?

The participants were provided with information both prior to and at the workshop on sector trends, annecto Board priorities and project management. The facilitators drew on the Transforming Experience Framework, Open Space Technology and Organisational Role Analysis to work with the group to form project groups and commence the development of project plans to address annecto's priorities as determined by the guiding question for the workshop.

One of the things that I recall most vividly from this workshop was the 'in vivo' setting up of a networked system for the design of work on project management. Project leads and teams were assigned according to their formal job descriptions. As the teams realised that they really needed input from someone who was in the workshop but had not been assigned to their teams the team was authorised to negotiate with this person and the team to which they had been assigned to agree to work with a different team for a while on a specific aspect of that team's project. To describe this differently, the teams were practicing working across silos.

This was a 'break through' workshop. It set the basis for the establishment of a Project Management Office within the IST team, with project teams being comprised of staff across annecto, Executive Managers as sponsors of projects addressing organisational priorities and the Executive Management team monitoring the project grid on a regular basis. These processes assisted to break down silos and moved annecto along the path to operating with agility to manage change. Of course, this did not happen overnight, and it was not all smooth, but without the workshop I do not know how this it would not have happened at all.

Also subsequent to this workshop I decided to change the way that the Executive Management Team was operating and, using some work done for annecto by Korn Ferry/Hay, to structure the team along business process lines, allocating core, enabling and steering organisational processes to each member of the Executive Management Team. This method of structuring of the team is not strictly relevant to reflective practice in management but I mention here as the workshop somehow enabled me to understand how I could introduce this model for the Executive Management. The model was not easy to understand however once established helped greatly to clarify accountabilities and expectations, and to safeguard against silos.

The Executive Leadership Team meeting developed the expression CHEEBI: Connecting, Honest, Empowering, Evidence -based, Initiative. Meetings were book -ended with a check in and a check out and some meetings were scheduled as reflective practice workshops as compared with formal presentations or reports for analysis and decision. Dr Wendy Harding facilitated several reflective practice sessions which included setting of priorities for the Executive Leadership Team as a team, as distinct from individual priorities, and work on team member communication and decision making.

In February 2020 the Executive Leadership team met for a two-day workshop with Dr Harding on Leadership Journeys. Each member of the team in turn drew their leadership journey from a child to an

adult. Wendy facilitated a discussion of this journey and what it meant for the way in which they took up their annecto leadership role for each person with the group in turn. I had been unsure how the managers would engage with this workshop and was surprised by the level of communication, trust and mutual accountability. This was the last time that I met in person with the annecto Executive Leadership team as from March all annecto meetings moved online and in August I finished as CEO.

Managing through an unanticipated crisis.

The February workshop was not the last reflective practice session which I attended. The Executive Management team participated in online sessions facilitated by Dr Harding to work on addressing communication influenced by amplification of frustrations during Covid -19, and on introducing the incoming annecto CEO.

And a word on annecto during Covid-19:

The Board's initial response to the developing Covid-19 crisis in March was to give management time and space to put responses in place, and then to conduct a reflection session at a meeting of the Board's Culture Committee on the alignment between these management responses and annecto's purpose and principles. The Board also asked management to keep in mind, and report on, what was being learnt during the pandemic. In other words, the Board chose to promote a form of reflective practice by management rather than the Board stepping into a directive role. In my view this contributed to annecto being able to respond rapidly and effectively.

As annecto's work in community aged care and disability services is regarded as essential services the focus for months has been on keeping services going safely in a usual or adapted form and keeping staff safe and in work. annecto has been running with the majority of the 800 staff working from home since March 2020. Normally 'office based' staff accomplished this transition in a week of being asked; all staff, including frontline support staff, increased their communication; as of the date of writing this paper staff were diligently following guidelines, there have been minimal positive diagnoses and no outbreaks. Concurrently the organisation has continued to roll out digital transformation replacing the CRM and CRS and moving management of and by frontline staff on to mobiles.

As I understand it agile teams are motivated by a shared vision and commitment to delivering value. Team members actively engage with other teams to manage dependencies and resolve impediments. I have observed this across annecto during 2020; in 2017 it was a dream or fantasy.

Some current personal reflections:

1. Do I credit reflective management practices as contributing to annecto's growth and management though government reforms, digital transformation and a pandemic? - Yes. Was it hard? – Yes. Did I work consistently on encouraging reflective management? No. Is it embedded within annecto? I don't know and I hope that the organisation continues the journey.

2. annecto operates in a sector where despite the aspirations of many individuals and organisations, it is very difficult to stay on a humanitarian purpose. Although annecto's stated purpose of *Connecting individuals and communities to realise an inclusive society* is well accepted, there are continual pressures to divert the purpose or primary task to such as one of the following:

   - We should just get bigger. The pressure across the sector for growth in the sense of simply growing in scale has increased since the government reforms and mantra about aged care and disability moving to a 'market' environment.

   - We are going to go broke. Not for profits do struggle to survive financially, at least from time to time, and annecto's history and pre-history is no exception. The anxiety that annecto will fail financially persists and resurfaces regardless of the current financial data.

   - We should just do what government asks. Government compliance demands have increased since the government reforms. Government is also, intentionally or inadvertently, shaping the sector in a way that is not necessarily what is needed or what government will want in the future.

Positioning annecto as a social purpose organisation using commercial processes for social impact and outcomes is an antidote to these pressures, yet one that is (to me) somewhat surprisingly hard for many people to understand/ accept.

3. Reflective management practices have much to offer in contributing to building managers and organisations equipped for the challenges of today and into the future. Organisations in the community and social services sector need capabilities, practices, processes, such as reflective management approaches, that can enable authentic human connection and welfare. This is illustrated by the observation in the Interim Report of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, October 2019, that most people's experience of the formal aged care system is distressing. A further illustration is the observation by Mr Alan Robertson, who recently investigated the tragic death of Ann Marie Smith, an NDIS participant, that NDIS plans, although they are meant to be person- centred, are better characterised as transactional.

4. To implement and participate in and hold to these practices is personally challenging, takes courage and requires a level of trust and authenticity that cannot be assumed in a workplace and needs work in its own right. To introduce and maintain them maintain them requires a level of trust in oneself and others that cannot be assumed, needs work in its own right, and is very difficult to maintain if not supported by the formal leaders, the design, structures and systems of an organisation. I feel that I that have been privileged to be able to use the authority of the role a CEO to contribute to creating spaces safe enough to explore these practices, which have influenced both annecto's and my own journey to date.

NIODA

The Century of the System

Dr James Kranz

Organisational consultant and researcher, USA

James Krantz is an organisational consultant and researcher from New York City, whose principal interests are in the impact of emerging trends on the exercise of leadership and authority; the social and technical dimensions of new forms of work organisation; and the unconscious background to work and organisational life. He is the Managing Principal of Worklab, a consulting firm in New York City that focuses on strategy implementation, leadership development, and helping organisations confront the need for change.

What follows is a summary of the plenary presentation

Introduction

The plan for the talk is three-fold:

1. Provide an overview of systems thinking, where it came from and what it actually is

2. Implications, which includes some of the psychological challenges involved in embracing systems approaches

3. What it means for organizations going forward. The challenges we face as system psychodynamic thinkers and practitioners to continue to be relevant. Including how we need to adapt and develop our concepts to join more fully with what is emerging.

The challenges we now face are messy and inordinately complex They are profoundly disturbing and create a sense of constant crisis.

Our institutions and governments seem woefully inadequate. They are losing their legitimacy and long with it their capacity to contain anxiety. Increasingly unable to offer meaningful roles through which people could connect to larger purposes and repair their inner worlds through generative work (Klein)

Twenty five years of social, economic, industrial and technological upheaval, have left us with a fragmented, shocked, society with people searching for connection, hope and lost meaning. Symbol systems involving family, social and political authority, sexuality, birth, death, and the ordering of the life cycle are in disarray. Repeated betrayal by organizations, failed dependency, massive social trauma, and fragmentation of the self have stimulated a deep yearning for renewal in the midst of a catastrophic loss of reliable, containing structures.

I have an hypothesis about this: we are in a period of large-scale social transformation. As profound as was the shift from agrarian to industrial society: a transition from industrial world to the information world. Like the change to industrialism, this will take decades – maybe a century - and involve deep

disruption. What social systems on the other side look like remains to be seen. I think systems thinking plays an important role in this transformation.

Systems thinking from two vantage points[1] –

From one vantage point, systems thinking is a method of inquiry. A powerful tool for seeing interconnections, for looking underneath the surface of events to see beyond symptoms and enactments to understand underlying causes.

As many of us know, it is a wonderful framework for revealing how seemingly individual or interpersonal issues are never simply personal or interpersonal. They always channel systemic issues as well. And how roles are imbued with so much more than tasks and authority.

From it we've come to appreciate how one part of a system recreates the problems and tensions in other parts. Also how dynamics in the environment are mirrored within organizations and then within its subsystems.

Few – if any of us here - will be surprised to learn that people could tell when the Barack & Michelle Obama were squabbling by watching the interactions of their personal staffs. When the hairdressers and transport people worked well together, they knew the first couple was getting along. Or that consulting teams unconsciously absorb and reenact dynamics of their client organizations, which provides deep insight into what's happening under the surface of the client system... if we can figure out how to harvest that knowledge. (Gilmore & Krantz)

But there is another vantage point with more profound implications. Systems thinking is also much more than a tool. It is also an image of reality. A fundamental set of assumptions about how to understand experience. What the epistemologists call a root metaphor or others refer to as a master narrative. A way of seeing the world that unconsciously configures even the facts as we see and makes assumptions about how things are related to one another.

Different historical ages have a particular view of the nature of reality. When there is a transformation from one age to another, the dominant world view evolves along with it. I want to suggest tonight that we in just that sort of transition. That the transition from the industrial age to the information age involves a shift in worldview from a what is often called the mechanistic - or machine - view of the world to a systems view of the world.

This is what the title of tonight's talk is about.

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[1] The thinking about the mechanistic and systems view was originally and much more clearly formulated by two of my teachers: Russell Ackoff and Eric Trist, to whom I owe a great deal of the understanding represented in this talk.

NIODA

Two World Views or Master Narratives

Let me begin by drawing a clear contrast between the two master narratives The Systems worldview will be much clearer when contrasted with the world view that has been a fundamental part of the Western world's outlook for nearly 500 years – the mechanistic viewpoint.

Machine View – or mechanistic view - of the world.

The machine view of the world can be traced back to the Renaissance, when humanism emerged from the Middle Ages and then bloomed into the Enlightenment & the scientific revolution with its embrace of rationality, tolerance, scientific knowledge, reason dispelling superstition. and questioning taboo. Freud was a child of the Enlightenment, though kind of a bastard child because he also revealed the limits of reason. In any case the scientific understanding that arose in the Enlightenment has carried through the industrial era to where we are now.

Isaac Newton was first to actually describe the universe as a machine many regard as the epitome of the scientific revolution his laws of motion, which view the concepts of distance, time, and mass, as absolute remains the most highly corroborated scientific theory in history. (An interesting side fact is that Newton's greatest insights came during the Black Death Pandemic. Cambridge was closed, giving Newton time to complete his most important work.)

Mechanistic worldview - 4 main elements:

First. A complete understanding of the universe is possible. Faith can no longer guide us.

Second. Has to do with HOW this understanding comes about. We understand by taking something apart. Reducing things to their basic elements and understanding what the parts do. Understanding the behavior of each part and then assembling that understanding of the parts into an understanding of the whole.

The term for this is analysis, which has became dominant method of thought in the Western world. This is the traditional scientific method, developed for reducing the complex to the simple by abstracting the part from the whole and analyzing relations between the parts.

Third. Once something is reduced to its elements, understanding is based on seeing how they affect each other. Reducible to simple relationship: cause and effect. Everything could be explained through the lens of that relationship. if the cause occurs, then the effect must follow. If something happens, it has a cause that can be identified

Fourth. To analyze precisely, the environment must be excluded. To establish cause and effect, variables had to be isolated, uncontaminated by external or environmental factors. This helps us understand the systems psychodynamic diaspora – so frequently extruded from mainstream institutions if variables had to be uncontaminated by external or environmental factors. Action research has been devalued in mainstream social science. Whereas experimental psychology with tightly controlled

laboratory conditions was so highly rewarded. The entire Industrial Revolution is an expression of the power of machine worldview: "See the elements and figure out what causes what."

Extraordinary Advances & Contributions.

This model of understanding has left us with extraordinary and wonderful advances. With the disarray and suffering in our world today, it's easy to overlook the extraordinary contributions of industrialization. The scientific revolution transformed society by subjecting nature – including human nature – to systematic and rigorous exploration.

Analytical thinking is very well suited to solving serious problems For example: preventing smallpox, increasing food production, moving large weights and numbers of people rapidly over long distances, diagnosing and treating all kinds of diseases that would have been deadly, taking billions out of poverty. And so on. Difficult to overstate the advances this scientific method has propelled. It is useful to read Steven Pinker's "Enlightenment Now" to see the astonishingly positive record for the past few centuries.

Of course, every solution solves some problems and creates others. The machine model – for all its wonderful gifts - has created its own challenges. Amongst them Mechanistic thinking became the template for our social organizations as well. Many implications for all sorts of institutions.

Consequences of the machine model for Social Organization

In keeping with the analytic mindset, work also was divided into its smallest bits. People doing them were treated as if they were machine parts. This led a great deal of dehumanization and suffering as it created highly infantilizing work environments (with attendant depression, disassociation, psychic withdrawal, lack of growth, kind of work, etc.)

Another is that the machine model led to highly centralized, tightly coupled bureaucratic hierarchies based on stratification, specialization, standardization, and formalization. Top down control authoritarian organizations were highly effective for many challenges it faced. However, as the nature of work and organizations have evolved, this approach has become increasingly maladaptive.

Unintended consequences of the machine model

An important problem that arises from the effectiveness of the machine model is extreme complexity. Immense achievements of industrialization have created the conditions that are now exposing the limitations of machine thinking. The dynamics arising from our global integration complexity, dense interconnectedness, and accelerating rates of change create their own set of problems. They create dynamics and forces that are beyond the capacity of organizations and social systems that are organized as machines

Problems that arise from these dynamics are problems for which there is no clear solution – Despite all of the analytical ability and technical brilliance aimed at solving them. They are not reducible to interacting parts. These are really big, messy, problematic situations Drug addiction, financial crises,

health care, hunger, income disparity, obesity and chronic diseases that grow out of lifestyle, poverty, terrorism, sustainability. And, of course, climate, which threatens our survival on the planet.

The issues involved are too extensive and too many-sided to be coped with by any single organization, however large, In many cases, to large and complex to be handled by any single nation. These "meta-problems" have been given a variety of names: Problématique (Chevalier, 1966), or "Mess" (Ackoff, 1974) or Wicked problems (Rittel & Webber, 1973).

Responding to these issues is beyond the capacity of our industrial institutions. The machine, so to speak, can't handle them. We need approaches and ways of thinking that are addressed – specifically - to interdependency and complexity rather than the reductionistic thinking characteristic of the mechanistic mindset. Albert Einstein put it so simply and beautifully with his famous comment, "We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them."

Which brings us, of course, to:

Systems Thinking, which is all about complexity and interdependence and, as a result, perfectly attuned to addressing todays emergent challenges. It is an approach to the type of problem arising from irreducible complexity, which is what we now confront. This requires its own logic. The special competence of systems theory is to offer a strategy for analyzing the irreducibly complex,

Historical overview. One key element of systems thinking – attending to the **whole** rather than the **parts** – is over 2000 years old and can be seen in the debates between Aristotle and Plato about whether we understood something by its function or essence. It reappeared in the debate between Darwin and Lamarck about whether evolution happened at the level of the individual or at the level of the group.

In the early 20th century cracks started to appear in the machine model of reality. Efforts to keep reducing to smaller and smaller parts lead to some dead ends. In mapping the subatomic world, for examples, physicists had to go beyond the certainties of Newtonian physics.

People were discovering aspects of reality that didn't conform to linear cause and effect thinking. Heisenberg discovered that when studying one property of the atom, the other property becomes impossible to know. So, after all, it isn't possible to understand everything. Einstein and others showed that Newtonian mechanics only applied to a certain range of events, disconfirming the most highly corroborated scientific theory of all time. Quantum mechanics, etc.

Representational Art – based on idea that there is a single version of reality gave way to pos-impressionism, expressionism, cubism, abstract art and others that. Novels decentered individual and represented multiple perspectives. My personal favorite is Durrell's Alexandrian Quartet. The first three books offer the same sequence of events through several points of view, allowing individual perspectives of a single set of events. introduced multiple perspectives and subjective construction

In the mid-20th Century systems thinking came into its own. Machines emerged – computers – that went beyond working on materials to manipulating symbols and communicating with one another. An important step was the development of radar – machines that read themselves and give themselves instruction. An important breakthrough occurred when systems thinking was applied to living – biological – systems (von Bertalanffy). From this came the realization that living (open) systems differ from non-living (closed) systems because they have a purpose.

In applying systems thinking to organizations was where the early Tavistock researchers played a key role. In the earliest Tavistock projects Trist, Emery & others were in forefront of using systems thinking to humanize work develop industrial democracy and the quality of worklife movement.

Pioneering the use of systems thinking for group, organizational and community development is such an important part of the Tavistock tradition. Today we often overemphasize applied group dynamics and underappreciate this part of the tradition – especially because of what we're facing today reclaim this aspect of our tradition.

Many of you will know the basics of systems thinking but to make sure our terms are straight   let's start with a simple definition of a system. Simply put, it is two or more things that interact to create properties that are not part of the things themselves. Best summarized in colloquial terms as "the whole is greater than the sum of its parts." The whole is the focus, not the parts, as is the case with analysis.

Each part affects the other parts. If it doesn't, it isn't part of the system. No part has an independent effect on the system – they are all interconnected. They all interact. No part is isolated - each affects the whole.

An example might be the human body. The motor system, nervous system, metabolic system, and so on, these subsystems interact, and each one can affect our behavior. It's a whole. When you take a system apart, it loses its essential properties. The essential properties of any system - the properties that define it – are properties of the whole which none of its parts have. The eye doesn't see; the hand doesn't write…..

This leads to the important question: If the essential property is in the whole, how do we understand a system.   Analysis obviously doesn't work because when you take it apart you lose its essential properties. Another method was required, which came to be called synthesis which is the exact opposite of analysis. To first understand a university, for example, we see it as part of a larger educational system. Understanding the larger system to which it is adapting is a central focus of systems thinking.

20th century philosophers made a useful distinction in this connection (von Wright). Analysis and machine thinking **explain** how things work. Synthesis reveals **understanding**, why it works the way it does. Synthetic thinking tells us the role or function of the system in the larger system.

A critical point here is that with systems we can only understand something in its context. The unit of analysis changes from the element – whether it be the atom or the person or organization or

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community - to the element in its environment. It is a radical change in perspective. Rather than eliminating the environment it is fundamentally important part of understanding

This seems obvious to many of us who have worked in the systems psychodynamic fields. Yet, when you think about it, it is difficult to think systemically – truly systemically. The habits of thought that are grounded in the machine view are deeply ingrained in us. Doing so is psychologically challenging. It creates stress and cognitive dissonance. Systems thinking challenges some very basic ways of managing our emotions, about how we think things work, and about what's important.

I'd like to pinpoint three of these challenging shifts that comes with systems thinking.

1. Cause & effect & unpredictability

2. Blame, accountability & psychic equilibrium

3. Individualism, autonomy & the problem of the other

Cause, Effect & Unpredictability

We are explanation-seeking animals who tend believe that everything has an identifiable cause. This is beautifully captured by a poem at the start of Kurt Vonnegut's Cat's Cradle

> Tiger got to hunt,
> Bird got to fly;
> Man got to sit and wonder, 'Why, why, why?
> Tiger got to sleep,
> Bird got to land;
> Man got to tell himself he understand

With systems thinking, we have to accept the limits to knowing. Every position, every perception, is location bound. No claim to objectivity can be made from any position. Objectivity is a property of the system itself.

Everything is connected, and a change in one part will affect all of the other parts. Systems teaches us that the "because" is a synergy of multiple events. This throws linear cause and effect out the window and forces us to accept uncertainty & fuzziness. Psychodynamic thinkers know something about the defense of knowing and the psychotic underpinnings of certainty.

The illusion of linear, direct causality Is something like an analgesic – "Oh, this happened because of that." Not having the clarity makes us queasy – unmoored – anxious – mean spirited. Systems theorists have developed other concepts for the multiple influences that shape outcomes in systems. Ideas such as directive correlation, producer-product, probabilistic causality or non-deterministic causality.

It is deeply unsettling to give up illusion of knowing. Systems thinking forces us to recognize that our picture of the world is not the only one. It de-centers us with knowing that all perception is location

bound. With today's focus on white supremacy we are learning something about how easy it is for those of us with privilege to imagine our experience is universal. In this way systems thinking requires humility.

Blame and psychic equilibrium

One of the great pleasures of the machine model is that it creates a framework in which scapegoating can flourish. After all – there must be a cause if there is an effect. But with a system it is impossible to ascribe blame to any one part. It deprives us the opportunity for scapegoating since outcomes are multiply determined by the interaction of the parts. The systems approach requires emotional deprivation. Perhaps maturity. What happens to our hatred?

Individualism, Autonomy & Otherness

Since Interdependency is the very fabric of systems and nothing stands alone, the critical qualities arise from interaction, not from within the elements. The machine model is based on a highly individualistic view of society. Because understanding is based on breaking things into their basic elements, individualism is it's logical philosophy.

Systems narrative weaken the concept of individualism. With systems, the idea of the individual independent from others and from the environment no longer makes sense. The individual is no longer the explanatory variable at the system level

Those of us involved in group relations work know something about the underlying strata of emotional interconnectedness and the way that unconscious dynamics shape how people find their voices, lead, and exercise authority. Group relations conferences challenge the idea that we are the Captains of own ships. It often leads to narcissistic injury and enormous turmoil, but also excitement of finding voice/role from that matrix.

At the societal level, our particular form of capitalism can be seen through lens of mechanization through it's focus on individualism by adopting capitalism survival of the fittest and by taking free-market competition to the extreme.

Otherness. Global interconnectedness and information technology confront us with otherness in new and extreme ways. We are increasingly immersed in thick realms of otherness. Systems thinking recognizes that not only are we connected but that we are dependent upon the other. The wicked problems we now face are forcing us to re-examine the principles of autonomy and individualism. We NEED the other now to survive.

This poses enormous challenges to our narcissism. Because the other exists beyond our understanding, and brings us into contact with what is unsaid, the other confounds our 'knowing selves'. The other constantly reminds us that our understanding inadequate.

The existence of the other frustrates our sense of certainty calls. It calls into question the codes, symbols and unspoken agreements through which we believe we know who we are. Denial creates

hazardous states of mind that repudiate the other and relieve anxiety through projection, denial and projective identification. As a mindset it creates social climates that legitimate policies of dehumanization and exclusion of the external other.

Systems thinking requires us to accept the reality of otherness. It means operating with the realization that we are all equally marginal and that the certainty that underlies totalitarianism nd fundamentalism makes no sense whatsoever.   This is one reason that I see the commitment to systems thinking as a moral choice – it is how we can join with what is excluded through accepting the limits to 'knowing'. Putting us in a more benign relationship to the denigrated and disowned other.

Implications for organizations and leadership

Organizations are going through extraordinary stresses. So often we hear that organizations are disappearing, being replaced by networks. I see this idea as a splitting dynamic, a false dichotomy. There will always be organizations to get things done but their fates are correlated with one another. They are linked with one another in densely interconnected ways. As a result, they become agents of each other's success rather than threats to each other. The response to our challenges today requires us to look beyond individual entities and organizations to the fabric of their interconnectedness.

The remarkable early Tavistock founders saw this coming. They were among the first to recognize this dynamic. They were far sighted in identifying these characteristics. They realized that addressing our greatest challenges requires cooperation rather than competition. Yet we don't have the structures and capabilities to cooperate at that level. This requires cultivating competencies that can't be accounted for in the mechanistic model.   As Eric Trist described it, domain-based, inter-organizational, global collaborative competences have become a necessary societal project.

One of the challenges we - as system psychodynamic thinkers – face is how to address this domain based – interorganizational – realm without authoritarian approaches. Simon Western, Jon Stokes and others have been leading the way in helping us think about new leadership stances that recognize the importance to addressing problems in terms of eco-systems and the essential need to shape the context

Leadership

This obviously raises questions of how we think about leadership systemically. Ideas about leadership organize a great deal of thinking in today's world. What we see in and need from our leaders symbolizes our ideas of belonging, moral behavior, practical necessity, and the meaning of community.

A vast industry has grown for finding, training, developing, supporting, and fixing leaders. Countless graduate programs and undergraduate courses focus on leadership. Business schools center their missions on turning out leaders.   Endless array of seminars, conferences, speeches, books are offered by leadership experts.

Last 75 years seen - massive effort to identify the essential elements of leadership. Tens of thousands of studies have been conducted endless amount of data has been collected. Leadership scholars started by trying, with no success, to isolate the particular traits that distinguish leaders. Maybe behavior is the answer. How do leaders behave? What leadership behaviors or styles promote effectiveness? Neither traits nor behaviors did the trick, Maybe thought processes would reveal the secrets – intentions, perceptions, sensing, subjectivity, adaptive learning, mindfulness, which underlie today's most popular ideas. Regardless, a commonly accepted, empirically verified, understanding of leadership eludes us.

The field is a quagmire of competing concepts and theories. Often left with little more than clichés, bromides, and empty platitudes. All of this research neglected two essential aspects of leadership that reflects the machine view of the world.

1. Context matters.
2. Locating leadership in the person.

Context It seems obvious that context really matters and frustrates any search for timeless qualities. Familiar with how different organizational contexts and historical moments bring out certain kinds of leadership. Several charisma studies illustrate this by showing how someone's charisma in one setting doesn't transfer to another. Or how Churchill's leadership was a different cup of tea during wartime than afterward.

In the person. One belief that cuts across all theories and models is that leadership exists inside of that sack of skin we call the person. Leadership is exercised by individuals who influence others based on some combination of position and personal qualities. Systems thinking provides alternative to the idea that leadership resides in the person. From the systems perspective leadership seen as a property of the system rather than something that simply emanates from talented individuals. It is these special qualities, created by the countless interactions, yet beyond the individuals, This involves turning the usual equation on its head and considering leadership as an OUTCOME or OUTPUT of the system rather than as an INPUT or starting condition.

The idea of the dynamic leader, looking over the horizon, discerning the correct direction and guiding the ship is becoming an outmoded myth. It can actually stand in the way of what is needed. An idea that can be used defensively for purposes of safety rather than for confronting today's complex, confusing realities. A darker view that is that the singular focus on the leader can become a kind of collective escape from responsibility.

A systemic view of leadership is about what enables people to exercise leadership in their own roles, wherever they are in the pecking order. As long as people are born into a world where they are profoundly dependent, and for quite a few years, the dynamics of hierarchy and its primitive flavors will always be with us. It used to be that organizations were better matched to this aspect of the human character. Now, our deeply hierarchical template is increasingly dysfunctional and with the types of organizations and environments that are emerging.

Practical Implications for Leadership

Of course, it is easier to advocate creative problem solving, new ways of combining resources, different leadership sensibilities and activating leadership at all levels than to say what it means on a more practical level. At the risk of adding more clichés, bromides, and platitudes to the swelling archive, I'd like to offer some ideas about the implications of these changes. Here are three dimensions that, in my mind, Those who are interested in leadership as an aspect of the system must tend to. I'll call them: enrollment, and conversation.

Enrollment[2]

There has been a great emphasis on empowering employees. I'd like to propose a somewhat opposite frame. Empowering suggests freeing people constraints and structures. Rather, I believe that we need to help people join more deeply by occupying their roles more fully and vitally. Instead of empowering people we need to enroll them. By role I refer not to a position, but to the part of the larger task that people carry forward. Enabling people to discover or create meaning in their part of the overall effort. Living systems are purposeful – they play a role or function in the broader system. Role is how people find that connection.

Shared purpose is what binds people together. And being fully in role, is the way systemic leadership comes into being. Without shared purpose or task, community become hollow and ritualistic. The result is obedience, compliance, passionless engagement, and authoritarian environments. Aligning roles with the larger purposes involves taping into the "institution in the mind" as David Armstrong has so richly helped us understand.

The link with the broader world is vitally important to the sense of community and citizenship. "*So, what is my role? Do I carry a block of stone all day or am I building the cathedral; do I turn a bolt with a spanner or am I protecting my community by producing jet fighters?*" To make institutional purpose personal involves the kind of discourse that Eric Trist referred to as re-appreciating, or reframing, challenging situations.

Shared Leadership Requires Conversation

Increasingly, work has become knowledge work. People used to leave their tools at work at the end of the day Now they take their tools home with them. Work relies on environments in which people are learning from their own experience, from each other, from customers, students and partners. Learning happens through conversation and it emerges through relationships. Meaningful conversation turns out to be a crucial asset.

Knitting together different groups and institutions involves getting groups and individuals with different definitions of the problem to incorporate one another's perspectives. And it requires an ability to face contradictions. Not thinking about leadership but the leadership of thinking (R. Silver). A subtle but crucial difference which suggests that the need is not to have new orthodoxies and formulas but new

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[2] I am grateful to Mal O'Conner for this idea.

forms of conversation and engagement. To give thinking a greater role in leadership and to support leadership as a reflective practice.

Three provocations for the future of systems psychodynamics

The systems psychodynamic tradition Has always represented a critique of the machine model of the Universe As such it has been on the forefront of understanding We have been the cutting edge of recognizing interconnectedness

We're surfing on the discoveries made in the latter half of 20th century. Early researchers Open vistas – through research & exploration Through combining insights from related disciplines – anthropology, sociology, systems sciences, field theory, etc. That were emerging at that historical moment How do we need to adapt and shape our work to remain relevant? And what other areas of inquiry and learning do we need to be in communication with to address this historical moment?

As the world of organizations and community evolves and as the former strategies for understanding and change lose their relevance what sort of adaptation do we need to make to how we work and think?

IN my mind, some foundational concepts for systems psychodynamics: Including: Group as a whole, of course, as an expression of systems thinking Primitive anxieties are stimulated by collective life Projection, projective identification & denial mobilized Susan Longs articulation of associative unconscious and abductive logic Basic assumptions Containment of anxiety in institutions Task, authority and role And – what I want to focus on here – social defenses

Social Defenses in 21st Century

Social Defenses is a foundational aspect of systems psychodynamics They refer not to group level defenses – as is often implied – but to the aspects of organizational life – non human aspects such as structures, technologies, etc. that interact with individual defenses To handle the anxieties that are stimulated in confrontation with tasks

Social defenses are about containment of anxiety They teeter on a beam between enabling people to work effectively Or Blunting people's experience and leading to dissociation and detachment. We've learned a lot about social defense that are active in 20th century organizations but less about social defenses in 21st century organizations. For example: classic systems-psychodynamic strategy of social defense is to create small group reflection. Now stable boundaries are disappearing, what will provide containment?

BA thinking in networked arrangements – the management of affect How networks relate to institutions? Our organizations are deeply vulnerable to existential anxieties, with primitive emotional dynamics an all too familiar by-product, such a flight into inter-personal conflict and resistant dependency.

The loss of dependable boundaries is often fought against by adhering in-the-mind to hierarchical models of organizations and their environments, aggravating the difficulties of working in the horizontal,

cross-functional, fragmented social-ecologies around us (Armstrong 2007). To this exploration I believe the concept of social defense systems has much to offer, as long as we don't succumb to the defensive temptations of sentimentality or longing for earlier modes of containment.

The systems psychodynamic tradition examined the ways in which structures can usefully help contain workplace anxieties, yet these same structures that were effective under earlier conditions have in many situations become maladaptive. Knowledge work requires large degrees of self-direction and the ability to collaborate horizontally, often across large distances. We see powerful resistance to relinquishing these dysfunctional approaches, including the use of patchwork solutions and matrix overlays to address the surface problems while avoiding the underlying issues. We need to learn about the management of affect in unbounded groups. Basic Assumption life in networks is a crucial line of development for us.

Connect with interorganizational domain

Networked relations where hierarchies and structures appropriate for 20th century organizations take on the character of social defenses when they come to interfere with the conditions necessary to confront work. The systems psychodynamic tradition has examined the ways in which structures can usefully help contain workplace anxieties, yet these same structures that were effective under earlier conditions have in many situations become maladaptive.

Domain based defenses. Increasingly we must look to the environment of organizations – the "domain" – to discover and addresses critical dynamic issues. First to identify domain based social defenses was Alastair Bain with his exploration of defenses against learning. Tom Gilmore and I, shortly thereafter, wrote a paper on the splitting of leadership and management. So much more needs to be done to further our understanding of the texture of collaboration in the inter-organizational sphere. What are the dynamics of collaboration, for example, in the absence of central authority?

Digisphere. Increasingly relationships are being mediated through digital media. Separates people from the consequences of their actions. This is a definition of social defenses. How digitally cultures may replicate or transform existing forms of inequality and participation.

Algorithms. Algorithms as social defenses with technology a huge amount of our interaction, coordination, and knowledge of each other is deeply shaped by algorithms. They are mysterious concoctions, developed by software engineers that guide us in all sorts of way.

Much has been made of some of the more obvious insidious effects Facial recognition software tends to respond differently to racial characteristics sentencing guidelines, sending pregnancy ads to women before they know they're pregnant. Also enormous benefits from all these algorithms sorting through and distilling data to give us access to all sorts of information, goods, services, and human connections.

Explore idea of social defenses embedded in algorithms. Statistical models are mathematical representations of the real world. So if you lose sight of either the real world *or what the math you're

applying is actually doing*, your model will be prone to failure They are images of the world – What we think of as relatedness.

Algorithms sort for sameness. Move us away from serendipity or discovery, away from otherness We have a lot offer in this realm While our forebearers collaborated with coal miners, car and weaving factories and insurance companies Learn how to collaborate with software developers and designers.

A Darker Sentiment on this transition

Psychic Demands of moving from a machine world to a systems world Relations among people even in solid organizations deteriorate rapidly when org becomes disrupted by an unrecognized change in its larger environment. Increase in the level of aggression. Internal world of orgs became darker, more savage place Socially amplified regression brings exceedingly primitive defenses into play whether in the form of hostile projection or alienated withdrawal.

Once legitimated structures give way and no alternatives are available, how anxieties contain anxiety is one of the great discoveries anxieties are unbound and seems like a descent towards catastrophe. Traumatic break mobilizes primitive defenses which become organized to defend against unthinkable anxiety or of the acute confused state that belongs to disintegration of emerging ego structures Working through entails painful process of tolerating the emotional upheaval that comes from realizing that one's familiar world is not going to see one through, that one's security base and the very foundation of one's identity are being challenged. Confronted by the magnitude of impending change, many refuse any further working through of the issues. They draw back. Prefer to hold onto what they have.

Paradigm shift – discontinuity with present – creation amidst uncertainty of new forms of organizational life. Working through has to take place at deep levels of persecutory and depressive anxieties. Org and social paradigm shift required cannot take place unless personal paradigm shifts occur in large numbers of individuals. Overwhelmed by confused state, makes use of his objects as a way to keeping frightening feelings away.

Instead of providing a means of development we can use the other to absorb some of the conflicts pertaining to the work of mourning. Aspects of the work of mourning are externalized onto object, pain or other perceptions involved in the work of mourning is not felt. How to achieve sufficient working through in time to avoid a number of disasters is unknown.

CONCLUSION

Some more hopeful thoughts. We live in a precarious time. The machine mode and industrialism seem to have played themselves out. Created conditions which require a new way of seeing the world. The world has changed dramatically Technological advancement has brought abundant food, resources, and income to many more people than ever before, but it's also made us value independence (that is, a

movement towards an individualistic society that de-emphasizes depending on and helping others) at the expense of interdependence, and now we're seeing the fallout.

We're in the middle of this independence bubble, and independence has become a very dangerous myth. The massive global economy we're living in is a society of strangers, with little to no feedback and consequences that are invisible – until they are dangerously felt. E.P. Thompson wrote about the moral economy in England before and after the Industrial Revolution. Moral contracts existed between landlord and peasants before the Industrial Revolution. The rise of free-market thinking did away with putting these moral concepts first, the long-standing contracts between people and groups were broken. Globalization – Later elaboration: no respect for social contract. Decimated local communities, local institutions, and local civic organizations. The resulting grievances are closely connected to the sad and destructive appearance of Donald Trump on the American and global stage.

Our current economic structure and reward system doesn't take into account the most important factors for our collective well-being, like justice, equality, the environment, and our physical and mental health. Tonight, I have suggested that systems thinking holds the possibility of seeing the world and our problems anew Understanding our shared responsibilities I have also suggested that a transformation that is underway. Aspects of the future are making themselves felt now, what Eric Trist referred to as "futures we are in."

At Center: A new Unit of Analysis Instead of individual person – separate organization – or nation/state person in the environment /organization & environment. This both raises and suggests a response to a central ethical question:

Can we find our way to a more moral capitalism? A capitalism that does not exploit resources – a capitalism that is symbiotic rather than parasitic

How is Systems Thinking implicated in this question? A moral economy respects interdependence and relationships rather than leaving everyone to fend for his or herself with no regard for how others are faring. must reconfigure the goals focusing on individual achievement and advancement into goals that prioritize survival of the organism plus environment

A genuine systems perspective pulls us in this direction. I hope we can carry forward the immense contributions of the founders of our tradition into this next phase of social, economic and cultural development

<p align="center">And, of course, as the great poet Neruda reminds us:</p>

"Be careful how you see the world, it is that way you know."

The 'fairy dust' effect of role reframing in transforming organisations

Joan Lurie

CEO, Orgonomix, Australia

Joan Lurie is the CEO of Orgonomix, a company she founded in 2008 to assist leaders and organisations to transform themselves and to function at their growing edge. Her work integrates strategy, systems thinking, complexity and adult development theory. Joan works with executives and leadership teams to help them rewire their thinking to be more systemic and to design and lead complex adaptive and second-order change in their organisations. With over 20 years of practice and experience, she has taken up both internal corporate as well as consulting roles, helping companies achieve turnaround results - emerging new cultures, operating models and different organisational systems, whilst simultaneously building their adaptive capacity.

In 1993 in the Kruger National Park in South Africa in the dying days of Apartheid I was given the gift of a new pair of glasses - 'systems glasses' - and I discovered the magical power of role reframing. These glasses shifted my sense-making, how I understood the world and changed my understanding of organisations and how to think about change.

Most of the research on change programs in organisations indicates that in the main they don't yield the return on investment or achieve the outcomes intended. Multiple reasons are hypothesised for this – ranging from 'change is hard', 'people don't like change', 'the failure to communicate the vision or burning platform' or 'get the buy-in' from employees. In leadership and organisational theory, the dominant logic is that if we are to bring about change, we must either change the organisation (structures and processes) or the people. These being largely either technical or psychological assumptions. What if there were another explanation? What if at the core these fundamental assumptions about change in organisations were not entirely accurate or they were missing something? I had held these assumptions for years until I was introduced to an alternative systemic framing and set of assumptions, which offered a way to think about and initiate change with more speed, less 'noise', resistance and turbulence.

Here I share how I got these 'systems glasses', discovered the 'fairy dust' effect of role reframing and explore its impact in transforming systems and organisations.

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The Context

In the late 80's the CEO of a publicly listed company, which manufactured and distributed chipboard, laminates and related products invited me to be part of a team he was forming to help him transform the culture of the company, break down racism and prepare the company, leaders and employees for a post-apartheid South Africa. The ANC was still banned then and Nelson Mandela in prison, the situation was precarious. None of us on the assembled team were culture change experts, but we were all 'activists' in some form with different expertise and a deep commitment to seeing the dismantling of Apartheid. He gave us the space to experiment and find a way forward with this adaptive challenge.

At the time I was completing a Masters in Adult Education and my research focused on developing a literacy program for workers. The majority of black workers had not had the opportunity to attend school beyond Grade 5 if at all - a deliberate strategy of the Apartheid regime to keep black workers unskilled. The challenge was to develop a curriculum and program suitable for adults without the demeaning experience of having to learn through a child's curriculum. The CEO provided the context for this research and program evolution along with multiple other interventions we designed to shift the culture. Through experimentation the interventions we developed were very successful. We were able to bring about some fundamental shifts in the patterns of relating between white management and black workers, management and unions and shift deeply ingrained biases, assumptions and behaviours.

I had always been interested in how we could use organisations as contexts for adult education and development, but working with this team on the culture change, I became deeply curious about how to transform and bring about change within organisations as well as how organisations could be contexts for shifting sense-making and for catalysing wider social and political transformation.

In 1993 on the back of this culture change, the CEO realised that he needed to bring about another transformation in the company. He needed to change the company's business model and redesign its operating model. At the time the company was made up of 3 companies, which were competing with each other. Costs were increasing at twice the rate that profits were growing. A market analysis had been done and he understood that in a short time, if the trend continued, the company would become unprofitable. The 3 companies had to be merged, and the technical strategy for post-merger was clear. The problem was with doing the merger itself.

Whilst rationally it was clearly the right thing to do, most of the senior executive didn't really want it to happen because of the loss of status, autonomy and independence it would bring (in their minds). The CEO was convinced of the resistance that would come. He also knew the statistics of successful M&A's was not high - most not providing the return on investment initially intended - or claimed in the business

case. He needed help with this adaptive challenge. He had heard about the successful change approach of Dr Irving Borwick, who was working in Europe helping leaders to transform their organisations and he went to meet with Irving to learn more about the approach and if he was able to assist. After spending a few days exploring the challenge together, the CEO engaged Irving to support the merger. They contracted for the goals of the transformation work, to merge the three companies into one:

- whilst maintaining sales and profits;
- without turbulence or dislocation to the organisation; and
- whilst maintaining the spirit and social conscience that now characterised the company and the culture, we had worked so hard to develop.

They also contracted for the approach they would apply and the way they would work together to achieve the goals. This included the respective roles they would play and how they would relate as a 'subsystem'. The contract was both commercial and systemic.

On his return to South Africa, the first step for the CEO was to transfer the responsibility for the change to the Executive Team and then down the organisation. Each executive was offered a new role and given the responsibility of defining the goals and strategy for his new functional department, including forming their new management team. I was to be part of the new People and Organisation Development team and was one of the approximately 35 leaders who were invited to an offsite to launch the new company, form the new leadership team and align on the transformation program. As part of that offsite we would do Borwick's GSAP© (Group Strategy and Action Program). I had just returned from NYC where I was taking a study break, completing a Fulbright Scholarship and second Masters in Developmental Psychology at Columbia University. The offsite was also my re-entry into the company with this new developmental lens. Multiple new beginnings.

The GSAP© Intervention
The offsite took place in the Kruger National Park a game reserve a few hours from Johannesburg and took one week. It began on a Saturday and that day was called 'paint the organisation'. The CEO presented the overall vision and burning platform for the change and each executive had an hour to paint the picture for their area. At the end of the day we all shook hands and said farewell to each other in our old roles and to the old organisation. New beginnings start with good endings. Sunday was a free day. It felt good to be back on African soil and to breath in the crisp air of the African bush.

Monday and Tuesday were focused on 2 things:

- Helping us individually to reframe the mental maps we held in our minds of our roles and the organisational system and

- Working in our teams (and with other teams) to determine the practical details of how we were going to manage the transformation and the new company

It was a marathon 2 days - we made over 100 decisions as we all moved between our individual mapping sessions and team meetings. To help reframe our mental maps each one of us had a 90-minute mapping interview with one of the consultants - Bella Borwick, Irving's wife was one of the consultant on the team of three - and she was to debrief my map. To prepare for our individual mapping sessions, we had to draw our mental maps of the system. I remember both my map and the map consult clearly even though it was 27 years ago! It was a defining moment for me in many ways.

In that moment I discovered five things:

1. I had a mental map of 'the system' which I had not known until that moment
2. What that map looked like in my mind, and how I saw my role in that system
3. The reality that maybe not everyone held the same map as me
4. The possibility that my map and my framing of my role was no longer current, and
5. That given the transformation I could, and probably would need to hold an alternative map of the system and frame of my role, as well as others

This was not only an important mental map and role reframing moment, but now as a Developmental Psychologist, Kegan's theory of Adult Development - Constructive Developmental Theory - came crashing into view. Kegan argues that as adults we can grow and develop higher orders of complexity of mind. Each represents a quite different way of knowing the world. He posits we can move through three qualitatively different plateaus or orders of mind - the socialised, the self-authoring and the self-transforming mind. "The self-transforming mind has a filter, but it isn't fused with it, it can stand back from its own filter and look at it, not just 'through' it. It is aware that it lives in time and the world is in motion, and what might have made sense today may not make sense tomorrow" (2009). This form of mind is able to hold multiple perspectives, even contradictory ones and is comfortable with ambiguity. As we move from socialised, to self-authoring to self-transforming we are able to hold more of our thinking and 'filters' as object. I realised that I had been 'subject' to this map, which as a result of this exercise I could now hold as 'object', explore and examine from a meta position. Doing this work could possibly assist with developmental movement and growth work. I was curious and excited about this prospect too!

By the end of those two days, the first step of the GSAP intervention was complete. All 35 or so managers had had a similar experience and had begun our reframing process - the impact of all of us experiencing this simultaneously was profound.

On Tuesday evening the process of creating the new organisation began. At the official start of the GSAP workshop, we all gathered together in the plenary room in a wide circle of chairs and Borwick began by outlining the fundamental principles and framework on which the program was based. This he explained was a systemic program not a psychological one – there would be no psychological 'examinations' or revelations.

He drew a triangle on the board and explained the key components. The whole program hung off this framework and the assumptions connected to it.

The Role/Organisational System/Individual Triangle
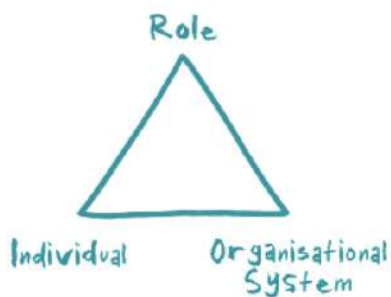
The System is defined as a set of relations with a boundary. It is purposeful either overtly or covertly and is self-regulating i.e. capable of making adjustments to itself without reference to outside agencies. It possesses rules both overt and covert which govern the behaviour of the system and its members. Every system has a structure (pattern) of relations between the parts.

The Individual; the system is made up of individuals and the individual and the system are linked through the role that, the system provides, and the individual takes up. Individual could be a subsystem.

The Role may be defined by the function it plays in ensuring the accomplishment of organisational tasks. Each role is at the junction point between the individual and the system and both the individual and the system define the role.

It is in the joint defining process that much of the behaviour of the individual and the system is worked out. If the system and the individual don't define the role in the same way, there will be 'noise' - tension, under-performance, conflict - in the system.

The key systemic assumption is that behaviour is a function of the role, the system and the context. This is different from the psychological assumption that behaviour is a function of the individual – their traits,

personality, character, styles and personal motivations. If one can change role one can change behaviour.

'Change without change'

To change the role and yet not change the person is the challenge Irving called 'change without change'. We do it every day change our role but not our personality. The assumption is that to bring about change one must reframe mental maps and redefine roles, shift relations between individual roles and entities in the system and redefine the 'rules of engagement' between them.

This was both a confronting and provocative moment for me, which reframed my understanding of organisations, behaviour and how to bring about change. These systemic assumptions offered a completely new way of understanding. This was the gift of the new 'pair of glasses. As Proust says in 'The Remembrance of Things Past' - "...the voyage of discovery begins not with finding new lands but with seeing with new eyes".

Once the key framework was laid out, Irving applied it immediately to our context at the workshop. We were a temporary system for the next few days and we contracted for the roles we were going to take up and how we would work together. We, not the consultants were to do the work. They were not the 'police', they would create the learning opportunities and we would be in role of 'learners'. To the degree that we would take these opportunities to learn the program would be a success. The frame and the 'contract' was set.

The next day began the formal process of integrating and redefining our collective roles as managers of the new organisation. Over the course of the next 2.5 days we would conduct nine Role Analysis sessions. We identified 12 business issues (each 'owned' by an individual) that had to be resolved - these business issues provided the context to examine the roles and explore the system. Three Role Analysis sessions ran simultaneously in four rounds over two days. As leaders we selected which session, we wanted to participate in, in each round, and with each round the depth of exploration and learning deepened, simultaneously exposing and aligning our system further.

The Role Analysis process is very structured and prescriptive which from my perspective is its strength - here again the roles people play are very clearly defined and contracted for. The individual presenting the business challenge provides more information about the challenge and becomes a 'client'; the rest of the participants are consultants to the presenter/client. As consultants our role is not to solve the problem, but to help the presenter/client understand what is going on in the system. Consultants don't give advice, critique or feedback but have to ask questions and with every question must share their hypothesis behind the question. In these sessions the presenter discovers the system underlying the presenting problem and gets a new understanding or reframing of their role. In addition, everyone in the Role Analysis learns about how the system is functioning. Through these sessions the process of redefinition of roles continues and the system continues being revealed. The Role Analysis sessions built on the individual mapping sessions and continued to help us shift and nudge our system to new ways of functioning.

From my developmental perspective the power of these Role Analysis sessions was that as managers we were learning to take up our leadership role differently - to ask different questions (more systemic questions) versus give advice, solve, fix or give feedback. But most importantly we were learning that we hold assumptions and how to test them; and also that our assumptions are at times different to others, so a diversity of perspectives becomes visible and possible. Another powerful subject-object move.

After the first two rounds of Role Analysis sessions we went to work on the system itself. A full system analysis was conducted, deliberately redefining the roles and relations of all members in a special systemic exercise (a form of constellation) that displayed the relations for all to see visually in the room. Even though we knew we were in the new organisation, we didn't necessarily organise ourselves that way initially, which was revealing again. The CEO had the prerogative to reorganise us into our new subsystems. Here boundaries were redefined, the new subsystems formed, and the next layer of role reframing began. By developing hypotheses we explored our new subsystem (teams) roles and relations between them. Role reframing does not only take place at the individual level, but at the level of subsystems and in the whole too. By creating the space for us to develop and exchange our subsystem roles and hypotheses we were now working together as an entire system to reframe the roles, rules and relations of the whole. We were observing our own hypotheses, behaviour and patterns while changing them. The neutrality of the hypotheses allowed us as a system to examine the similarities and the differences, to discover how we were functioning and reset with curiosity and lightness, with less attachment and defensiveness. Another subject-object movement in our disentangling and repatterning.

As a system we were redrawing our maps and reframing roles at the individual, sub-system and the collective level. This was not through definitive role clarity of tasks and actions but most importantly through role alignment - a key distinction. As I would come to learn later when I was trained by the Borwicks to run GSAP's and lead systemic change work - we were delving two or three levels down to 'discover the pattern that connected us' (Bateson). As a system we were in the process of self-organising and - we had entered into what Maturana and Varela call an autopoiesis state, a state of 'self-making' and self-organising (1980). To build on this the consultants shared their hypotheses about the system with us, introducing new information into our system, which nudged us along our way.

We now had new maps and a new shared understanding and role contracts. The new system was at work. We were all somewhat intrigued, but also excited about the shift that was taking place before our eyes - to me it felt like magic! We now began the technical work of laying down the blueprint for the transformation going forward. We did this not as the old system planning what we would change, but rather as the new system, from reframed roles and this changed everything.

The GSAP and the systemic methodology allowed us to bring about second-order change in our system (to fundamentally change the structure and function of our system and how we were patterned to relate), as different from most organisational change programs which focus on first-order change (changes within the system which do not change its structure, relational world or relationship to its environment). Paradoxically, the well-defined boundaries, clear roles, rules of engagement and structure

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set up by the consulting team created the controlled conditions and safe container for this exploration and emergence to occur. Doing this in a systemic not interpersonal manner was the key.

We left the program in the main as a united leadership team in our new roles, but additionally each of us individually and collectively in the change leadership role. It was our turn now to help the rest of the system reframe and reset. Over the next few months a number of other systemic processes were introduced to us and implemented to support the change. Most importantly, we got back together regularly to observe ourselves as a system and make any adjustments and adaptations we needed to.

The Results

The merger was very successful. Within a year the three companies had come together and were functioning as one integrated entity. The two manufacturing businesses had become the Manufacturing division, the retail business transformed into the Logistics and Distribution division, along with a new Sales division and all the Support functions repurposed. This all took place with very little 'noise' or turbulence. During this period of significant upheaval, the company continued to run effectively. Not only did we not lose sales or profit, we actually gained a few percentage points of market share and achieved the highest profitability in the company history to date.

It helped us reframe hundreds of roles both at the individual and subsystem level, shift boundaries to form new subsystems, and repattern how these roles and subsystems related and functioned together all the while improving company performance and organisational flow. The results defied M&A research trends.

My understanding of organisational systems and how they change was reframed. I was hooked! As a participant in the Borwick GSAP I not only received the gift of this new pair of glasses - transformative in themselves - I was also introduced to his tools of Mapping, Organisational Role Analysis (ORA) and working with systemic hypotheses among other systemic applications. I went on to be trained and had the privilege of working with the Borwicks on and off for the next 15 years. Learning and applying this thinking; practising and continuing to grow, refine and develop these systemic tools and processes across diverse contexts over the last 20 years I have observed similar transformative results.

Some examples include:

- a beer company under-performing and losing market share in a shrinking market after applying this thinking and methodology within nine months was ahead of budget, and in organic growth for the first time in 17 years, to the surprise of competitors and customers. This because they

were able to reframe the multiples roles within the commercial subsystems of Sales, Marketing and the Regions and shift how they related to go to market.

- a food company that had not met their contract for five years, through reframing the roles of their Category, Sales and Supply subsystems and how they interrelated and functioned as a whole system - within the year exceeded their contract, had their best year in history and went on to meet and exceed their contract over the next two years.

- an industrials company which had been under-performing and declining in profit by 14% for the last three years, was able to fundamentally reframe the roles and relations of their two 'businesses' which had never integrated and were competing post an acquisition. Becoming one system with aligned roles and rules of engagement which functioned together created new coherence and flow and they became profitable within the year.

All these results from my understanding are outcomes of repatterning the organisational system and how it functioned as a whole - reframing roles at the individual, subsystem and collective level and shifting how the parts related and worked together. This rewiring of the circuitry allowed all of these systems to not only perform better but in addition to shift their culture as an outcome too. Organisational culture then is not necessarily an outcome of individual and collective values and behaviours as traditionally maintained, but rather maybe a function of a system's inter-relatedness. Therefore, culture too can be shifted by role reframing and repatterning relations and implicit agreed systemic contracts.

Why is this work so critical now?

The new world of work and organisations

As our world becomes increasingly complex, the pace of change escalates and digital technologies compel our organisations to take on more matrixed, agile and cross-functional project forms and ways of working, leaders need to manage themselves in and through what I now would describe as continually changing dynamic role ecologies. We no longer join organisations to take on one job in a simple hierarchy, but multiple roles in different sub-systems and contexts within the organisation. We need to learn to move fluidly and adaptively to navigate this complexity. Having the ability to see and understand the roles we are playing, evolve and contract systemically for these in interdependent ways is a vital scaffold and capability for leaders to develop. Not just to get to know self and develop self-awareness, but to know see and know self in system.

Change with less 'noise' and more speed

Role reframing provides a very powerful lever for change acceleration. Every time we shift role, we change behaviour. One doesn't behave in the same way in role of partner, parent, consultant and rightly so. This does not mean that we change who we are every time, or that we are reduced to our roles, more that in the complexity of our lives and organisations we are always taking up roles in multiple systems and contexts. We are never not in a role. If we can learn to see the roles we occupy and are able to change these, we could bring about change quite rapidly. We already have the intuitive, implicit

capacity for this. It is much easier to change role than it is to change the person. The ripple effect that one person reframing their role can have is profound - not only can it change our own behaviour, but because roles are interconnected, changing one role can change others behaviour too; and it can ripple out across multiple systems and contexts.

After doing the GSAP in 1993 I came to understand this in relation to the culture transformation work we had begun doing earlier in the company. The CEO who had initiated the work, had not changed who he was as a person, but he had reframed or seen his role differently. Until then perhaps he had seen that his primary role in the company was to ensure profitability and to provide superior shareholder returns. But he had come to realise that he had a wider role to play in both preparing the company for the future post-apartheid context and ensuring that the culture of the company did not tolerate or engender racist beliefs and behaviours. Equally that it was not good enough for him to be 'non-racist' in how he behaved as an individual. He had a role to play in contributing to the end of the Apartheid system and leveraging his formal CEO role and the authority that gave him to make this contribution. As a result of reframing his role, and taking up new roles he was able to not only bring about a profound transformation in the company, but the work we did became known in the wider business ecosystem and other CEO's began to take on the work in their organisations; and so the role reframe rippled out and impacted multiple other subsystems and the system as a whole.

In the fraught context we are in today, with multiple social and environmental challenges the roles of organisational leaders and how we see and take up our roles is a critical lever for change, not only in our organisations but beyond their boundaries too. For leaders to see themselves, their roles and their organisations as part of a wider interconnected ecosystem is no longer a 'nice to have'. Doing this work in organisations helps grow this systemic lens and develop systems thinkers. If leaders can apply it to the challenges they have in their organisations, it can ripple out into other contexts into their family systems (as it did into mine and so often their stories tell me it does for them to) and into the wider socio-political and ecological domains.

Capra explains - *"As the twenty-first century unfolds, it is becoming more and more evident that the major problems of our time - energy, the environment, climate change, food security, financial security - cannot be understood in isolation. They are systemic problems, which means that they are all interconnected and interdependent. Ultimately, these problems must be seen as just different facets of one single crisis, which is largely a crisis of perception. It derives from the fact that most people in our modern society, and especially our large social institutions, subscribe to the concepts of an outdated worldview, a perception of reality inadequate for dealing with our overpopulated, globally interconnected world"* (2019).

Maybe most importantly doing this work develops systems thinkers and spreads the 'systems glasses' around. If Capra is right, and I suspect he is, there is no more important work for us to be doing than to be helping leaders shift their meaning making and their sense making.

Growing Complexity of MInd

Furthermore, we are in the age of complexity. As a species we have created more complexity than we yet have the capacity to deal with. Our complexity of mind has not kept up. As Kegan explains in his book of the same title most of us (adults) are 'In over our Heads' (1994). In the main our complexity of mind is not yet 'fit' for the complexity of our context. We have to find a way to accelerate growing our complexity of mind, to be able to hold more as object; to grow a new meaning-making and sense making to be more systemic so we can be more in interdependence, than independence or dependence. Doing vertical development work (expanding the container) to be able to hold multiple perspectives, live in the 'grey', be self-transforming and transforming of systems - is an imperative for this complexity.

I hold a hypothesis that doing this systemic change work begins to rewire thinking (lay down new neural pathways) for leaders to be more systemic. Through this work leaders learn that the answer does not always lie in analysis; to not in the first instance always look for root cause, and ask why something is occurring or to seek the part which is at fault; but rather to seek to see the system and to discover how it is held in their minds; to make visible and understand with others how it is functioning, the pattern that connects all the roles interdependently together, including their own role in it. Instead of taking things apart, seeing things in context. It is my hypothesis that doing this work in organisational systems can grow us into our 'bigger' selves; not one person at a time but collectively, so we can scale and accelerate this developmental work too.

Organisations provide both a challenge to and a fertile context for this growing work; supporting leaders to lead systemic change and transformation successfully in their organisations creates a rich container for this necessary developmental work; if we are to meet the system where it is but not match it (Bateson) - we have to meet it in a place which is meaningful, accessible and useful. Then we can possibly speed up our epistemological rebirthing, return to lost ways of knowing, reclaim the wisdom which has been consumed by the mechanistic and reductionist ways of making sense.

The 'fairy dust' effect of role reframing is key in liberating leaders and organisations from the sense-making and patterns keeping us stuck.

This extraordinary poem 'Cleave' by David Whyte captures so perfectly the liminal space we are in as we move into embracing a more systemic, 'bigger' and more expansive way of knowing.

Cleave

To hold together and to split apart
at one and the same time,
like the shock of being born,
breathing in this world
while lamenting for the one we've left.
No one needs to tell us
we are already on our onward way,

we are here and we are not,
we are present while still not
wanting to admit we have arrived.
Not quite arrived in our minds
yet always arriving in the body,
always growing older
while trying to grow younger,

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no one has to remind us
of our everyday and intimate
embrace
with disappearance.
We were born saying goodbye
to what we love,
we were born
in a beautiful reluctance,
not quite ready
to breathe in this new world,

always in the act
of catching up,
of saying hello
or saying goodbye
finding strangely,
in each new and imagined future
the still-lived memory
of a previous,
precious life.

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Sample Mental Maps
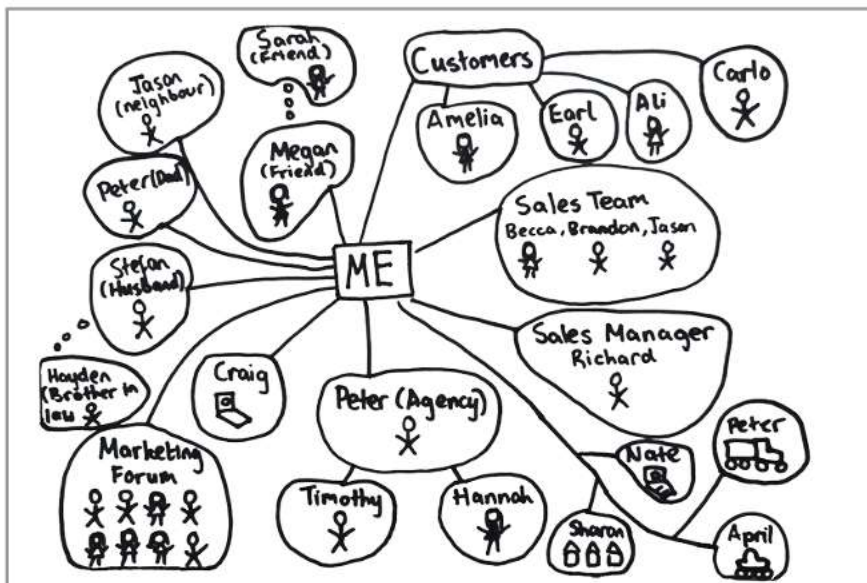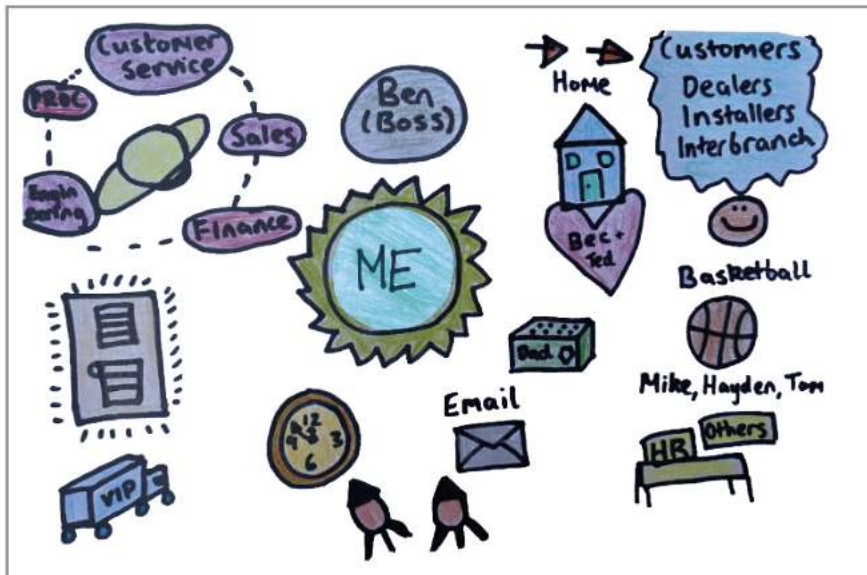
Leaders we Deserve

A work in progress

Dr Judy Kent

Organisational and Executive Consultant, Winning Spirit, Australia

Dr Judy Kent's career as an organisational and executive consultant spans 30 years. In that time she has worked with senior executives from a wide variety of industries and countries to help them improve their leadership capability while achieving business results in an uncertain global environment. She is also the Chair of NIODA's Board of Governance.

'Leaders We Deserve' was the tantalising title of Alistair Mant's book in 1983. His hypothesis was that leaders emerge or are elected in response to the conscious and often unconscious dynamics at play at the time. Drawing on such leaders as Ronald Reagan, Margaret Thatcher and the Ayatollah Khomenei, he postulated why it is that often totally inappropriate leaders bubble up to the top and are tolerated at best, and at worst, revered. The familiar nature versus nurture argument comes into play as he illustrates how their birth order, family and social circumstances impacted their personalities and reinforced their self-belief. These were no accidental leaders but they were also being groomed by the times in which they emerged and by the projective fantasies of their followers. Hence our collective guilt in contributing to the conditions which allow inappropriate leaders to become the leaders we deserve.

Many of us could argue, hand over heart, that there's no way we would ever have voted for Donald Trump or perhaps Boris Johnson. So what caused so many people to support them and how can we 'rational' thinkers be accused of colluding in their rise to power? What caused them to put their hands up for leadership in the first place?

In this paper I will explore these questions in relation to four of our prominent political leaders – Trump, Johnson, Merkel and Ardern, examining their early childhoods, the conditions in their countries and globally which promoted them to power and leadership, their relationships with their supporters, their

gender and their leadership styles. Following this I will try to extrapolate learnings for our business leaders in an effort to work out if we really do get the leaders we deserve.

Trump

Early years
Donald John Trump was born in 1946 in Queens, New York City, the fourth of five children of Frederick Christ and Mary MacLeod Trump. Frederick Trump, the son of a German immigrant, was a builder and real estate developer in districts around New York. His mother Mary, a Scottish immigrant from a family of six daughters, was ill as a result of complications following Donald's younger brother's birth and was reported as being 'emotionally and physically absent' for Donald's early years.

In her hot-off-the-press tell-all book, Donald's niece Mary is quite scathing about her grandfather, Fred, describing him as a 'high-functioning sociopath' with 'a lack of empathy, a facility for lying, an indifference to right and wrong, abusive behavior and a lack of interest in the rights of others'. (Trump, p.24) To say that Fred did not give Donald the type of fathering he needed is an understatement according to his niece, saying that Fred 'had more important things to do than deal with Donald' (Trump, p.49)

Mary Trump, herself a psychologist, reports that Donald's older brother, Freddy, was a disappointment to Fred senior, for his failure to live up to his expectations. Donald, observing this, learned that if he were to gain any attention from his father it would be by being bold, aggressive and unapologetic, especially in his humiliation of his older brother.

At age thirteen he was sent to the New York Military Academy where he claims he learnt the discipline which would channel his energy in a positive manner. In fact Mary tells a different story about why Donald Trump was sent to Military School, saying that "Finally, by 1959, Donald's misbehavior—fighting, bullying, arguing with teachers —had gone too far" (Trump, p.49) and even Fred, who encouraged this behaviour, was happy to outsource his parenting.

Mary paints a picture of a child who did everything in his power to gain his father's approval, taking his cue from him in regard to his misogynistic and bullying behaviour. He may not have been the first-born son, but he certainly worked his way to become the number one son. Of his business dealings, she paints a picture of tax evasion, bad loans and bad investments, propped up by his father. She describes as 'smoke and mirrors' how the media spun a myth about Donald's brilliance, despite his failed business dealings. She also describes how Fred "had become so invested in the fantasy of Donald's success that he and Donald were inextricably linked" (Trump, P. 142). Fred was dependent upon Donald succeeding and perpetuated the myth of his brilliance.

She continues, "I watched in real time as Donald shredded norms, endangered alliances, and trod upon the vulnerable. The only thing that surprised me was the increasing number of people willing to enable him" (p. 186) and "Donald's need for affirmation is so great that he doesn't seem to notice that the largest group of his supporters are people he wouldn't condescend to be seen with outside of a rally." (Trump, p. 197)

Who were these enablers and what did they hope to gain? Some were the officials and others who stood to gain from his economic developments in Manhattan. But the main culprits were the press who colluded with him in his achievements and then covered up his massive failures. Donald became the symbol of the self-made American, even if his wealth was inherited. Time and again he was rewarded for failures including bankruptcy, and bad behaviour, even being awarded a television show 'The Apprentice' which traded on his brash and bullying behaviour. "You're fired" became a familiar catch cry. It is hard not to think of the fable of the Emperor's new clothing with the sycophants telling him how wonderful he looked when all the time he was naked.

That Donald showed narcissist tendencies is hard to dispute. In Mary's words, 'Nothing is ever enough. This is far beyond garden-variety narcissism; Donald is not simply weak, his ego is a fragile thing that must be bolstered every moment because he knows deep down that he is nothing of what he claims to be. He knows he has never been loved'. (Trump, p. 198)

We can see how Donald's ego propelled him towards the Presidency. What then were the circumstances which enabled his election as the leader of 'the free world'? As Mary says, 'Donald isn't really the problem after all' (Trump, p. 205). He has been rewarded by the media, the Justice system, and all those who have turned a blind eye to, or failed to call him out for, his lies and misdemeanours. Just as his father did so many years ago.

Populisim
Pastor Martin Niemoller's poem, "First They Came" is a portentous warning of how a movement such as populism can creep up on and challenge the worldview. (The poem was part of a speech he gave in 1946 at the Confessing Church in Frankfurt.)

First they came
For the Communists
And I did not speak out
For I was not a Communist.
Then they came for the Socialists
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a Socialist.
Then they came for the trade unionists
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a trade unionist.
Then they came for the Jews
And I did not speak out
Because I was not a Jew.
Then they came for me
And there was no one left
To speak out for me.

The poem has recently been adapted by anti-populist movements to read, 'First they came for the Muslims' (Kemp 2020) in an attempt to show how easy it has become to scapegoat 'the other' and manipulate opinion away from liberal, democratic, humanistic behaviours.

That Trump, and to a lesser degree, Johnson, have been able to exploit and foster the rise of populism can hardly be disputed. But what is populism and what were the conditions which enabled it to rise in the first place?

Populism refers to supporting and pushing policies that are popular with the populace or ordinary people as opposed to the views of the elites and the experts. These policies often tap into the basest unconscious fears of people, exploiting racism and fear of 'the other', while promising social and economic benefits to the masses. Along the way, these policies encourage mistrust of scientific expertise and logic, these being seen as tools of the establishment which have been used to keep them in power.

The socio-economic conditions in the US and the UK were ripe for the rise of populism, and hence its exploitation by Trump and Johnson. In the US globalisation's free markets, international trade, and the transfer of jobs to lower-labour-cost production centres like China and Mexico - made almost all U.S-based multinational corporations (MNCs) massively profitable and successful but with it came huge structural and social problems which were festering at the time that Trump was contesting the election in 2015.

The gap between the rich and the poor was enormous and ever increasing. Generations of poor, unemployed Caucasians and non-white population groups, fuelled by a non-existent universal welfare system, caused an estimated 40% of the population to be disenfranchised from the political system which promoted globalisation and corporate capitalism.

Add to this mix, an ageing population needing to draw more heavily on an already broken welfare system, wage stagnation and unemployment at unprecedented levels and the conditions were ripe for a saviour or Messiah (Western, Shapiro) to emerge.

In the UK, Johnson also exploited populist policies, playing to the people's fear of 'the other' as migrants and asylum seekers were threatening to swamp its shores – and jobs. Unlike Trump who appeared to be deadly serious in his attacks on Hillary and the establishment in his exhortations to 'Make America Great Again', Johnson appeared to find it all 'a jolly good laugh'.

Boris Johnson

Early years

Boris was born in New York City to English parents in 1964, the eldest of four children. At birth, Boris, christened Alexander, was granted both American and British citizenship. He returned to the United Kingdom where he spent most of his early childhood. His parents valued high-achievers and the young boy was raised to be intellectually competitive from a young age. Awarded a 'King's Scholarship' to study

at the prestigious 'Eton College' he went on to study Classics at 'Balliol College,' Oxford. He began his career as a journalist with 'The Times' and then went on to work as the editor of 'The Spectator' from 1999 to 2005. Along with journalism, he was also interested in politics and was elected to the House of Commons as MP for Henley in 2001. He went on to serve on the opposition frontbench, first as Shadow Minister for Culture, Communications and Creative Industries, and then for Higher Education.

He became the prime minister of the United Kingdom in July 2019 having served as the mayor of London from 2008 to 2016 and held various MP positions. He also served as foreign secretary from 2016 to 2018. A member of the 'Conservative Party,' Johnson is also an historian and journalist. Somewhat surprisingly, he spent his Gap year in 1983 teaching English and Latin at the elite Geelong Grammar's Timbertop School in the mountains north of Melbourne.

The above description sounds fairly circumspect but you only have to search 'Boris Johnson silly antics' to trawl through a very different description of him. It ranges from drunken pranks at Oxford to forgetting his prepared speeches to exaggerating (or lying about) the benefits of Brexit.

One analyst has described him as "rewriting the rules of what leadership looks like" as he "displays a deep, disturbing moral emptiness that Britain must reject" (Robinson)

What Jolly Good Fun It All Is
He goes on to say "I don't know if there is anybody in Britain who believes Boris Johnson is in politics because he genuinely believes in effecting positive social change. From the time he was a boy, he had the disturbing fantasy of being 'world king,' and he now enjoys being a famous person who gets to sleep with a lot of women...To Boris Johnson, politics is a lark. He makes that very clear. He has no moral core. Those who have known him closely have described him as a person almost completely without principles"

Supporters have praised him as an entertaining, humorous, and popular figure, with an appeal stretching beyond traditional Conservative voters and Eurosceptics. Conversely, his critics have accused him of dishonesty, elitism, and cronyism, and of using offensive language. He has also been accused of "one of the greatest exponents of fake journalism".

Love him or hate him, Boris certainly evokes strong feelings in his audience.

He admits to stirring the pot as, even before his election over the exit of the UK from the EU, he says when he was in Belgium he delighted in "throwing rocks over the garden wall and I listened to this amazing crash from the greenhouse next door over in England as everything I wrote from Brussels was having this amazing, explosive effect on the Tory party, and it really gave me this I suppose rather weird sense of power" (Gimson).

"The selection of Boris Johnson … confirms the Tory Party's increasing weakness for celebrity personalities over the dreary exigencies of politics. Johnson, for all his gifts, is unlikely to grace any future Tory cabinet. Indeed, he is not known for his excessive interest in serious policy matters, and it is hard to see him grubbing away at administrative detail as an obscure, hardworking junior minister for social security. To maintain his funny man reputation he will no doubt find himself refining his Bertie Wooster interpretation to the point where the impersonation becomes the man." (Hastings).

What was it that caused Boris to present himself to the world stage, to want to be the 'world king' at a very early age? Was it his first-born position in a family which encouraged high achievement and 'high-brow' activities? Was it his family's connections to royalty? (His middle name, De Pfeffel, is a family name indicating his German ancestry and relationship to King George 11.) Was it his upbringing, largely by his mother, Charlotte, who was an artist who studied at Oxford when she wasn't accompanying his father to overseas postings and who was hospitalised with clinical depression causing Johnson to be sent to boarding school at the age of eleven? How did his parents' divorce in 1978 affect him? How did his experience of Eton College and Oxford contribute to his desire to be a leader on the world stage? What was behind the change of name from Alexander to Boris while at Eton?

Johnson has evoked comparisons (both ideological and physical) with President Donald Trump. In June 2016, Nick Clegg described him as "like Donald Trump with a thesaurus", while fellow Conservative MP Kenneth Clarke described him as a "nicer Donald Trump" and EU official Martin Selmayr described the potential election of Johnson and Trump to the leadership of their respective countries as a "horror scenario". Trump acknowledged the comparison, saying British people refer to Johnson as "Britain Trump". Johnson was critical of Trump on several occasions before Trump was elected; he has praised Trump as President, but disagrees with some of his policies. Since he became prime minister this comparison has been repeated, including by Trump himself.

In The Economist's 2018 end-of-the-year awards for "the worst in British politics", Johnson received the highest award—that for the "politician who has done most to let down his party and country". It described Johnson as one of the architects of the Brexit "catastrophe", and "the most irresponsible politician the country has seen for many years."

Both Johnson and Trump, along with Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro, India's Narendra Modi and Mexico's Andrés Manuel López Obrador, have exploited populist policies and gained power in democratic countries, challenging the old order by promising jobs and social benefits to the people while thumbing their noses at the establishment.

But it turns out that when it comes to dealing with a new disease like COVID-19, the disruptive policies of populists are faring poorly compared to liberal democratic models in countries like Germany, New Zealand, Iceland or Taiwan.

COVID 19 presents a public health crisis that requires expertise and science to resolve and Populists by nature, preach a disdain for experts and scientists who are seen as part of the establishment. Johnson has performed a 'mea culpa' for his tardiness in confronting the virus in the early days. Trump, unable or

unwilling to apologise has blamed China, the Democrats and everything else for his failures to take a leadership role in combatting the disease. He continues to preach conspiracy theories to the masses in the lead up to the November elections but his following appears to be waning. They elected him as a 'noble' leader who would give them jobs and 'make America great again', but they are starting to see that the Emperor has no clothes at all.

Jacinda Ardern b. 1980

Early Years

Unlike Boris Johnson, Jacinda Ardern as a child never expected to become her country's leader. She enjoyed a rural childhood on the family farm in Murupara, not far from Rotorua on New Zealand's North Island where her father was a policeman and her mother worked in the school café. When they moved to the Bay of Plenty, she observed that many of the children did not have what she had; it was her first observation of inequality.

"I always noticed when things felt unfair. Of course when you're a kid you don't call it social justice. I just thought it was wrong that other kids didn't have what I had." (Blackwell, p.1)

Her first political activism seems to be awakened when she campaigned in her school for girls to be able to wear long pants as part of their uniform. Naturally she won. At seventeen she joined the Labour Party, at her Aunt Marie's instigation. Marie was a longstanding member of the Labour Party, and it was she who recruited Ardern to help her with campaigning during the general election of 1999. Ardern says she joined the party, not in search of a career, but rather hoping to change the world. (Blackwell, p.16)

As her political career began to rise, she became well known for her other interests which included performing as a disc jockey. She also began a romantic relationship with a broadcast personality, Clarke Gayford who became the host of a television program, 'Fish of the Day' and as a result, got to travel extensively to exotic islands in the Pacific. Ardern played down allusions to her attractiveness, modestly referring to herself as an "acceptable nerd"; she also described herself as "relentlessly positive."

The second of two girls, Jacinda says that she was always "a pretty angsty child" (Blackwell p. 32) She remembers walking home from school one day and seeing a little boy with no shoes in the middle of winter. This raised many questions for her, but she says it was her parents who were Mormons who provided strong role models in terms of kindness and service to others.

Jacinda's rise to party leadership was something of an accident as, six weeks up to the elections, the then leader decided to stand down as he thought he had no chance of winning. Jacinda remembers thinking that she had no alternative but to step up and contest the election. She remembers feeling an enormous amount of pressure because there were now more people to let down. This in spite of the fact that she was voted number one in the popularity stakes. The next election she was voted in but had to form an alliance with the Conservatives in order to form a majority, becoming at 37, New Zealand's youngest and third female prime minister and enjoying enormous popularity there and abroad.

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What were the conditions which enabled her rise to the top? It comes as no surprise that New Zealand is heralded as a refuge. The Land of the Long White Cloud has long perpetuated this myth through its refusal to allow nuclear-powered ships to berth in its ports, through its support of the Green Peace movement, through its dogged attempt to assimilate the Maori and white populations, through the panoramic backdrop it provides to films such as The Lord of the Rings. The face which its proud people presents to the world is one of natural beauty, inclusion, humanity and compassion. No wonder then, that Jacinda has been allowed to represent all of these things. Another society might not have tolerated its prime minister giving birth while in office, showing compassion to the Islamic victims of hate shootings or offering asylum to Australia's refugees. As she said of her country at the time of the terrorist attack in Christchurch,

"We were not a target because we are a safe harbour for those who hate. We were not chosen for this act of violence because we condone racism, because we are an enclave for extremism. We were chosen for the very fact that we are none of these things—because we represent diversity, kindness, compassion, a home for those who share our values, refuge for those who need it."

Margaret Wheatley in her book "Who Do We Choose to Be?" shows how civilisations over time have predictable life cycles. She predicts that our western civilisation is close to bottoming out through its worship of "frivolity, aestheticism, hedonism, fanaticism, and other negative behaviours" (Wheatley, p. 302) She despairs of being able to save the world, but suggests that leaders become warriors for the Human Spirit and create 'islands of sanity in the midst of wildly disruptive seas'. Is this what Jacinda Ardern has become for her citizens and others? A Warrior for Humanity who remains true to her moral core while negotiating the chaos of global politics?

Angela Merkel b. 1954.

Angela (pronounced Angeela) Merkel is in a different league from Trump, Johnson and Ardern. Not only has she survived fifteen years as Germany's first female Chancellor, but she has been widely described as the 'de facto' leader of the European Union, the most powerful woman in the world, and by some commentators as the 'leader of the free world'. She is also regarded by many supporters as 'Mutti' (mother or mummy) and by some of her detractors as 'Hitler's daughter'.

Early Years

From the age of eight weeks, Merkel's, early years were spent with her father, Horst Kasner, mother, Herlind nee Jentzsch, and two younger siblings, Marcus and Irena, in Templin, East Germany where her father, had been posted as a Lutheran minister. Her mother, formerly of Polish roots had previously been a teacher of English and Latin while living in West Germany.

From the age of three she lived in Waldorf, a seminary which housed visiting students but which also functioned as a home and workplace for mentally disabled adults. It must have been an unusual setting for a child to grow up in and Angela describes not seeing a lot of her father who was busy with his pastoral work. When she went to school in the adjoining town of Templin, Kasi, as she was called, distinguished herself with her quiet confidence –and dogged application to her studies. Her teachers

described her as determined, meticulous, and prepared for everything while never wanting to show incompetence, traits which she carried into her political work.

Between 1961 and 1973 Angela attended a polytechnic school, excelling in sciences and foreign languages. Ever the conformist, and in spite of her Christian upbringing, she joined the Young Pioneers, the official communist youth movement of the German Democratic Republic (GDR) and the Socialist Unity Party of Germany. It seems that even at an early age she was able to hold two seemingly opposed belief systems simultaneously.

She had wanted to study medicine but enrolled at the Karl Marx University Leipzig to study Physics as she later said, "I wanted to study physics, because the East German regime couldn't simply suspend the rules of elementary arithmetic and the laws of physics". She also states that she wanted to get away from the small town where she had spent her youth.

It is not surprising that 63 of her 70 university classmates were men and Angela proved herself their academic equal or superior, eventually gaining her doctorate in natural sciences. She also continued to be active in the Communist Party's official youth movement but when questioned about her involvement in later years, said that she was 'Culture secretary' in charge of buying theatre tickets. Angela's survival skills in East Germany served her well in her later political career.

So what were the conditions which enabled Angela's rise into politics and the German Chancellorship? It seems that she served an apprenticeship by working her way up through the various parties, beginning with the popular political force, 'Democratic Awakening' which mainly comprised church leaders. From there she became a member of the Christian Democratic Union, and after the fall of the Berlin Wall, she became a member of the Bundestag. It was in her interests that she had been raised and educated in East Germany at a time when reconcilliation was high on the country's agenda.

From there she was pulled up through the ranks by Helmut Kohl who saw her as his 'Madchen' or girl'. When he lost the election in 1998, she became the general secretary of the CDU and was not above publicly criticising him when he was embroiled in a scandal involving party financing. This led the way for her to become the first female leader of a German party in 2000 and five years later, at the age of 51, she was elected Chancellor of the unified Germany.

If Angela's political life appeared consistent, her private life was anything but. While working as a barmaid while still a student in Leipzig at the age of 23, she met and married her first husband Ulrich Merkel, also a scientist. She insisted on a wedding in her father's church where he could walk her down the aisle. The newlyweds were not overtly political, nor did they completely follow the party rule, expressing interest in 'The Alternative' a book written by Rudolf Bahro who criticised the regime from a Socialist perspective. She states that "a group of friends and I studied 'The Alternative' almost scientifically. We spent several evenings discussing each and every chapter." (Merkel, p. 69))

From Leipzig the couple moved to Berlin where they both took up jobs as scientists. By 1981 they had drifted apart and although there was no shouting or recrimination, Ulrich reported that one morning, Angela had packed her bags and left.

That Angela's private life was unstable, was of concern to Angela's father who, visiting her shortly before her thirtieth birthday implied that she had not progressed very far. To lose her father's approval hurt Angela as she had always seen herself as her father's favourite child and in part, had excelled in her studies to please him. That she was still studying for a doctorate was considered somewhat bohemian and less worthy than settling down to have a family.

Shortly after this visit, Angela travelled to Prague, accompanied by Dr Joachim Sauer, who was at the time married with two sons. Sauer was able to help her with her thesis but also seemed to have influenced her political awakening at a time when history was being shaped by a convergence of factors, not the least of which were Gorbachov's 'Glasnost' (generally translated as 'openness') and 'Perestroika' ('restructuring') and 'Demokratizatsiya' ('democritisation'). The fall of Communism, demonstrated by the fall of the Berlin Wall in November 1989, was a momentous event which took everyone by surprise.

At this time, Angela's father and brother were becoming more and more politically active, and Angela attended a seminar they conducted in Templin entitled 'What is a human being?' But Angela was bored by tedious philosophical discussions, stating that she believed politics was about results. This is probably why she decided that if she were to influence politics she would join an established political party and she actually shopped around the various parties before settling for the DA (Democratic Awakening) which she was already affiliated with and which had transformed itself into a political party. Her first job was distributing leaflets in the centre of Berlin. Little did she know that less than a year later she would become a cabinet minister.

As she herself reflected, "I didn't have time to meditate over such matters (as to my lack of expertise).What was clear to me was that there was a constellation of factors that favoured me: being a woman, being from the East and being young – none of that hurt me. The policy area itself (Women and Young People) was not one that I had spent much time thinking about – the theme women and children was not one that interested me during the period of reunification.... For me this challenge was a great opportunity. I could learn the game and the mechanisms of power, and I could do so without too many dangers." (Merkel, p.91)

While Angela was consciously attaching herself to Kohl's shirt tails it was clear that Kohl was using her to broaden his appeal. He called her his 'girl', and on many occasions was seen to publicly berate her so that she would, much to her chagrin, be reduced to tears.

"I have to be tougher, otherwise it won't work", she was reported as saying to the weekly magazine, Der Spiegel (Der Spiegel: 3 Jan 1994)

She also admitted that she knew she had to extricate herself from Kohl as she was aware that in the eyes of the people she was considered 'a token woman on the left'. As she had been in her youth, she was determined and goal-oriented and she used her intelligence to learn all aspects of the political system and use them for her own advantage.

She may have been Kohl's girl, and the nation's mother but her determination and intelligence fostered by her parents, coupled with the historical and political climate of the time, ensured that she would be a

leader to be reckoned with, and one who could play the political game of compromise while still remaining true to her scruples.

In her private life which of course was not very private, she was ordained to be 'living in sin' with her friend and mentor Joaquim Sauer. Frustrated at having been asked many times about her private life and whether she would have children, she felt compelled to fend off the questions she found to be irrelevant and married Sauer in 1999 in a very low-key wedding. Although preferring to keep her private life private, she has said of Sauer that "It is often said that my husband does not play any political role. This perception is in no way a reflection of the reality." (Kornelius: Angela Merkel, p. 42)

In her political manoeuvrings, Angela Merkel has had many extraordinary accomplishments. Under her leadership, the German economy resisted a serious pan-European crisis. In foreign policy she tried to maintain smooth relations with all partners, but she considered a priority the cooperation with the United States. As de facto leader of the EU she steered the Union through a rocky course in 2015 when the loss of one of the 19 countries might have caused the Union's disintegration. The process took some time but Merkel was resolute. A new word was coined in Germany, 'Merkeling', which describes her dogged resolve. Over the years she has repeatedly demonstrated her tremendous capacity for compromise and negotiation. This was demonstrated most recently when she withdrew her support for the 'Frugals' (the Netherlands, Austria, Denmark and Sweden) over their unwillingness to allow all 'Club Med' countries (Spain, Italy, France, Portugal and Greece) to leverage their EU membership to borrow at a substantially lower rate.

Common Themes

What, if any, are the qualities common to these four leaders which caused them to put their hands up for leadership?

Birth order is not one we can use since only two of the four – Johnson and Merkel - are first born children which is often associated with leadership. Trump and Johnson had mothers who were ill and often absent – did this cause them to seek love and adulation elsewhere? Trump and Merkel tried to impress their fathers and live up to their expectations, Trump for all the wrong reasons and Merkel for the right ones. Johnson, Merkel and Ardern all exhibited an early interest in politics and were highly educated (stories attest to Trump negotiating his way into the University of Pennsylvania and Wharton Business School). Merkel and Ardern seemed to be in the right place at the right time in terms of their election to lead their countries. Both admit to some degree of fear and trepidation which might be a factor of gender, since both Trump and Johnson have never publicly admitted any sense of lack of confidence.

Could it be as simple as motivation? Johnson wanted to be a 'world leader' while Ardern wanted to 'change the world'.

It is perhaps easier to examine what is not common to all these leaders.

Gender

Both Merkel and Ardern attest to the fact that they did not seek out the leadership of their countries from an early age. Ardern, however, was quoted as saying that "she wanted to change the world" and Merkel also looked for a political party which would align with her political views so there must have been some initial flame of ambition, even if not outwardly expressed. Merkel must have been affected by being called Kohl's 'girl' but Ardern says being a woman was not an impediment to her as she had two other female role models as Prime Ministers before her. She does confess, however, to agreeing that there is a 'confidence gap' between women and men (research shows that the men will go for a job if they have 60 per cent of the job requirements, whereas women will only go for it if they have 100 per cent).

"It's me knowing myself and knowing that actually, when you're a bit of an anxious person, and you constantly worry about things, there comes a point where certain jobs are just really bad for you. I hate letting people down. I hate feeling like I'm not doing the job as well as I should. I've got a pretty big weight of responsibility right now; I can't imagine doing much more than that." And "I am a very risk-averse person, I always have been. Which is why politics is such a terrible place for me to be! I'm constantly anxious about making mistakes. Everything in politics feels so fragile; just like that [clicks fingers] you could stumble and that's forever what you'll be known for. So yes, I do live in this constant fear of what might be."

Julia Gillard highlights in her book that women need to be seen as having strength as well as empathy. Julia discusses the difficulties she faced as Australia's first female Prime Minister, both from her fellow ministers as well as the media. On reflection, she wishes she had addressed earlier the name-calling, the focus on what she was wearing, her childlessness, and the blatant misogyny. She realises now that in her attempts to appear strong and above the insults, she appeared to lack empathy, and it is this quality of empathy and compassion which Jacinda highlights as her personal strength.

 "My skin isn't thick at all," Jacinda says. "I get upset by stuff, absolutely – like when people think I'm not doing a good job. But the real trick, something I'm constantly trying to keep in check, is that you have to find a way to filter things, but still be empathetic. So I don't want to get too thick-skinned." (Bertrand)

Julia also reflects on the negative perception of women who appear to be 'ambitious'. In a male politician, this quality would be taken for granted; in a women it is characterised as 'individually power seeking' rather than 'communal'. One journalist depicted it as "Nice girls don't carry knives" (Grattan). It is interesting to note that neither Ardern nor Merkel suffered from that image, almost giving the impression of the 'reluctant leader' in spite of the fact that they were fast rising stars in their political parties. A touch of humility in any leader goes a long way.

Gender or Engendering?
It is too easy to point to the fact that Merkel and Ardern are leading with a 'feminine' style of leadership which has served them in good stead during the COVID-19 crisis. Recent research by the Centre for

Economic Policy Research and the World Economic Forum seems to show that countries led by women had "systematically and significantly better" COVID-19 outcomes, locking down earlier and suffering half as many deaths on average as those led by men (The Guardian)

"Our results clearly indicate that women leaders reacted more quickly and decisively in the face of potential fatalities," said Supriya Garikipati, a developmental economist at Liverpool University, co-author with Reading University's Uma Kambhampati.

"In almost all cases, they locked down earlier than male leaders in similar circumstances. While this may have longer-term economic implications, it has certainly helped these countries to save lives, as evidenced by the significantly lower number of deaths in these countries." (The Guardian)

That they took up a style of leadership which was more focused initially on saving lives than on the economy may not necessarily relate to their gender. (We only have to think of Maggie Thatcher and Marine Le Penn to fantasise about female leaders who might not have made the same decisions as Merkel and Ardern.) Perhaps we could see their leadership as 'engendering' rather than specifically 'gendered'.

In these days of gender fluidity when gender is no longer as binary and readily identifiable as it was once presumed to be, it may be seen to be on a spectrum ranging from Nurturing/peace-loving/gentle/people-oriented through to Aggressive/war-mongering/patronising/economically focused. Perhaps male and female leaders can be found anywhere along that spectrum or indeed, balancing the two polarities.

The notion of 'engendering' is explored by Boxer. He argues that engendered leadership is not one which is polarised between male or female 'your money or your life' choices. In the case of COVID-19, saving lives or the economy. "This ability to hold both sides will be referred to as engendering leadership, an approach to leadership in which the work is a work of continuous innovation in the face of...underlying impossibilities". Perhaps the most successful leaders are those engendering leaders who are able to hold both 'male' and 'female' choices without having to decide between the two polarities.

Perhaps another cause of the different leadership capacties of the men compared with the women may be traced to the fact that they both had depressed or absent mothers while the women had stable parental figures. It is possible to surmise that the lack of the 'maternal' influence in the family wherein the mother tries to help each child fulfil their potential, prevented them from dealing well with siblings, and this might explain their unwillingness or inability to deal with horizontal stakeholder relationships (e.g. Johnson with the EU and Trump with China and Mexico).

The media

The media plays a huge role in determining a leader's popularity. Jacinda's humility and compassion make headlines, just as Merkel's capable, motherly image sells papers. Julia and Hillary Clinton were not so lucky – their headlines of 'Juliar' and 'Lock her up' made the nightly news. Feminists despaired, while middle Australia and America secretly applauded. How dare these women think that they could lead a

country when they couldn't even keep their kitchen fruit bowl full! Somewhere deep in our psyches is the belief that a woman should not try to do a man's job, and if she does, she needs to be either the 'good mother' or the 'Madonna'. How complicit are we all in that belief?

In the period 2006-2008, Forbes magazine ranked Angela Merkel among some of the most influential ladies in the world. 'Ladies'! Why the gender reference when Merkel should have been seen as one of the most influential leaders in the world. – male or female!

Time magazine was much more generous in headlining her Time Person of the Year in 2015.

"We choose as Person of the Year the individual who has had the greatest influence, for better or worse, on the world and the news each year. The process invariably inspires a lively debate. While on occasion we have named groups, such as last year's Ebola Fighters, and even objects (the Computer in 1982), we have not named an individual woman since Philippine President Corazon Aquino in 1986."

Time editor Nancy Gibbs wrote. "You can agree with her or not, but she is not taking the easy road. Leaders are tested only when people don't want to follow. For asking more of her country than most politicians would dare, for standing firm against tyranny as well as expedience and for providing steadfast moral leadership in a world where it is in short supply, Angela Merkel is TIME's Person of the Year."

Obviously annoyed that he had not been selected, Donald Trump tweeted, "I told you @Time Magazine would never pick me as person of the year despite being the big favorite. They picked person who is ruining Germany." (12.53am. 10 Dec 2015. Twitter for Android.)

The media has been blamed for promoting 'Celebrity politics' (Wheeler) especially in the US and the UK. It is not difficult to see the likes of Trump and Johnson exploiting this in order to gain the affection of their constituents. Social media has played a huge part in celebrity promotion, ranging from Trump's off the cuff Twitter posts to the algorithms of Facebook and other platforms which only deliver to us what we want to see. Hence the media and therefore leaders we deserve?

Leadership styles

If we look at the style of leadership they have assumed and what they are holding for their constituents, we could liken Trump to the failed Messiah, Johnson to Monty Python's 'naughty boy' (Kent), Merkel to the 'good mother' and Ardern to the Madonna.

Western in his book on leadership traces its history through stages promoting the Controller, the Therapist, the Messiah, and more recently, the Eco-leader. What was at play in society which promoted these styles of leadership at a given time? And what of these styles do Trump, Johnson, Merkel and Jacinda display? (And why do I feel more comfortable calling Jacinda Ardern by her first name?)

No prizes for guessing that Trump uses Controller and Messiah styles to maintain his authority. His message of 'Make America Great Again' demands belief that he knows the direction to be taken. His exhortation of people 'to lock her up' in reference to Hillary Clinton, echoes the voice of the Controller authoritarian along with his demonstrative finger pointing. He goes close to diagnosing his own popularity when he says in his book "The Art of the Deal" that he embraces the idea of what he calls 'truthful hyperbole' in that he plays to people's fantasies. As he says "People want to believe that something is the biggest and the greatest and the most spectacular." (His co-author has since stated his regret that he ever wrote the book and said that Trump played no part in it authorship.)

His Messianic self-belief creates a dependent constituency which wants desperately to believe that he will lead them out of the wilderness. In psychodynamic terms, the society is operating from a Basic Assumption of Me (Bion's BAMe). 'This assumes that a group is simply a collection of individuals, each out to satisfy their own needs, joined by a common interest but basically from a narcissistic stance' (Long). It is also possible to hypothesise that Trump's messianic popularity is a result of 'splitting' as described by Melanie Klein who observed that young infants cannot hold both good and bad feelings together in their minds and the world they experience is either all good or all bad. Klein calls this the paranoid schizoid position and it is possible to observe that Trump's supporters might be getting rid of their inability to hold conflicting feelings of guilt and hate by identifying with what their unconscious might know to be 'bad'. Long argues that "Being a leader is experienced in many ways, both by the role holder and those who interact with him or her. Here it will be argued that the images of the role reflect the surface of the symbolic, often unconscious heritage of our deeply social being." (Long 2010, p.179) She goes on to say that leadership occurs "between roles; between leaders and followers and exists in the relation and the associated relationship between the role holders." She describes how the myth of the primal horde is still with us and within us bringing up images of Trump's supporters whipped up into a frenzy and screaming for murder and justice.

Mant goes further to suggest that despotic rulers like Hitler and Galtieri could not survive unless significant numbers of people experienced a certain "ambivalent love/hate feeling for them." He continues, somewhat controversially "deep in the murk of the dictatorial/authoritarian subconscious is a knowledge that part of each person wants to be raped. It is too shameful a desire for consciousness, so it emerges, through the cracks, in the 'accidents' of political in-fighting." (Mant, p.221) If we are complicit in electing Trump and Johnson because we want to be raped, perhaps we support Ardern because we want to make love to her and Merkel because we want a mother's approval.

Jacinda Ardern, exhibits a great deal of Therapist tendencies. Her compassion, her empathy, her softness, draw in the follower who yearns to be nurtured, while her politics of sustainability, peacefulness, collaboration and a refusal to compromise her values demonstrate the best qualities of the Eco-leader. It is no surprise that Jacinda's upbringing was as the second of two daughters born to a Mormon family with caring parents. Although she subsequently dropped her Mormon religion because

of its aversion to same sex marriage, she nonetheless spoke of seeing "children without shoes on their feet or anything to eat for lunch" as a defining characteristic of her values. She has since fought for the rights of gay marriage and in her maiden speech to parliament at the age of 28 she castigated the government for its failure to take action against climate change. She describes herself as a positive and optimistic person. Jacinda's latest refusal to accept a pay-rise for parliamentarians in the face of so many others losing their jobs demonstrates an operation from Bion's Basic Assumption Oneness (BAOneness). "This assumes that a group is a unity with little differentiation between members – all caught together in a common need and with common responses" (Long). In line with this, even though Jacinda seemed to be grooming herself for leadership from an early age, perhaps we can believe that she is a somewhat reluctant leader who may have asked herself at times, "Why me?" Shapiro (2020) discusses this question in relation to a person taking up their role of citizenship on behalf of others.

Merkel possibly represents a combination of all styles of Western's leadership discourses. Therapist because she is seen by many as the good mother, setting the standards for a compassionate Germany, Messiah because they look to her to lead the way, Controller because she appears to be in control of the EU and other world leaders, and Eco-leader as she demonstrates her concern for the environment and refugees even while risking her popularity. She is also able to see both sides of an argument and more often than not settles for compromise instead of a 'win:lose' decision. In the lead up to the last election, Merkel's supporters focused on her hands which are always held fingers touched carefully together, pointing down, held in front of the abdomen to make a diamond. Merkel's hands were exulted by her followers who worshipped her as they would a holy mother (Moser). Previously, when she gained leadership of the CDU, she was likened to a female Oedipus who had to kill off the patriarch, Kohl, in order to lead in her own right.

Trump and Johnson were elected because of their Messianic promise of a new direction, a 'promised land'. It is no surprise that their promises are failing to come to fruition especially in the light of Coronavirus. Typically the Messiah style is short-lived as groups will progress through the stages of dependence upon an established leader, through a period of counter-independence followed by counter-dependence, then independence and finally, hopefully, inter-dependence. This is why most classical historical Messianic leaders have been crucified or dishonoured. Their style is not sustainable especially when their promises start to fall apart. The projections of omnipotence onto them by their followers fall away just as the Emperor's cloak, and leadership by its very definition is determined by its followers.

The Messiah leadership style creates a basic assumption of dependence which sucks up all the attention and creates expectations which become impossible to fulfil. Neither Merkel nor Ardern have made such a promise, preferring to bring their people along with them to ride the waves of uncertainty. They both try to be consistent leaders but are adept at holding the incompleteness for their people.

Today's business leaders

Today's business leaders are just as confused. They are no longer able to operate as Messiahs because in today's chaotic world they don't know the way any more than their followers. When they were able to make decisions based on agreement and certainty they could show direction and give comfort to their people that they knew the way. The triangle of Direction, Alignment and Commitment promoted as the essence of leadership in the 1990s and early 2000s just doesn't wash any more since leaders can no longer be relied on to set Direction. In this environment of ambiguity and anxiety, all the more exacerbated by the global Coronavirus pandemic, their roles as leaders become less clear. All they have to rely on now is their ability to tolerate the anxiety of admitting that they do not know the way at the same time as they draw on their people's knowledge, resources and networks to redefine organisational purpose and identity. It is this overarching redefinition of purpose, together with the involvement of all their resources, which can help them collectively, find order through the chaos.

What does all this say, then, in how we select leaders in our future political systems and organisations? If we want to 'stop feeding the beast' of a failed economic and social system, post COVID-19, these systems must change substantially in order to survive. Wheatley's hypothesis is that it may be too late for our civilisation to change; Smith discusses a renaissance which will bring in an economic system "based on abundance and scarcity" rather than merely scarcity alone, a socio-economic system based on trust, faith and belief (Smith, p.184). Western exhorts the need to "coach leaders to act in good faith to create the good society" (Western, p. 382). Mant argues that the primary task of an organisation or system needs to reflect what is required in the world (as he reminds us, if the primary task was genocide, Hitler was an inspired choice!) (Mant, p. 227) As he says Leadership can't be bottled – there's no one size fits all. He argues that a successful leader is one who triggers a powerful response which is pre-programmed into us by pre-history causing a fight or flight basic assumption as with Johnson or Trump or a dependence as with Jacinda or Angela. Hence, the leaders we deserve.

So what if our corporate leaders voted with their values rather than their hip pockets? Would they command enough followers if they took up roles commanding democratic, collaborative values which embraced diversity and emphasised the sustainability of the planet? Today's business leaders have largely gone missing in the global arguments against populism and nationalism although some are a little reluctantly signing up to a focus on reputation and brand management. On political issues they like to have it both ways so as not to alienate a large part of their customer base. According to Walmart's CEO (leader of 1.5 million US employees) it's a conscious decision not to lead or follow.

"'There is not a part of me that says, 'That's political. I'd love to get involved in that,' he said. "But society expects things of leading companies and sometimes we should take a stance on something.' Some public statements are 'easier for us,' he added, such as supporting environmental sustainability and military veterans, but 'on social issues it gets tougher,' he said. 'Ideally we wouldn't lead on very many things.'" (Wall St Journal)

What does society expect of our business leaders? By not making a political decision they are in fact taking a stand. Hence, the leaders we deserve.

Stop Press

This paper has chosen to focus on four current and prominent political leaders in order to analyse what it is that causes individuals to present for leadership together with their relationship with their followers within the environmental conditions of the times. What parallels can we draw between these and our business leaders of today, let alone tomorrow? Even as I put the finishing touches to this paper the news has broken that AMP, an Australian icon of 171 years, has been forced to give into shareholder pressure to clean up its act – again. While just recovering from its reputational disaster of charging dead people, it had seen fit to promote an alleged sexual harasser to head up its Capital division together with the role of chair of diversity and inclusion. What were they thinking? To say the old-school chair and his cronies were tone deaf is an understatement but they must have eventually heard the message when it was driven home by several of the major shareholders on the weekend. The Chairman and one of the directors have resigned and the alleged harasser has been sent back to London, but not into retirement - to do so might have cost the company way too much in its severance package. Once again a 'money or your life' decision has taken the middle road of compromise but not without setting an example of the consequences of poor behaviour for corporate Australia. If CEOs are finding it difficult to make decisions about the strategic directions they should pursue, perhaps they can be forced to make decisions based on values which promote citizenship (and BAOneness) in their companies and the society. What is our role as citizens in ensuring we get the leaders we deserve? Perhaps we all have to take a stand for our values and in these days of social media we might just get listened to and therefore get 'the leaders we really deserve'.

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"Dissociation, the 'meat paradox' and leadership

Ms Margo Lockhart

Facilitator and Coach, Margo Lockhart and Associates, Australia

Margo Lockhart is a highly regarded facilitator, designer and coach with a deserved reputation for developing trust and rapport in the working environment. She has extensive experience in program design and implementation in a very diverse range of organisations, and regularly facilitates Management and Leadership programs, as well as courses in Emotional Intelligence, Team Dynamics and Influencing Skills.

"If I am to be a voice for the animals, then how should I speak? Am I to whisper, when they are screaming in pain? Am I to be calm, when they tremble in fear? Am I to shout for mercy, as their throats are being slit? Tell me how I need to speak – for you to grant them their freedom."

Davegan Raza

Paper

Let me begin by sharing something which could be viewed as a personal paradox. I loved growing up on a wheat/sheep farm, but have chosen not to eat wheat or meat anymore. Reconciling these different facts, or 'forces' as Smith and Berg (1987) would say, has been important in my own life journey. Moreover, recognising and seeking to explore the very complex paradox on the issue of animals raised for food has been my research focus for the past three years. In this paper I will briefly describe current farming practices to explain the 'meat paradox' and the dissociation that results from this paradox. I will use the yin-yang symbol as a framework for considering this and other personal paradoxes. In so doing, I hope to provide some useful ideas for leaders to recognise and manage all sorts of paradoxes that arise in personal lives, teams, organisations, and indeed in society.

Farms and farming practices

My family's farm in southern New South Wales provided the foundation for a very happy childhood for my siblings and me. We loved the space, the animals, and the Murray River at our doorstep. We were proud of the farm animals and wanted them to have good lives. Which they mostly did, while on the farm. What happened to the sheep when they were sold and transported in the trucks was not something I ever thought about. They were 'out of sight, out of mind'.

This type of pasture farming is no longer the norm for the majority of farmed animals around the world. Sheep bred in Australia are an exception, but open paddocks are no longer the home environment for the majority of animals we consume.

Instead, the practice that now dominates our food system is industrialised animal agriculture, or factory farming. Global research suggests over 90 percent of farmed animals world wide live on factory farms (Gilliver, 2019). Billions of animals around the world live in these industrial complexes with no sunlight, fresh air, or room to move. They live lives of extreme deprivation and cruelty (Ricard, 2016). Along with the cruelty comes humanitarian crises. Industrial agriculture didn't cause Covid 19, a wet market did (another form of institutionalised animal cruelty), but factory farms are also breeding grounds for pandemics. Experts assert that industrialized farming was a major factor in the emergence of the recent avian flu and swine flu epidemics (Fickling, 2020). The Centre for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports that three out of every four new or emerging diseases are zoonotic, diseases that pass from an animal to a human, surely an indication that we need to re-examine our relationship with animals (Saffron-Foer, 2020).

Not only are pandemics a risk, the detrimental environmental impact of industrialised agriculture is now well known. The methane and nitrous dioxide produced by the livestock industry is reportedly responsible for one-fifth of global emissions. According to the Research Director of Project Drawdown, a non-profit organisation dedicated to modelling solutions to address climate change, eating a plant based diet is "the most important contribution every individual can make to reversing global warming" (Drawdown, 2020).

Why are we treating and killing animals so brutally, and in the process, seriously damaging ourselves and ruining our environment? Undoubtedly we have a global collective blind eye on this issue. It seems to me that this collective denial is linked with the fact that meat is embedded in our culture and our personal histories.

## Human-animal relationship research

I began my research into this collective blind eye by designing a poster for the 2017 NIODA conference. My key question was: How do we get this discussion of our dinners ON the table? I've now been researching this very question for 3 years, and I've made many mistakes along the way. Typically, it's been through the difficulty of owning those mistakes and learning from them that I've made the biggest progress on the pre-doctoral work.

A field of research outside of my usual study domain has been critical: the relatively new interdisciplinary field of "Anthrozoology", which explores the spaces that animals occupy in human social and cultural worlds and the interactions humans have with them (DeMello, 2012, p4).

Diving into this body of work led me to discover what is known by anthrozoologists as the 'meat paradox'. While most of us do not endorse cruel treatment of any living creature, most people continue to eat animals as food (Herzog, 2010, Joy, 2010), and in fact our consumption of animals is increasing at

a phenomenal rate. In the fifty years that the world doubled its human population, it quadrupled its meat consumption. (See figure 1 below)

Figure 1. Total global meat supply from 1961 (in millions of tons)
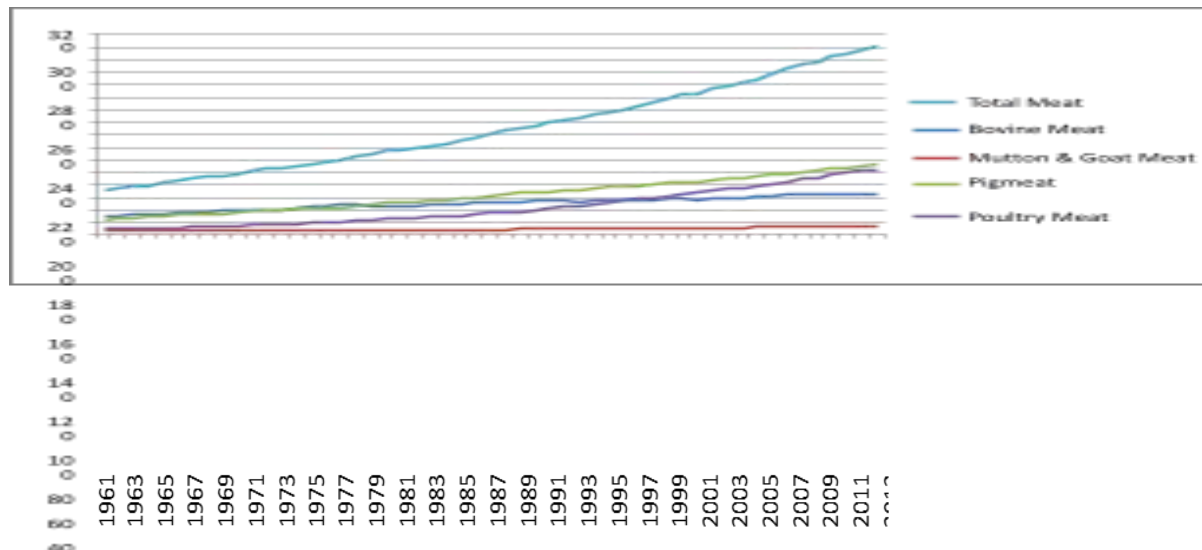
Source: FAOSTAT, 2020

Notes: Bovine meat consists of cows and buffalos, but overwhelmingly cows; Poultry meat covers chickens, turkeys, ducks, geese and guinea fowl, although mostly chickens.

Researchers have also documented a rise of moral aversion towards animal killing (Leroy & Praet, 2017). As such, a cognitive dissonance arises: the ethical conflict caused by the thought of our behaviour harming animals, while also enjoying meat as a staple in our diet (Loughnan, Bastian & Haslan, 2010).This cognitive dissonance leads to an internal conflict, which we deal with by dissociating from one of these thoughts. When we dissociate we disconnect- from our feelings, thoughts, memories or even a sense of identity. Saffron-Foer says we even disconnect from our own 'animality', which he says leads to a sense of hidden and unexpressed shame (Eating Animals, 2009).

Dissociation

Our dissociation includes both individual defense mechanisms and societal (or institutionalized) defense mechanisms. Five dimensions of moral disengagement from the thought of our own behaviour harming animals have been identified: means-ends justification , the conscious or unconscious thinking that we need meat, and that need justifies what happens through the production of this meat; desensitisation, the blocking of uncomfortable thoughts through language and other means; denial of negative consequences, the refusal, conscious or unconscious, to see the consequences of our actions; diffused responsibility, our inability to accept our own role in the issue, and finally, reduced perceived choice, we tell ourselves that we don't have other food choices available to us. (Graca, Calheiros, Oliveira, 2016).

On a societal level, Melanie Joy, author of Why we Love Dogs, Eat Pigs and Wear Cows (2010), has coined the term "Carnism" to describe the invisible system and dominant ideology which encourages us to eat

certain animals. Carnism sustains itself through invisibility (we don't see the factory farms), denial and dissociation (we eat 'meat', not animals), and myths (agricultural advertising uses countless pictures of animals looking happy on 'real' farms).Clearly, it is easier for us to turn a blind eye when our social norms, and indeed an entire meat industry, encourages dissociation with difficult emotions.

For some time now the field of systems psycho-dynamics has explored collective turning away. Psychoanalyst John Steiner calls this phenomenon "turning a blind eye." (Steiner, 1999) He uses the Oedipus narrative to explain how we often have access to adequate knowledge but because it is so unpleasant and disconcerting we choose unconsciously, and sometimes consciously, to ignore it. Many characters in the play knew the truth: Oedipus had killed his father and married his mother, but they colluded to ignore it. We too, according to Steiner, turn a blind eye to dangers and horrors that confront us, despite the abundance of evidence that if we don't radically change the way we are behaving, catastrophe is inevitable. Steiner goes so far as to name the collective illusory mindset:

*"where we believe something against the evidence of our senses because it suits us to do so......that is the factor of **collusion** (original emphasis). A cover-up requires conspirators who agree either covertly or tacitly to collaborate." (p99).*

Long (2015) also explains this collective blind eye. She writes of climate change denial: "*it is important that denial is not seen simply in terms of the individual. Denial becomes a systemic process that can shape a whole culture, and therein lies its most insidious harm*" (p 248). It seems that denial on a collective scale is both cultural blindness, but also strategic deception. Both an active avoidance, and a deliberate attempt not to notice.

Personal denial

In doing this work, I couldn't help but become aware of my own denials. An attempt to have a "Vegetarian Family Christmas" created much angst and conflict within my extended family. Actually, 'minor family war' might be the best description of what happened. A fellow PhD student commented at the time on my naivete "Of course that was bound to happen. Blind Freddie could have seen it coming." I slowly realised that my enthusiasm for this subject is NOT shared by everyone, and that in fact, people like eating meat. I've never been a 'foodie' (a person who loves cooking and has a particular interest in gourmet food), so I've been slow to learn that it is a great passion for many people, and that a large part of that passion is the eating of meat. For some people in my family, the traditions of Christmas, which include a ham, turkey and roast pork on the table, were terribly important. I needed to respect and take account of the views of meat eaters, not only to maintain my family relationships, but also to take up the role of researcher, rather than activist on this issue. I didn't want to go to war, I wanted to explore how to have this difficult but important conversation. I was learning, in a very personal way, about the role denial plays in avoiding disruptive emotions that might challenge the status quo. Like it or not, denial can stabilise institutions (Delmestri and Goodrick, 2020), and stability is an important aspect of any functioning system. It took me a while, but I thought a lot more about my family's farming history. The seed of an idea and the kernel of an important emotion – pride in family history – emerged in my journal writing.

Getting away from the polarising ideas of right versus wrong, ethical versus not ethical, and humane versus cruel has been crucial for me in terms of family relationships, but also for my role and identity as an academic in this field. I am just beginning the journey of my doctoral work in this issue at NIODA, and discovering the work already being done on the 'meat paradox' has given me a useful frame to make shift my mindset That mind-shift has not been from activist to researcher; rather from activist or researcher to activist and researcher. I can be both, just as I can embrace my family history and campaign for animal welfare.

Embracing paradox

Cambridge dictionary defines paradox as "a situation or statement that seems impossible or is difficult to understand because it contains two opposite facts or characteristics" (Cambridge Online Dictionary, 2020). A common paradox in the everyday life of parents is the need to treat children equally, **and** also treat them as unique individuals. A constant leadership paradox is the need to be firm **and** in control, **and** to be flexible and collaborative. A citizen's paradox: being 'responsible' involves both giving up power **and** taking up power at times. A resilience paradox involves the need to both have constancy **and** habit in our lives and be adaptable and able to change. Our lives are full of paradoxes.

Kenwyn Smith and David Berg, in *Paradoxes of Group Life* (1987), explain the circular nature of a paradox with this example:

The following sentence is false.
The preceding sentence is true.
(p13)

As Smith and Berg explain, separately each sentence makes sense, but when we read them together we get "tangled in a strange loop" (p13), we go around in circles.

The 'meat paradox' contains these contradictory and circular elements: many people enjoy eating meat but dislike causing pain to animals. Dissociating meat from its animal origins is a powerful way to avoid the cognitive dissonance resulting from this paradox. But how can we deal with this paradox in a more conscious, integrated way, as opposed to simply suppressing difficult truths and feelings?

In *Polarity Management* (1996), Barry Johnson distinguishes between problems to solve, which have an end point and are solvable by making a choice; and polarities to manage, which do not have an end point as long as the system is functioning. He stresses that you cannot solve a paradox by making a choice between one side and the other: "If it is a polarity you must manage, applying traditional problem solving will *increase* (my italics) the problem rather than help it." (1996, p2). But interestingly, Johnson stresses that we need both types of thinking to solve complex problems. He expresses this as a paradox in itself:

"*Either/Or thinking and Both/And thinking is itself a polarity to manage. We need both. Either alone will be dysfunctional. This is not about the rejection of either/or thinking. The rejection of either/or thinking is an example of either/or thinking, alone.*" (p16)

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We can see Johnson's dual approach being applied to the 'meat paradox' if we look at the diverse methods used by various leaders addressing animal cruelty. We can see the application of either/ or thinking and both/and thinking. The vegan movement is becoming a strong force, a stroll through a local supermarket shows the growing range of vegan options available. Many vegans, take an either/or stance: you either care for animals and don't eat them, or you don't care, and you continue to eat meat. Other leaders are taking on the 'both/and' attitude, creating and promoting 'plant-based meat products'. The company currently leading this movement, Beyond Meat, has high profile investors such as Bill Gates and Leonardo DiCaprio (Kowitt, 2017). This approach is managing the paradox with a both/and approach- we like the taste, AND we don't want the cruelty to happen. One other form of leadership in managing the 'meat paradox' also comes to mind: the less vocal, quiet person who influences others by their actions, not their words. Such leadership came to my mind when a friend of mine who works for one of our Big Four banks, and who is interested in my research, told me about her CEO, who is vegan. She was at a team dinner with this CEO when he ordered vegan food. Surprised, she asked him why he was vegan, and he explained that he'd watched a documentary on the way our farm animals are treated, and hadn't eaten meat since. When I asked her if this influenced the way she viewed her leader, she said "I guess I realised he's someone who really thinks about things." It strikes me that such people manage their own paradox, by choosing their own either/ or, without expecting or pushing others to do so.

Yin Yang Symbol

Various symbols can be used to explain and explore a paradox. We could use the line with 'A' at one end and 'B' at the other. A bit like a seesaw, somehow we need to balance both. Barry Johnson uses the infinity symbol, showing the unending continuum of managing the paradox (Johnson, 1996, p6). The symbol I find most helpful is the ancient yin yang symbol, for a number of reasons. The curvy line signifies that there are no absolute separations between the opposites. Even when we choose one side or the other, we have to accept both truths, and work with the reality that they both exist.
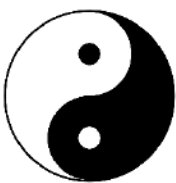
 The seeds are also important. If there is no seed on one side or the other, there is rigidity in the system, and we are treating the paradox as an 'either/or'. If the seeds are not big enough there won't be enough movement, and if there is too much, the whole symbol gets out of balance and turns itself over. This may be seen as a good thing to some, but undoubtedly it would mean major disruption.

On a personal level, I have realised that I am most influential, not just when I accept and respect the food choices others make, but also when I acknowledge the seed of their side in myself. I have been guilty of judging, pushing, and feeling morally superior, which has only caused polarising and friction. Exploring my own appreciation of tradition, my own love and pride in our family farm, and the importance of good relationships within my family has helped me feel reconciled, not just with my own history, but also with family members to whom these things are vital. Acknowledging that I happily ate meat for the first 45 years of my life is a way to see the seed of the other in myself. And when I quietly make my own vegetarian meals and offer these around, I know I am influencing in subtle but strong ways.

Smith and Berg (1987) argue that progress or development in managing a group paradox can be measured in terms of the group's ability to (1) define and understand the opposing forces active in the group and (2) find the links between them, the framework in which both are embedded. For instance, if the paradox is about individuality versus collectivity, expressing and finding opportunities to distinguish individuals, *as well as and at the same time* identifying and serving the wellbeing of the collective will help the group manage this timeless paradox. In our current pandemic crisis the Victorian government seems to have found and named the links between these opposing forces with their slogan *"Staying apart keeps us together".* Individuals are asked to put the collective first, in many cases by putting their own jobs at stake, for the sake of *both the collective and the individual.* Barry Johnson advises us to explore the values and fears of each side of the paradox (Johnson, 1996). I suggest we go even further, and identify the seeds within ourselves from the 'other side'.

Managing our paradoxes- self, group, organisational and indeed societal paradoxes, is a leadership function. It involves observing our own paradoxes, which may be difficult to see because they generally involve discomfort and dissociation. If we can start to think about something we've been avoiding, we've started the journey. '*Dare to think the unthought known*', as Ajeet Mathur prompts us to do in his book by that very title (Mathur, 2011). The next step is to create safe spaces for expressing and exploring such feelings. We might ask: what am I (or what are we) feeling/ assuming/ thinking now? It's useful if we can recognise and name the values and the fears of both sides (Sharma, 2020). This honours the dignity of everyone involved and helps us to identify the seeds within each side. As Shapiro would say, ask "How is the other person right?" (Shapiro, 2020, p3). I also think it's helpful to anticipate a learning curve, paradoxes are all about movement and stretch and we can't expect to solve or manage them perfectly. By exploring whether we can use both *either/ or* and *both/and* thinking we might come up with helpful actions to take. Perhaps a change in our thinking or behaviour will be helpful. Finally, circling back to the paradoxical dilemma after some time might help us to observe whether there has been movement, if the seeds have changed at all, and what further action we might need to take to keep managing the paradox.

The more we look around, the more we see paradoxes everywhere. Managing those that are hard for us to see or acknowledge is difficult. But undoubtedly, our own personal authority is enhanced when we take the time and effort to understand such unconscious processes. My exploration of the 'meat paradox' has illuminated how I can explore the opportunities as well as the challenges such a paradox offers within the context of this research. But there is universal wide application to the ability to identify and own different forces within oneself, or between oneself and others; to find the links between these two forces; and to work towards balance, unity and harmony throughout the process.

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The unconscious side of technology: where does it land in organisations?

Mr Mark Argent

Organisational Consultant, Mark Argent Consulting, UK

Mark Argent is an organisational consultant and psychotherapist based in the UK. Early in his career he was very involved in the computerisation of music typography and has continued to have active involvements in the high tech sector, and in the application of technology to front line politics.

The unconscious side of technology: where does it land in organisations?

Mark Argent, August 2020

Introduction

On the face of it, computer technology is about bits and bytes. "Computer says 'no'" is an absolute, and there's no concept of an unconscious. It just "is". But people are involved, and phrasing it so strongly implies an opposite — an unconscious complement of that certainty. I could spell that as something against which the seeming-certainty is defined.

There's also an ambiguity about how far that something is individual and how far it is collective — ideas of the radically unconscious or the collective unconscious suggest that that's never a sharp distinction, but there's substantially more ambiguity when this is appearing as an unconscious complement.

As a rather less abstract snapshot, I've been introducing people in my local area to the "Connect" software used by the Liberal Democrats in the UK to record contact with voters. The "new user" experience is not good. I can give all sorts of explanations for this, but the suspicion at the back of my mind is that this either reflects developers feeling very protective of the system and being wary of letting newcomers in, or who know what the system can do and are nervous of people who might not see its elegance. Both might be true.

Close to elections, I've seen people "fiddling with Connect" in a way that seems to be about containing their anxiety about the risk of not winning. The give-away is that a statistician would ask how reliable the data is before attempting to draw any conclusions, but that question isn't asked — the important thing is the anxiety rather than the reliability of the conclusions.

I suspect that the containment of anxiety is also in the design and the uses people usually make of Connect. I want to say that these don't have much to do with the primary task of winning elections, but even here, there is a non-clarity. This is a political party that hasn't formed a majority government in over a century, and is currently agonising about the legacy of its time in coalition (2010–15). If even the primary task is unclear, there might be a lot of anxiety for the seeming-certainty of a computer program to contain.

I mention that by way of introduction. I'd like to pick this up in terms of what happens for programmers at an individual level, in the processes of organisations, and across society.

At the back of my mind is Freud's idea in *The Uncanny*, of repressed content being activated in something seemingly ordinary, which Lacan suggests also has a link into the relationship to the Real. The speed of change in computing means that it's never "ordinary", in the sense of having been familiar for a long

time, so there is a deceptive sense of "ordinaryness", overlying something where the Real is much closer than it appears.

The Programmer's experience

Behind all software is the experience of those who develop it. That involves those who designed the machines, the compilers and programming environments, and the actual software. Each of those brings in different blind spots and possibilities.

Designing and writing software is a complex task. It's usually learned by starting with abstract ideas around how computers and programming languages work but moves rapidly into a domain where reality is modelled in software. Ideally people are very aware of the gap between the model and reality but it's easy for the complexity of the modelling to become all-consuming.

I could present that in terms of traits of particular personality types or pathologies, but that's to evade the issue. Almost all engagement with computing involves thinking differently because of the machine. I've heard people talk as if Photoshop does all the image manipulation a person might need — and when I pick up a paint brush, I enter another world that is different precisely because it's not controlled.

From the programmer's perspective, it is dangerously easy to model the world in software and then perceive the world through the algorithms used to model it, which brings in a raft of blind spots. When I first became involved in computer-based music typography, an early experiment involved setting a two page spread of Elgar's *Enigma Variations*. I thought I did this in the same way as Novello's original engravers had, but was called up short when I realised how much more they were accommodating on a page without it looking cramped. Seeing the page through from the perspective of how it was modelled stopped me seeing the shortcomings of my model.

I remember a rather heated discussion about the computerised transposition of music with a programmer who assumed that this just meant moving everything up or down by a particular number of semitones. What he didn't take on board was that the black keys on a piano are both sharps and flats --- the same key is pressed for C sharp and D flat. If a piece is in D major, a C sharp is perfectly normal, but a D flat means the key is changing rather drastically. More-or-less on autopilot a string player would play the D flat lower than the C sharp because it has a different meaning. Because he didn't understand the distinction, he assumed it didn't matter, and angrily dismissed it as "illogical".

In a psychoanalytic context, I would have the word "psychosis" in mind if someone seems to have a weakened sense of reality and is being over-concrete. Things are more complex in this context because it is both a collective and individual process --- clinicians sometimes talk as if psychosis is only ever individual, yet collective psychosis seems an obvious way to read lots of contemporary politics. In terms of computing, what this throws the spotlight on is the absence of the rich chains of symbolisation associated with myth and literature, giving a sense of the thinking around the computing as denuded.

But early in my career I did some work at a University Computing Service as a "programming adviser". At the time, my knowledge of programming was woefully poor. I soon discovered that, when someone walked through the door with a pile of listing paper and a problem in a program in a language I'd never met, the trick was to ask them how it worked and listen very carefully. Very often the mistake would

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show itself in the moment when they lost focus. My working assumption was that the "technical" problem also had a "people" element — which I'd miss if I let myself be distracted by the technicalities (or my lack of knowledge).

That human element ties in with stories from programmers of ideas emerging during physical exercise. That makes no sense if the computing is about nothing more than logic, but makes total sense in terms of Bion's idea of the proto-mental matrix — so that something is going on in the body, or at least, outside conscious thought, that eventually emerges as something that can be thought (and implemented).

I've found it helpful to think of computing as a product of human culture, which means that it is about much more than bits and bytes. Not denying the unconscious component makes it possible to talk about it, even though, as with any statement about the unconscious, it's never possible for what is said to be "complete". Some things seem to be fundamental — a storage location is either set or it isn't — but it's worth not assuming that's the whole story.

My Great Uncle was Research Director of an engineering company. In the early 1990s he told me of a meeting [re-told in his autobiography] in the very early days of computing where they had tried to brainstorm what these new devices might bring. Way down the list of ideas, recounted almost as a joke, was the idea that it might produce things that "replace the typewriter". Yet a huge number of social changes were unleashed by the word processor — not least the change in gender roles as we have moved from away from men having women as their typists to a more equal world. An obvious reading is that the pressure for those social changes was held unconsciously, so there were powerful social forces driving computing down a path its pioneers didn't imagine.

At the time of that conversation neither of us were aware of the World Wide Web --- the first web browser had been developed at CERN in 1990. Like the word processor, this could have been a minor innovation, but it too, almost despite its inventor, was in touch with some powerful social forces --- enabling people's anxieties to be surfaced in ways that seem to have led to the votes for Brexit and for Trump and now for the raft of things unleashed in people's reactions to Covid19 and to Black Lives Matter.

Chris Wylie, sometimes called "the brains of Cambridge Analytica", has written a powerful account of their "plot to break the world". It also describes his own journey as a developer, from being thoroughly taken up in the technology to horror at what was unleashed. It's a powerful articulation of how seductive this world can be.

An organisational lens
Most software is developed within organisations. That adds a layer of complexity. It's not just about an individual developer's constructing their own image of reality, but instead, how that sits within the dynamics of an organisation.

In a sense, this is nothing new — organisations have always had to navigate what's going on around their primary purpose, most obviously around money, power and sex. The "organisation in the mind" is a useful idea because it enables an exploration, rather than because it offers a simple answer.

Technology focusses some of this, in what people express on social media, in how people design software, and how they do (or don't) understand the business case of what they are developing.

The increased and increasing speed of technological change means that the natural tendency of younger people to claim their place in the world is sharpened by them using the technology they have grown up with, sometimes displacing the "older" generations who are still adapting. Inter-generational rivalry is as old as the hills, but this has a new sharpness because it encourages a discarding of the past — including the myths, stories and wisdom passed across the generations that are stable because they change slowly (and are now in danger of being discarded for this very reason). Jung [1921] suggested that the success of the West since the Renaissance has come at the expense of our feeling function, and accelerated change without attention to the unconscious component is compounding the situation.

Jung [1916] also pointed out that the unconscious becomes more available in mid life — the brash young programmer who creates a model of the world which is not so well connected to reality is able to do that partly because the unconscious processes that would point out the gap between the model and reality are less developed.

There's another layer around sexual potency and attraction. Two examples from small/medium sized companies will help draw this out.

The first is a company where the Managing Director is a woman who says she moved from programming into management because she became fed up with "programs not doing what I want". My sense was that she had recruited people in her own image, and the result was, unusually for the computing world, a reasonably-equal gender balance. At one point I saw a young woman remonstrating with a new developer who she thought had made some big changes to the way the software worked which she wanted him to reverse. As it happens, she was wrong — she'd mis-understood how that application worked, and didn't realise the enormity of the changes she assumed he had made. In "watercooler" conversations with female colleagues she seemed to alternate between frustration at her boyfriend not doing her bidding and agonising over whether to change her hair style. The interaction with the new developer seemed to be about her projecting an imagined sexual power --- mis-understanding the software wasn't relevant because it wasn't actually about the software.

The second example is a company with an almost-entirely male development team where watercooler conversations often seemed to be about women and being attractive to women — giving the impression of a competition to project sexual potency. Discussions of development work were often mired in seemingly-ideological arguments over how things should be done, with surprisingly-little awareness of the actual needs of customers.

What these two have in common is a sense of the computing as something where a significant layer is abstract and ill-understood, so that "power over the (ill-understood) computing" was a proxy for potency. I could imagine this approach working in former times, if, instead of "computing" people were making sacrifices to the gods — with varying levels of effectiveness, and varying claims to control the gods. Anchored in a framework of myth and ritual, with ways of coping when the gods don't do as bidden, that might once have been stable, but here had a concreteness in the half-understood "technology" that is hard to engage with.

Finding one's place in an organisation structured around half-understood technology is not a straightforward task. My mind jumps to basic assumptions of me-ness [Turquet] (that the group doesn't exist) and one-ness [Lawrence, Bain & Gould] (that it is met for some transcendent purpose), and Earl Hopper's linking of these in the basic assumption of incoherence, aggregation / massification, with the suggestion that this emerges when there is a failure of dependency. The point about basic assumption me-ness is that, if the organisation is structured around software that is an imperfect reflection of reality and means different things to different people, then it is hard to form an "organisation in the mind" to relate to. Basic assumption one-ness captures the sense of something ill-understood being given elevated status. In both cases, the sense of the primary task, or of what dependency might look like, are both undermined.

Richard Morgan Jones suggests that these "basic assumptions" shouldn't be thought of in the same way as those Bion describes and make more sense at the level of the proto-mental matrix — things around, not least in physical sense data, but not in a form available to be thought. It's as if the over-concreteness of the computing pushes other aspects of being out of what can be spoken of.

It may well be that "ground breaking" tech companies need some blind spots in order to break ground. Many fail because of those blind spots, but when they work, customers need to be seduced into believing that the tech solves their problems (even if it doesn't). This also creates real problems in enabling organisations to function. My mind jumps to several tech companies which seem to work because people's pathologies line up, from which the wise organisational consultant would steer clear.

The societal level

I'd like to extend some of this thinking to the idea of society as a whole. It's tempting to pick this up the societal dimension of this in terms of technology creating a model of reality "in silicon", of Jung's idea of the wounded feeling function, and of how people's identity is shaped as citizens in increasingly inter-connected nations. What's really striking me is the difficulty I am having in doing this. I have plenty of material, but the anxiety is more like the anxiety I associate with being on the edge of something unsettling and dis-orientating that resists being put into words. There are echoes of the inexpressibility of the Lacanian Real.

Part of this is directly around technology itself. We're in one place if the implication is that programmers often create a model of reality, see the world through that model and therefore miss things, as if they themselves are carrying a blindness. But we're in a different place when programmers are seen as doing this on behalf of society: their blind spots are not called out because they meet a shared need to have a model of reality that seems solid and complete.

A more disturbing part is around the sense of nationhood and belonging. My own emotional reaction to Brexit is both about the dis-orientation of identifying with a country doing something daft (whose leaders are not coming over as dependable) and about losing part of my identity as a European. I understand myself as both British and European, and there is something profoundly dis-orientating around the latter being disturbed.

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Adam Curtis' documentary *Hypernormalisation* offers a reading of this going back to the 1980s. He suggests that, towards the end of the Soviet Union everybody there saw the gap between the optimistic news and the realities of empty supermarket shelves. Those who came to power in the post-Soviet era had grown up with the idea that news was fake — which provides a context for more recent Russian activity on social media. Stories of the growth of terrorism in the middle East, or the switching of blame for the Lockerbie bombing between Syria and Libya, reflected Western political pre-occupations. The beginnings of the internet were seen as offering an egalitarian, non-hierarchical, optimistic world, but this was defined by what it was reacting against. The powerful business interests that could use the internet to manipulate people's sense of reality are part of the same system.

Those two sides of the internet are intimately related. Both hold something on behalf of the whole and both do this by "not seeing" the whole picture. To sleep at night, people need to have a way to "not see" the destructive consequences of their actions. There's a direct parallel with what we are doing in causing programmers to see the world through their models of it.

What I said a moment earlier about basic assumptions of me-ness and one-ness needs to be pushed further. Beyond the ambiguity of how people locate themselves in technology companies, there's a much more complex question of how we locate ourselves in virtual groups. Facebook may offer me a bubble of what it calls "look-alikes", who seem like me, but I also know this isn't the whole of reality: much as I might want to deny it, the right wing, racist Brexiteer who lives near me is also a part of my world, which facebook (and Covid19 lockdown) enables me to pretend is not there.

Chris Wylie's lens into Facebook is useful here because of its sharpness. I'll pick out few snapshots:

- he talks of developers at Cambridge Analytica acting against their own interest — such as gay developers or developers from ethnic minorities, whose activities end up supporting homophobic or racist regimes, giving a sense of how this can "take a person over";
- from Myanmar there's a particularly sharp example of how what is already there can be amplified: mobile devices with facebook enabled had the effect of polarising people's views of the (mainly-Muslim) Rohingya minority — in March 2018 the UN concluded that Facebook had played a "determining role" in the ethnic cleansing directed at them;
- from the US there's a story of Facebook being used to inflame racism. Football player Colin Kaepernick caused some controversy by kneeling for the US anthem in protest at racism. His sponsors, Nike, supported him. Russian-amplified accounts began to spread content advocating a boycott of Nike in response to this. Alt-right groups began circulating fake Nike coupons with offers like "75% off for people of colour", resulting in footage of African Americans going into Nike stores and getting angry when they were told the coupons were fake, inflaming an "angry black person" narrative.

These things are not the "fault" of Facebook. Its approach has more to do with generating advertising revenues than anything intentionally malicious. But there is a huge amount of shared unconscious content at work in advertising and the mindset that causes people to act against their own interests

plays into one that can "not see" these other things. Wylie describes Facebook's response when the Cambridge Analytica story broke as being like a sovereign state acting against him as an individual, not a company being accused of wrong-doing.

This is spot on. Practical economics and identity don't work out around the idea of a "nation state" in they way they once did. Globalisation has interconnected the economies and migration has added to the blurring of identities. "The nation" isn't able to hold the unconscious content it once did. There's nothing to stop some of that content being picked up in how people identify with facebook, just as one of the basic functions of a nation state used to be to run its currency yet today cryptocurrencies such as Bitcoin operate independent of nations. The snag is that what people are identifying is "my tribe on Facebook" rather than "the nation of facebook" — hence the difficult situation for the Rohingyas, and serious concerns over the misuse of social media in political campaigning.

Twitter's tendency to reduce discussion to 240-character statements adds to this because that is enough content to mobilise unconscious anxieties, but not enough to hold a developed argument.

In one day recently, my news feed included an article about China's use of technology to built economic power in a tightly-controlled economy, a story of Featurespace recruiting people to work on something to detect fraud by modelling their behaviour and detecting deviations (with the assumption that the deviations from the model would mean fraud) and news of Elon Musk's plans for "Neuralink", using brain implants to enhance human functioning. Each sound like examples of the technologist's "world view in the mind" squeezing out reality. Except that an insight of psychoanalysis is that things "squeezed out" are repressed rather than lost.

Right now, Zoom may be adding an extra layer to this in the time of Covid19. Online, I can see and hear others, but the physical, non-verbal layer is gone. Picking up Richard Morgan-Jones' idea that these basic assumptions are at the level of the proto-mental matrix makes me want to suggest that some of what we call "zoom exhaustion" is because something has gone missing — that is outside words, and therefore not readily available to talk about.

Against this, seemingly-irrational actions, such as refusing vaccines or denying the seriousness of Covid19 make sense, not because they are wise, but because they are about the denial of something else. This is serious when the suggestion is that 40% of American Republicans would refuse a vaccine for Covid19 — that is enough to prevent it's being eradicated [Chang].

Dominic Cummings, widely seen as the architect of the Leave campaign that won the UK Brexit referendum, wrote a disconcerting essay on *How the Brexit referendum was won* which caught the media at the time because he admitted that they lied, but is striking for two other things: that it makes no mention of *why* he thought leaving the EU is a good idea, and that he suggested that people wanting to become involved in politics study maths or physics, to equip them to handle data, rather than politics. This makes no sense if politics is about wise government, but they make total sense if he is thinking of the technology as defending against something sufficiently fear-inducing to mean that it is not named.

In the context of these comments, Lacan's idea of foreclosure has something to offer — of something that's around but doesn't get far enough even to be repressed. In the face of major changes such as China and India replacing the West as the world's dominant powers and climate change, there are some powerful forces which might be sitting there is a lot that we might be needing to foreclose. One key difference between repression and foreclosure is that, where the repressed can "return", the foreclosed leaves a hole, so there may be no more than a sense that something is missing, potentially expressed in anxiety, or the territory of basic assumptions of me-ness and one-ness.

Writing about *How modernity forgets*, Paul Connerton makes the point that, in the Middle Ages, change was slow. Something big, like building new city walls or a cathedral took generations. The day-to-day realities of life life changed very slowly. My point in the introduction to this paper about the uncanny is that unconscious content is around when ordinary things seem different. That makes sense, and we have found ways to deal with it, when we know what "ordinary things" are. When they are changing rapidly, everything starts to feel the strangeness of the "uncanny". The anti-vaxxer who is convinced that Bill Gates will be microchipping people when they get a Covid19 vaccine shot isn't exactly talking nonsense: they are expressing an anxiety from somewhere else, around the arrival of a "tech" they don't understand. A technological response doesn't discharge the actual anxiety.

One answer to this would be for technologists to keep their feet on the ground, and, at the end of his book, Wylie begins to sketch out some thoughts of what an "ethical computing" might look like.

The hitch with this is that it's easier to tell what's unethical in hindsight. The idea of what is "ethical" is collective. In effect, we are asking technologists to mobilise unconscious content — around the things we see as "good" and in its shadow. A small number of people make huge sums of money from being at the forefront of technology and many more make a very comfortable living. That is a huge incentive to keep things out of consciousness. The Faust myth is a reminder that we have been here before.

For now, the way forward might be in recognising that technology isn't abstract and is a product of human culture(s) — which means beginning to engage with our limitedness, rather than assume it is something from which technology will liberate us.

Postscript (post presentation)
I normally write a paper (to discipline my thoughts), then extract notes from it, as an *aide memoire*, and speak from the notes. I started doing this for my paper at ISPSO 2016, when I was speaking on elections as psychotic processes on the day after the Brexit referendum. To "read" what I had written, ignoring both the result of that vote, and the first reactions in the conference, would have felt absurd. This manner of presenting ties what I am saying into the process of the group --- and makes it easy for me to

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adapt, rather than seem to silence the group --- if something happens in the room (such as someone interrupting). For this paper, I was expecting to see people in the Zoom gallery view as I spoke, but that was switched off, so all I saw on my screen was my own face. I went from a sense of connecting with people across the world, in a conference focussed on Australia, to sitting in my flat and talking to myself. Quite literally, this went from "finding my space in the (online) group" to "does the group exist?". I'm torn between describing this in terms of Lacan's Mirror Stage, with the primary experience of the group shifting to the Imaginary, and basic assumption me-ness.

I'm also struck that I only realised after presenting that I had pulled these ideas together on the assumption that presenting online is the same as presenting in person.

Together these feel as if I had walked into a condensation between reality (a group that happens to be meeting online) and a computer-mediated reality (an image in a computer screen). That that condensation happened without me thinking about it (given the subject of this paper) might say a lot about how seductive the computer-mediated reality can be. In Lacanian language, I am wondering whether this might be worth thinking about in terms if "the Imaginary standing in place of the Symbolic".

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An Exploration of the Uncanny and Mystical Influences on Leadership. In the Context of Rising Technological Complexity and Declining Organisational Certainty.

Mr Noel McQuaid

Doctoral Candidate, Tavistock and Portman, UK

Noel McQuaid (Doctoral candidate) has over 10 years' experience working with adults and adolescents within NHS mental health services and in private practice, having trained in psychodynamic counselling. He is a graduate of the Tavistock D10 Masters programme and is currently working as a team leader, group facilitator and manager within the public sector.

> *"O the mind, mind has mountains; cliffs of fall*
>
> *Frightful, sheer, no-man-fathomed. Hold them cheap*
>
> *May who ne'er hung there."*
>
> 'No worst, there is none. Pitched past pitch of grief,"
> Gerard Manley Hopkins (2002)

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to enter an area of research which has the potential to be both uncomfortable and contentious in its value to the future of work. An area to which most individuals and organisations too readily look away. That is the issue of uncanny or mystical experiences in the influence of leadership thinking, particularly in the context of rising technological complexity and declining organisational certainty. However, before venturing into what might prove to be a novel topography in relation to the psychosocial influences at work, it would be useful to acknowledge the seeds of the research and define what uncanny or mystical experiences refer to in the context of work.

Metaphors are often used as a way of succinctly framing and describing organisational change, for example, 'We are in the foothills, but as a team we can reach the summit together'. Indeed, Gareth Morgan's seminal work, Images of Organization (1986) brought into focus how dominant metaphors, such as organisation as machine or psychic prison can profoundly influence thinking and seeing in an organisation.

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However, corporate generated metaphors are often seen as alternative management, not allowing for what Schechner (1993) refers to as a looseness, unbalancing and rebalancing, enabling processing of anxiety and novel thinking. It was initially this disparity between prescribed organisational and naturally emergent metaphoric forms that seemed a potentially useful area of research in relation to changing organisational structures. However, what became apparent was an area of influence which people were reluctant to speak of in a work setting. What I am referring to is a 'something more' which Grotstein (2007), describing the work of Bion, calls the 'mysterious lurking within the obvious', the experience of the uncanny and mystical at work. This suggested a research opportunity, to discover in the gaps of configured space, what Kupers (2011) suggests is a source of creativity hidden in the mundane.

An uncanny experience for an individual could be thought of as a psychic disruption to their frame of reference, the assumptions by which we all gain a sense of self in the world. For example, a chair appearing to move of its own accord, or if a tree appeared to suggest a thought, would likely cause such disruption. Therefore, such an experience might be responded to with dismissal or rationalisation in order to maintain a sense of equilibrium.

Mystical experiences on the other hand, might be thought of more positively, as those which leave the individual with a feeling of having glimpsed a larger benign reality. However, while both experiences might alter future perspectives, they are equally likely to be viewed as private and a taboo in relation to work. Lee and Renzetti (1990) also suggest that thinking which challenges vested interests of powerful people, regarding dominant and social control, is an area that may prove threatening. Therefore, exploring the influence of such uncanny and mystical experiences, particularly for an individual in the role of leadership, might elicit shame from exposed subjugation or repression, particularly if they believe such recalling may make them less in control.

Nevertheless, the issue of such experiences, described by Jentsch (1906) as a disorientation resulting from encountering the unusual, which excludes explanation and whose origin is unknown or unknowable, led to Freud's (1919b) paper The Uncanny'.

Freud's paper draws with great eloquence the idea of 'heimlich', the friendly intimacy and security woven into the idea of home, which also is the source of concealed secrets and to 'unheimlich', a source of uncanny feelings. He quotes Schelling's idea that the divine may be veiled with unheimlich, as well as acknowledging the inaccessibility of such knowledge. While not subscribing to such mysticism, Freud still appeared to find significance in that heimlich has another side, one which, while potentially unfriendly, might also be revealing. The phrase 'curiosity killed the cat' takes on a new meaning in that light.

Yet Freud appears to favour defining the uncanny experience as being a revival of repressed infantile complexes, perhaps emphasising a rational certainty as to the origin. Barnaby (2015) points out however, at the time Freud was also writing 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', as well as being pursued by his rivals Adler and Jung, so may not have wished to risk being thought of as 'unknowing'.

What I am suggesting is the hidden value in what Beyes & Steyaert (2013) refer to as 'unciting'. When an uncanny experience can produce disjuncture, a moment of 'unknowing', which if taken without dismissal

could lead to an alternative vision, a different viewpoint. As Beyes & Steyaert example, the resistance act of the Flaneur who walks the city as if part of the system, but suspended within it, open to unseen possibilities, as well as to the uncanny and mystical encounters.

For me, one such example of an 'unciting' experience occurred in a consultation, working with a leadership group going through an organisational merger. While in a moment of what Bion (1962a) terms 'reverie', I was disturbed by the mental image of a bride standing before a mirror. The experience was a moment of a dream like state, which was very disturbing in the context of a boardroom. While the intruding vision led to the emergence of creative metaphors from the leadership group and a working through the hopes and fears of the organisational merger, what felt most disturbing to me was the unknown source of the image. This was not for me the first such unsettling. There have been many others I've never spoken about, for fear of alienation or revealing cracks in the professional facade. Unfortunately, more often than not, such experiences have been rationalised as a result. However, they appear to be evidence of a mental drive to reach into the unknown, to see what might reach back. Such a drive that perhaps equates to the 'destiny drive' of Bollas (1989), a reaching out in search of a personal idiom. I suggest such unsettling experience contains an element of what Bion (1962a) refers to as meeting with the 'contact barrier', the point between conscious and the infinite dimensions of the unconscious. Yet I was left feeling that I might have made better use of at experience, had I been able to tolerate it longer. Might the unsettling encounter with the 'unknown' have proved more beneficial revealing a deeper significance regarding the organisational context in a period of turmoil, the truth in the mirror?

Perhaps I'd glimpsed the homely, becoming unhomely and in that moment experienced a dissolution of boundaries between physical and psyche, known and unknown. What might be valuable however is not the ability to label such experience as the return of the repressed, or a primitive belief in the inanimate becoming animate, but the realisation that in unsettling moments of contact with the unknown / unknowable 'other', there might be emergent alternative frames of reference, nestled within the Heimlich view. However, the subject of uncanny and mystical experiences in the context of leadership development, appears to be a particularly strong taboo. This is evidenced by how fervently both Freud and Klein articulated that uncanny and mystical experiences were direct evidence of pathology. The implied boundary being, that to suggest such experience could be otherwise and possibly lead to alternative perspectives, was to court expulsion by the prevailing psychoanalytic community. For example, Bion's suggestion of a mystical dimension, in his (1965) publication Transformations', where he first introduced his concept of an ultimate reality he termed 'O', was seen to have a direct impact on his professional relationship with Klein, and his resulting dislocation from home, in his move to America, as noted by Grotstein (2007).

Some leaders in psychoanalysis, such as Wilfred Bion and Carl Jung, actively acknowledged the importance of such experiences in their work which might stretch beyond the realm of the unconscious, embracing the potential of such unknown. Indeed, Bion was not alone in challenging the boundaries of psychoanalysis later in their careers, perhaps when they felt more open to challenging the established thinking. As Merkur (2009) outlines, a significant cohort of analysts took to exploring

aspects of an 'outward way' view of mysticism in their later years. Whilst Freud equated the fear of the uncanny to that of 'castration anxiety', what appears clear is that there is a potential risk, which may extend beyond professional development. The isolation of staying with an unstable situation or thought, waiting as Grobman (2005) suggests for a solution to emerge, is apt to be experienced as opening oneself to unbearable primitive and basic feelings, such as ontological and existential uncertainty.

While this may open what Stacey (1992) refers to as the creative potential of chaos, it also risks what the effects of 'non-linearity', where a small change could have disproportionate effect, be it in the individual, organisational system or the cultural response. Yet Bion promoted the ability to slow down, when there is pressure for action, as a form of 'negative capability'. Bion (1970) used this phrase to signify a quality of being in uncertainty as a means of promoting 'unknown', is one which could potentially enable leadership to step out beyond the dimension of the known, into the territory of uncanny and mystical experience and the emergence of alternative perspectives. However, to momentarily reach by thought into such a vortex, at the chaotic boundary of the unconscious, is to reach into the infinite and potentially have something, perhaps at a quantum level, reach the other way. No wonder then, that leaders might wish to dismiss such fleeting thoughts.

At the outset of this paper I quoted part of a poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins which describes the edge of sanity but might well describe the experience of suspension in the unknown. Such a state of mind as Bion (1997) describes being below the level of words requires a strength of inquiring leadership to bear it, let alone seek it. To begin with it takes what Bollas (1989) refers to as an essential ruthlessness not too immediately be drawn to associate, but to stay suspended in the hope of the 'unthought known', with the risk of emergence from a reality such as Bion's 'O'.

Samuel (2012) suggests that the same rules apply to an organisation as to a biological entity, that there is the inevitable entropy resulting in death. If not an outright disappearance, then a merger with something else or even a reconfiguration. The alternative however is difficult to hold in mind and Kahn (2017) evidences how organisations suffer greatly in their denial of an end, with unexpressed feelings often speeding up the organisation's demise. Kahn (2017) also proposes that one response to such overwhelming experience, is manic activity. Might therefore, the increase in data collection, the constant need for counting, be evidence of a need for defence against existential fears. Is this mania, 'turning a blind eye' in the way Steiner (1985) suggests, is not so much repression, but denial which needs collective silence to enable concealment. As Denhardt (1981) points out, such denial may enable organisations to be seen as the rational planning of things with providing ocular proof in preference to being curious of the potentiality at the edge of uncanny or mystical experience. It is hard to countenance the value of irrationality being tolerated in a culture of 'what can be counted, can be controlled'.

Indeed, my own initial training as an engineer, was much in line with the works of Taylor (1911), the observing of the system and making the process more efficient, to maximise profit through control of the organisational parts. However, a driving curiosity towards 'something more' lead to my becoming an experienced psychodynamic counsellor and a budding researcher. So paradoxically, whilst I do believe

there is beauty in the refining of complex systems, I also agree with Grobman's (2005) hypothesis, that the metaphor of the organisation as a machine, has failed us.

What is clear, as Krantz (2011) outlines, is that in a post-industrial information age, with the shift from fixed hierarchical boundaries to boundaryless networks, change is speeding up. With this constant change comes increased as dissolution and dislocation. The erosion of such boundaries then leading to anxiety provoking uncertainty and ontological insecurity. One might go so far as to speculate that animate and inanimate are becoming less binary with the increasing level of sociotechnical complexity. The response within many organisations, would appear to be an increase in the culture of control. For example, Power (2016) suggests that the explosion in auditing is not only aimed at avoiding disasters, but as a means of protecting against intangible fears. However, he also proposes that rather than predicting risk, thereby enabling decision- making, auditing is often provided as evidence of transparency that cannot be easily contested.

The consequences, even if unintentional, is a developing mindset which Powers (1994b) coined 'self-audit', with auditors as potential scapegoats in the event of disaster. Vaughan (2005) adds to this to suggest, that such disasters often spring from the banality of organisational life. After all, humans are not machines. Shore and Wright (2000, 2015) take this further to suggest the new world order of audits provide a means of controlling professional behaviour. A method of measurement that suggests a new form of subjectivity. It would be interesting to see what research reveals regarding such subjectivity through emergent use of technology, in the current climate of organisational turmoil, accelerated by pandemic, when work role identity is very much in flux.

My hypothesis is that in this rapid growth of one view, Taylorist in nature, with the demands imposed by technological complexity, there has been a pushing out of other forms of thinking. It is this issue of balance; I propose is central. In much the same way Bollas (1999) suggests there is a need for both parents, one who makes and enforces the rules and the other that nurtures and enables alternative views. If there is to be a restoration of equilibrium in organisational thinking, then giving voice to thoughts emanating from the chaotic edge of the 'unknown' could prove an invaluable topography to explore. This could be a developing area of outward non-binary thinking, not 'either or', but 'other'. However, it is the aspect of self-surveillance which I suggest is potentially most damaging, that experiences of leaders are not voiced, for fear of being shamed or more insidiously not being given space to develop such thoughts. The result being an eroding of the psyche from within. The subtlety of this is deftly exampled in the work of Lucey (2014), where the inability to voice experience due to an intangible colonisation of the mind, is shown to result in the stifling of confidence and novel

Thinking. The outcome of this can be seen in the work of Hoggett (2009) who outlines, that if we are to act as we are taught, without challenge and denied the room to think outside the occupying system, the resulting sense of humiliation could lead to scapegoating rather than collaboration, as well as leaders choosing not to lead, but simply to perform a role.

This diminishing of self to fit a role of leadership seems to be counterintuitive considering that institutions and groups need emergent creativity to grow, that there is a need of reaching into the

unknown. Indeed Gino (2018) makes the business case for curiosity in the Harvard Business Review. However, she also cites the leadership mindset, that it is costly and messy to encourage such curiosity, along with a belief in the focus on efficiency to be above that of exploration, being two of the main impediments to real organisational change.

It would appear to be difficult however, to go against the tide, in an age driven by data and the sense of security it offers. It would be tempting to leave unchallenged Freud's view that mysticism be dismissed as ignorance and the uncanny viewed as intellectual uncertainty, both dispelled with the 'knowing' of pathology. The resulting reluctance to challenge, based on fears of origin and existential anxiety, would appear to make it simply expedient that leadership dismiss such irrational thoughts in favour of certainty. Yet Jentsch (1906) himself suggested that we can become over reliant on the idea that what is familiar, homely, is equated with something self-evident, something known.

Recent large organisational collapses however, such as Enron, British Aerospace and Carillion, as well as the evident effects on organisations of the current pandemic, would seem to challenge that data driven certainty. While some suggest these are the natural occurring cycles of growth and demise, others propose that something more substantial is happening in the greater context.

If we take for example a system view, such as outlined by Long (2016), that person, organisation and context overlap, in an interdependent connecting field of experience, then increasing global connectivity, political unrest and the 'self-audit' culture, may provide important data regarding an over-reliance on an egocentric way of viewing things. A perspective which does not readily value experience connected to the outer boundary of context, referred to by Long as the source. Indeed, Shore & Wright (2000) suggest that we may be in a period of 'epochal cultural change' of a coercive nature, as a result of such a myopic view.

What I am proposing is that mystical and uncanny experiences perhaps offer a counterpart, an 'unknowing' perspective, one which might counteract what Gabriel (1995) identifies as a degree of prejudice towards considering mysticism in its true sense. I am referring here to the 'something more' which Merkur (2009) calls 'wholly other', a numinosity unclaimed by doctrine, an experience which is yet without words, but if held onto and reflected upon, can be a source of energy and direction. Indeed Kourie (2008) takes this further, to suggest such mystical modality is an antidote to the focus on problem solving and knowing.

Yet, this does lead to the pretendant question, if this 'something more' is a source of energy and creativity, providing alternative states of thinking, then why isn't it being used? Fenwick & Lange (1998) put forward the case that it is. They suggest that the innate need in individuals to access something of a wider context, is actively being targeted by learning programs, which cannot easily be questioned. In effect the space for authentic self, akin to what Bollas (1989) refers to as the personal idiom, is being hijacked to corporate ends. For example, the rapid rise in digital entertainment may provide alternative role identities, often with an uncanny and mystical element, but may also be an inauthentic substitute for a real need of wonderment, rather than a controlled 'unknown' with a profit driven outcome.

However, I'm suggesting that, in what seems a wry twist of fate, global connectivity may well be an impending storm that will shake us from such reliance on manufactured authenticity and towards reaching beyond the known. Stacey (1992) outlines, in the principals of chaos theory, that as tension builds within an organism, a point is reached where there is chaos prior to paradigm change. I believe that the future of work and leadership is currently located at such a point. I am suggesting therefore, that leadership would benefit in challenges to the cultural dominance with its diminishing acceptance of the unknown, such as encapsulated in the uncanny and mystical experience. This is significant, because in regard to the future of organisations, we may be at such a point of bifurcation in regard to the socio psychic relationship with technology itself. Technology may, as Watson (2002) proposes, become transhuman, with the dissolution of boundaries between human psyche, machine and system reaching a critical point. The binary nature of inanimate and animate, is itself likely to be challenged.

We may in effect be about to come face to face with our double, what Freud refers to in The Uncanny' as 'Der Doppelganger', our unencountered psychic reassurance, is perhaps on the verge of becoming present. So, I suggest the ability of leadership to open themselves to the 'unknown' has never been greater, if we are not to fall into the trap of taking the self-evident as known, as Heimlich, without paying attention to the unheimlich.

How then might we get below the polished surface of knowing, currently thought of as home? In the context of organisational leadership, how might we let go for a moment the manufactured handrail of knowing and tune in to the potential of uncanny and mystical influences hiding in plain sight.

This would be particularly poignant in the suggested prevailing acceptance of Taylorism. Any looking past its influences and ideals, might make it shameful to expose private and often deeply personal experience, shaped by what might be perceived as irrational experiences. It would seem then, that to enable leaders to 'let go' and to facilitate the expression of such hidden perspectives, the individuals' story might be key. This draws on the work of Bruner (1986) who proposes stories can hold both the organisational way of doing things, as well as 'unexpected' new ways of thinking and action in role. It also works towards addressing the issue of sensitivity, because as Gabriel (1995) suggests, story is neither conformity, nor rebellion and offers a plasticity of experience, a psychic container for emergent contradictions, complexities and emotions. Unhindered individual narrative, the leaders' story, would appear to be a means to get beyond the defended veneer of institutional knowing.

The trajectory of this research is indiscernible at its current interview stage. Although initial candidates have mostly found the methodology helpful, in exploring unspoken influences in their developing leadership. From a preliminary reading of the transcripts, there has been some perhaps predictable words, magical, mythical, spirituality and madness for example. However, even this cursory sample produced unexpected phrases such as, fracture, synchronicity, psychopathic, bogeyman and a beyond vision dimension. What does seem promising is that the eliciting or perhaps unciting, through open framed narrative, seems to reveal something of the unconsciously structured Gestalt of experience, and the influences of forces rarely spoken of, in the context of leadership.

In regard to the uncanny and mystical, I see this research as similar to the detection of an astrophysical black hole, which cannot be seen directly, but whose presence might be identifiable by noting the vibrating objects surrounding it. The analysis of the data has the potential to go off into exploratory tangents, to topics such as, the dimensions of time, quantum physics, the uncanny valley, dreaming as reality and shame as a defence against the unknown, to name a few.

Whatever the final emerging themes might be, in the exploration there is the hope to pull free of the gravity of our embeddedness in complex sociotechnical systems and surrounding cultural fabric. By so doing, the wish would be to reach beyond the synthesis of conjoined opposites, to the chaotic edge of what Hinton (2007) refers to as the psychic black hole. The black hole presented in the overwhelming experience of something 'other', the presence of 'no thing'. Which I suggest may be evidenced through the uncanny and mystical experience.

However, what I feel is critical, is to understand how the concept of the uncanny and mystical influence, can be explored in the service of opening leadership to the 'unknown' and thereby potentially to alternative frames of reference in their thinking and developing a leadership operating from the whole, both known and unknown. The research most work towards understanding how we might regain a familiarity with the ability to 'not know' and a curiosity to what might emerge from it.

In conclusion, I believe there is much to be excited about regarding the future of work. Even with the continuing dissolution of boundaries between the human psyche, system and machine. Yet, I feel that leadership might be better prepared for such a future, with the ability to consult more openly to what might be thought of as irrational. To acknowledge experiences that might be thought of as uncanny or mystical, might prove to be valuable as a speculative dimension, challenging the reliance on binary certainty. My concern is that without a sort of re-wilding of our frames of reference leading to a more 'whole self, leadership, we may end up simply as automatons at work.

I remain optimistic that developing a culture of consultancy open to the greater context of 'unknown influences of the other', can provide leadership with the containment and space to access novel perspectives, as well to find new direction.

Finally, I think there's something deeply human about being able to experience unheimlich, perhaps to be fearful, but yet to remain curious and to reach further into the dark of the unknown.

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Weaving culture - One strand at a time

Ms Sunitha Lal

Chief Human Resources Officer, Ather Energy, India

As CHRO and head of People Operations and Strategy at Ather Energy, Sunitha Lal leads all the HR functions and is passionately exploring and curating the organizational culture. She has implemented innovative strategies and fostered a value-led culture across leadership roles. She facilitates the establishment of people processes and systems at Ather while exploring and nurturing the talent.

'Similarly, the approach we took for curating culture at our organisation was weaving strand by strand with passion, care and deliberation.'

Author Note

Sunitha Lal is currently the CHRO of Ather Energy Pvt Ltd, Bangalore, India. She is an HR leader and organization culture expert with over 25 years of experience spanning diverse industries and geographies. She is also the author of a book titled 'Dotting the Blemish and Other Stories'. Her key interests lie in Yoga, philosophy, and she is a keen proponent of the oral tradition of storytelling.

Abstract

Ather Energy is a startup that has built India's first smart and intelligent electric scooter, the Ather 450. We realised early on that to create great products; we need a culture that fosters it. So about 2.5 years* ago, against the backdrop of launching the vehicle, designing an ownership experience, setting up a supplier ecosystem, and navigating regulations – we held what we call "Culture Conversations (CC 1.0)" about what Ather represents to its members.

We approached this bottom-up, talking to team members across age, tenure, experience, gender and through different arrangements - 1x1s, dyads, triads, groups. This exercise brought out data on how information flowed; decisions were made, ideas nurtured, and importantly, what worked and what didn't. We began categorising this data into

- Our essence to hold
- Stardust to seek
- Baggage to drop

A synthesis of all this information led to 'Think As A Species' (TAAS) - Our culture collective, our secret sauce.

*Since the Abstract has been published, the culture-building journey has extended from 2.5 to 3 years.

Further, we gave TAAS a visual identity, created artifacts, published stories on the intranet and social media; made it a part of hiring, performance management, rewards, recognition, and capability building programs - believing that these little things will eventually come together to strengthen our cultural fabric.

In June 2019, we launched CC 2.0 to understand how our leaders and team members experienced TAAS. Sentiment and thematic analyses of this data gave us insights into the state of the system and an ongoing action plan.

This year, as we prepare to scale operations and increase manufacturing footprint - balancing innovation with scale, we have taken up integrating critical processes in the organization with TAAS as one of our uber goals.

While we have tried a lot of things, one thing that hasn't changed is our approach towards culture: like a weaver weaving the exquisite Kanchipuram silk sari - strand-by-strand, with care and deliberation.

Keywords: culture, values, electric vehicle, Ather Energy.

Weaving Culture - One Strand at a Time

I am Sunitha Lal, Chief Human Resources Officer of Ather Energy, Bengaluru, India. This paper is about documenting Ather's journey of culture-building over the last 3 years. One of the reasons we are calling this paper 'Weaving Culture' is because we used the metaphor of weaving a saree throughout our journey. When we talk of weaving, the one thing that comes to my mind is the Kanchipuram silk saree. I think the beauty of the entire saree is in the deliberation and thought put in by the weaver to first create a 'picture in mind', and then translate it with care and patience to a tapestry on the loom. Similarly, culture building starts with what is the 'picture in the mind' of the organization we wish for, and the time and effort we're willing to spend on creating it.

In most organizations, business objectives like bottom line, optimizing cash flows, increasing productivity and profitability takes priority over culture building. However, in the case of Ather, we had a solid head start - the young founders had steadfast views on culture and its impact on the business plan right from the inception of the organization. We have always looked at culture-building as a journey and not an intervention - there is no ideal destination to get to nor is there a prize or reward to do it. Just like the Kanchipuram saree, the intent is to ensure that the outcomes and processes stand the test of time.

Historically, cultures that navigate harsh realities are the ones which articulate their values and first principles early on in their journey, and bolster these beliefs through creative expression in artifacts, signs, symbols, architecture, art, and folklore. Similarly, for us, all the work around our culture collective - Think as a Species (TAAS) - is towards responding to needs of the organization. The way Ather chooses to respond is by working with the challenges, dichotomies, and vulnerabilities that come our way while building an organization, rather than shunning them or ignoring them.

This paper explores how we've curated culture at Ather and how we have created experiences and systems that reinforce the cultural collective. The paper comprises three broad sections - the first and empirical level of data based on my own experiences of interacting and engaging with the organisation. Second, the theoretical section, exploring propositions, basic assumptions, implicit theories, and processes that emerged from these discussions. Third, the practice-oriented level of actions, interventions, and methodologies set in place to sustain, curate, and confront these assumptions.

Who We Are

We are an India-based Electric two-wheeler design and manufacturing company, operating in a nascent industry. We believe that the future of mobility is electric and connected. The company was started in 2013 by Tarun Mehta and Swapnil Jain, two Engineering graduates straight out of college, with the dream of challenging the well established Internal Combustion Engine (ICE) and replacing it with an electric drive. The product line includes India's first line of truly intelligent, high-performance electric scooters - the Ather 450 & Ather 450X, which are complemented by a comprehensive public charging network, Ather Grid, and a network of experience centers called 'Ather Space'

Image 1: Our co-founders - Swapnil Jain and Tarun Mehta (from the left)

Ather is one of the very few start-ups to actually have a product which is an amalgamation of a clean design philosophy, software engineering, and hardware engineering in an environment like automotives, more specifically 2-wheelers. We have filed 47 patent applications in India, 5 international patent applications, and 123 design registrations. The 450 & 450X are equipped with a touchscreen interactive dashboard and an integrated app that allows first-in-its-category features like onboard navigation, remote diagnostics, and over-the-air (OTA) updates for future improvements. The vehicle performance matches IC Engine scooters in India in some areas and sets higher performance and feature benchmarks in most performance metrics.

Image 2: Ather 450X - Our flagship product

We have designed every touchpoint in the EV ecosystem to deliver a consistent and seamless consumer experience, right from creating a battery management system to an appealing retail experience to a hassle-free ownership experience. 2020 marks an important year for us as we expand our distribution network by setting up dealerships across India and a new manufacturing facility to ramp up production capacity.

As an organisation, we believe all this was made possible by a bunch of curious & crazy folks. Crazy for us doesn't mean losing our mind but about what we find - crazy as a solution for a given problem. Incidentally, across the organization in all leadership layers you will find young leaders as peers alongside colleagues who come with years of experience from the industry.

We realized early on that to create great products, we will need a culture that fosters it. So about 2.5 years ago, against the backdrop of launching the vehicle, designing an ownership experience, setting up a supplier ecosystem, and navigating regulations, Ather took its focused step towards culture-building by hiring a CHRO.

Where it All Began

From a systems-thinking perspective, culture needs to be conceptualized as a working system of three components. First, culture is a component of a (social) system, and interacts with other parts (administrative, operational, economic, psychological) of a common structure in which it may be subordinate, equal, or superordinate. Second, culture is the symbolic environment of a system. Finally, culture can also be a process or a mechanism defining the relationship between operational and interpersonal processes.

The basic questions to be addressed in these terms are straightforward: what is culture, where is culture located, how does culture work, and how do we continuously study, curate, and engage with culture. Here is my attempt at answering these questions in our organisation's context based on the systems-thinking perspective, keeping conscious structures and unconscious processes in mind.

Unsettling nature of change - System's reaction to my role and being

Right from its inception, the wish of the founders has been to create a great organization, influenced by an open systems model, known for its technology, products and culture.

During my entry into the organisation in 2017, all conversations with the founders were about them expressing the desire to create an awesome organization. Not only the founders, but everyone I met before my onboarding at Ather also expressed the same desire.

However, I got my first glimpse of the kind of assumptions that the group held about my role very soon. Two days before I joined the organization, one of my 'to be' team members connected with me as part of the onboarding process. He informed me how his team member was surprised that he was getting a manager, the question he was asked by the team member was, 'why do you need a manager'. He informed me that his response was, 'do not worry, I am getting a manager but nothing changes for you'. This incident sort of gave me an idea of what is coming my way as I entered the organization.

When I joined, the members in the organization had three ways of reacting to me and my role - curious, not bothered, and polite. Some pockets were polite, unconsciously a sophisticated way of othering. Some were curious to know how my role would add value. Many pockets were not even curious, they did not think my role was needed. Clearly, while the need for the role was felt in the logical part of the organization, the unsettling nature of change that this role might bring in was met with resistance and anxiety.

As I sat down to make sense and contemplate on the reasons for these reactions, I realised that:

1. the team was predominantly a group of young, argumentative men who continued to treat the organisation as if it were an extension of their college.
2. they strongly believed that "Engineering is the only key to our success"
3. they believed they did not need any grey-haired person to tell them what to do. They already had an awesome culture, and they didn't want anyone to take credit for it.

And there I was...a woman, almost fifty, grey hair, non-engineer. I stood as a contradiction to what the organization strongly believed till then. This created high resistance, anxiety, and ambivalence towards my role and my presence.

Transitional Space

When we think of culture or change, the underlying psychological dimension is never well estimated, nor is it fully or partially worked with. Change can stir in many of the people involved, even those strongly committed to the organization, deep feelings of uneasiness and even fear. While these feelings are normal, they can manifest as a denial of the impending change and resistance to the change.

Interestingly, the year I joined Ather was also an important year for the organisation. On the cusp of growth, we were transitioning into a young organisation from a start-up. We had a consumer product that was to be launched and we were on the road to revenue generation. We were also looking at exponential growth in headcount and physically moving to a bigger facility.

Thus, in the system, there was high anxiety and trepidation that comes with momentous change. This translated into a fear of loss of intimacy with the founders. Team members who had joined earlier were experiencing separation from the founders or the core, as they felt a sense of missing out on information. They also felt they were becoming one among the many and experienced a loss of protection and privilege. Hence, conversations around culture with me, in a way, became a transitional space. A holding place as we move from being a start-up to a young organisation. We needed to start on a journey moving away from a person-based culture focused on individual excellence and omnipotence to one based on mutual purpose and equivalence.

Intentional Culture Building

Up till this point, the system had its own assumptions of what the group was there to do or to be. These were not conscious, nor were they acknowledged or spoken about. But they were powerful. What kind of processes do I then need to introduce to transition the system from organic to intentional culture building; from being to becoming? It was also time to see if there were any accidental/ toxic/ hidden pieces that got built into the system.

Arriving at TAAS

In one of my first meetings on culture building, I happened to be wearing a Kanchipuram Silk Sari and I used that as an analogy to break down our approach to culture building. The team was a bit shocked to hear about the weaving of a saree in an office set-up. They thought it was a 'woman thing' and that I would stop soon and that it would go away. There were awkward laughs and shifting of eyes.

Thankfully, the analogy did not go away. We worked with it, and today most of our leaders use it without realizing how hard this journey was going to be when it was first introduced.

Why a sari? In India, Kanchipuram silk saris are known for their golden borders, traditional motifs, and designs. The creation of a saree begins with the picture in the mind of a weaver - who then puts in painstaking efforts to identify the richest threads, gets the thread-count right, sets up the loom perfectly,

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dyes the silk in bright and bold colours, and hand-weaves each strand in a manner that creates a beautiful saree. This woven masterpiece defies age and use, and eventually every wearer of the sari cherishes this tapestry of efforts as a family heirloom.

To me, the approach we need to take to curate culture also requires us to weave strand-by-strand, with passion, care, and deliberation. The strands can be the decisions we make, the processes we set, the policies we follow, the language we use, or the patterns we approve.

One of the first strands that we picked up to weave the fabric of our culture was 'Culture Conversations': a 'new tradition' of having open and spirited conversations around culture.

Culture Conversations 1.0

The idea of using Culture Conversations began with wanting to unpack and understand what is in the mindspace (picture in the mind) of team members when they say 'culture of Ather', 'this is Ather', 'this is not Ather'. This was also a way to work with the resistance and ambivalence that the system had been signalling.

While we could have gone the typical route of using surveys or sitting only with the founders/leaders to define our values, we did not want to restrict ourselves to that. We reached out to a sample size of team members across the organisation and used a free-flowing format emphasising rich qualitative data. This strategy offered a way of making the subsequent outcomes more recognizable to team members and served as a structure for discussions within the company on cultural themes.

Culture Conversations 1.0 (CC1.0) were essentially meetings across various groups of the organization. Each conversation was meant to explore the construct of the organizational models the team holds in their minds.

- *How do the first fifty team members, who worked from very early on in the organization, see Ather's evolution from a lab in the college to an organization now?*
- *How are the rest viewing our journey as they join the organisation - were they struggling to find their space or voice?*

To unravel these assumptions and confront these undercurrents, we approached this bottom-up, talking to team members across age, tenure, experience, and gender through different arrangements - one-on-ones, dyads, triads, and focussed group discussions. This brought out data on how information flowed, decisions were made, ideas nurtured, and importantly, what worked and what didn't. With over 41 culture conversations spanning 38 hours and covering 30% of the organisation, we had a ton of data to explore.

We began discovering concepts and categorising all this data into:

- Essence to hold (things that we are good at and we would want to retain) - Celebration of ownership, innovation, no frills, first principle thinking, question the status quo, approachability, dynamism, future loving

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- **Stardust to seek** (things that we do not practice now and need to improve on) - Improve decision making process, become more effective, be better at communication, accept newcomers more openly
- **Baggage to drop** (things that inadvertently got built and need to be left behind) - lack of inclusivity, more of the same, explicitly engineering implicitly smarts, being judgemental, sub-system focus

While these themes provided immediate opportunities to address, what were the values we were demonstrating as an organisation? How do we triangulate all the other inputs to arrive at values that define and determine Ather's existence?

Curating TAAS

Stitching together previously intuitive thoughts, wrestling with the difficult task of expressing these themes, and forming associations from the minds and expressions of our own team members, we arrived at a substantive value umbrella that we hold sacrosanct today:

'Think As A Species' (TAAS) - Ather's culture collective, our secret sauce - defining who we are, the way we work, and the way we aspire to live - our values and behaviours.

In typical Ather fashion, most of our values also echo and borrow from themes in 'pop culture.' For example, 'Think As a Species' is borrowed from the movie *Interstellar*. Some values and behaviours are verbatim from the culture conversations - they captured the sense and essence of our culture perfectly. To reduce any unconscious assumptions, we also defined behavioural indicators for each value.

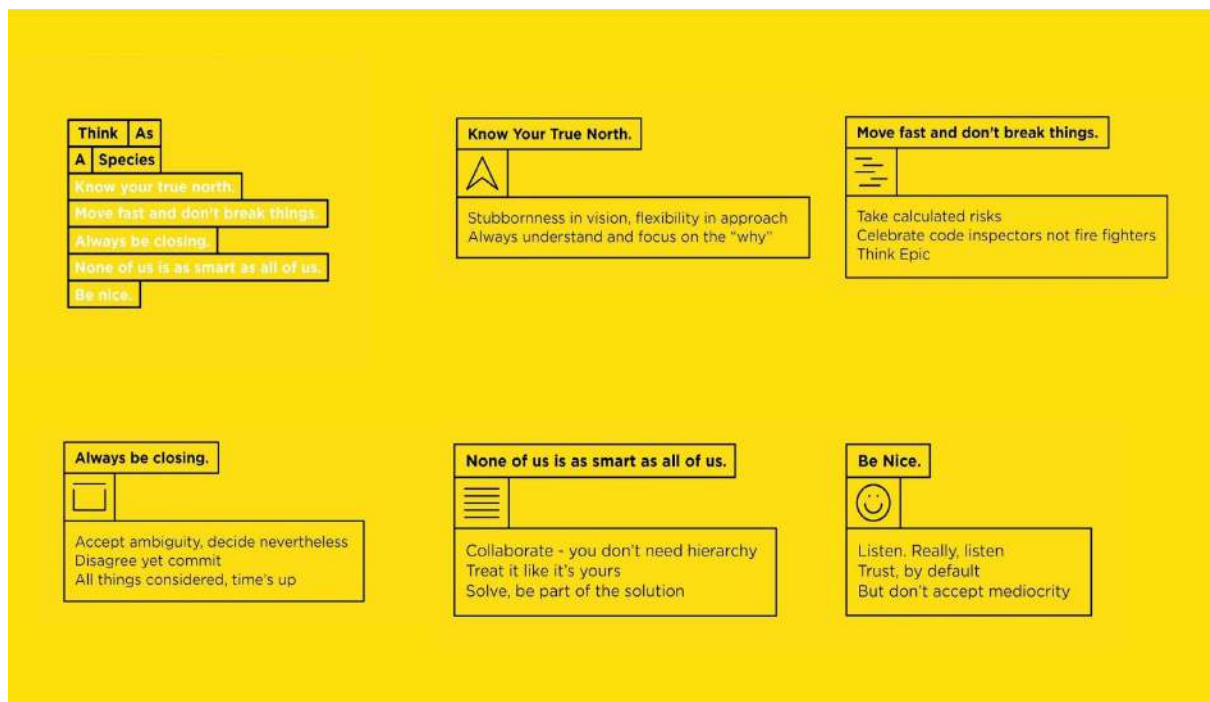Here's an explanation of the source from where TAAS is coming from:

Image 3: TAAS - our cultural umbrella

Know Your True North

Stubbornness in Vision, Flexibility in Approach. Our vision - to make the future of commute electric - is a state of the future that is obvious and inevitable. We are completely bought into it. Our approach is a continuous process of being aligned to this vision and, at the same time, being open to identifying better options to achieve this goal and not be stuck to one way of decision making alone.

Always Understand and Focus on the "Why". Knowing the true north comes from understanding the 'why'; essentially encouraging first principles thinking. It is easy to get carried away by the 'what' and the 'how' of a problem or a decision but knowing the 'why' and explaining it to others makes alignment possible. The focus is in setting context always.

Move Fast and Don't Break Things

Take Calculated Risks. Just like our products, our organisation also has interconnected subsystems. While the risk is taken by one subsystem, it forces the other subsystems downstream and upstream to adjust to the change in specs and timelines; so it is important to take calculated risks. Ownership and thinking through are essential.

Celebrate Code Inspectors Not Fire Fighters. We have a bias for action, but it has to come on the foundation of planning and with an eye for detail. The DNA and pride of the organization should be on planning meticulously and executing to perfection

Think ~~task~~ Epic. It is imperative to think long term. The excitement and the scariest part is in thinking ahead, thinking towards the future, and thinking beyond the obvious.

Always Be Closing

Accept Ambiguity, Decide Nevertheless. Decision making is influenced by many variables. While we want logic and data to be the underpinning factors for a rational model, we also have to realize that at times we might not have all the answers, but that shouldn't stop us from making decisions.

Disagree, yet Commit. Disagreements are welcome, but once a call is taken, it is imperative that we commit to the plan.

All Things Considered, Time's Up. Watch out for analysis paralysis - Data and opinions can be churned out forever but adjust to the ambiguity and act.

None of Us is as Smart as All of Us

Collaborate - You Don't Need Hierarchy. One person can't play Superman rescuing Lois Lane all the time – Responsibility ≠ Power. Break the Silos.

Treat it Like it's Yours. It's not about competing with your teammates, other departments, etc. but about doing the best you can do for Ather and its future. Take ownership of your decisions and of the organisation.

Solve, Be Part of the Solution. Develop a cross-functional way of working. Most people at Ather prefer a technical challenge to channel their brilliance. It is important to channel energy equally towards the plan's execution and stand together for solving.

Be Nice

Listen. Really, listen. Listening is not about hearing or waiting to talk; it is about being there in the moment and understanding thoughts and feelings and paying attention to where the other person is coming from.

Trust, by Default. It is easy to trust within one's subsystems but what creates a cohesive organization is trust across subsystems.

But don't accept mediocrity. Let us not confuse being nice with accepting mediocrity. Let us not settle for anything less than excellence from ourselves and others, so that we continue to excel as individuals and deliver excellence for the organisation.

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Weaving TAAS - The Big Little Things

"The paradox of organisational culture lies in the fact that, while it makes a big difference, it is comprised of small actions, habits, choices, and behaviours." - *Margaret Heffernan, Beyond Measure*

Culture as a system of ideas is manifested in its cognitive structures, processes, and products. Our first step towards making these processes obvious was taking the whole organisation through the process and outcomes of Culture Conversations 1.0 and Think As a Species.

After this, it was time to focus on the big little things behind culture-building - to shape processes, set up systems, and build our values into the fabric of the organisation's ways of work. It was time to set up a loom to support culture weaving.

Visual Identity for TAAS

While CC1.0 helped crystallize our values and resulted in our culture collective 'Think As A Species', the next strand was around making TAAS a brand, to give it better recall - with its own visual identity, logo, color schemes, iconography etc. After several design iterations, we were happy that we found a visual identity to give life to our values.
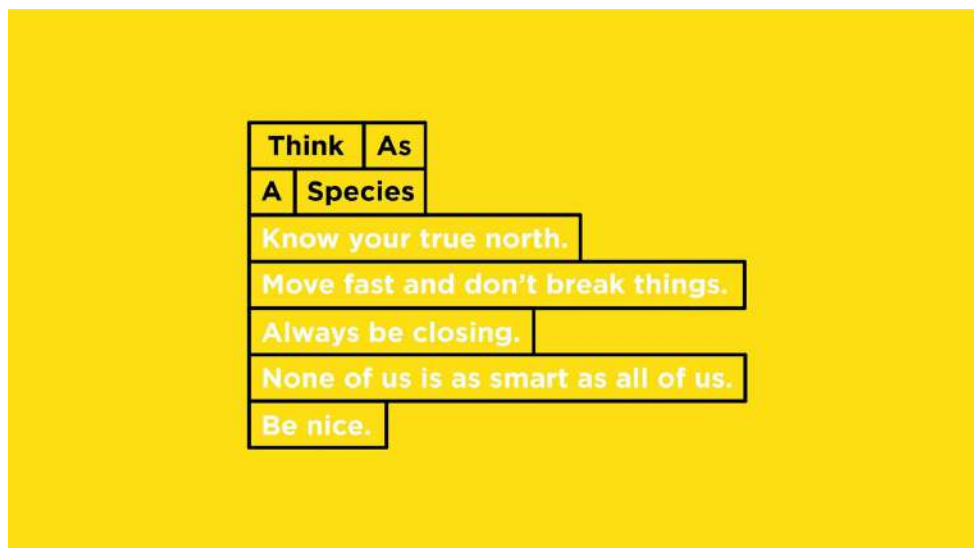

Image 4: Visual identity of TAAS

While "Think as a Species" represents the collective, the logo represents the diversity in the blocks that build Ather. These odd-sized blocks are symbols of the inherent diversity as an organization – be it age, experience, skills, personalities. The color yellow is used to signify the vibrancy of Ather's culture.

Thus, calling out our ambivalence for diversity has to end, and realising that our wish for collective will happen only if we are able to recognize and engage with the 'other'.

TAAS Mascot - Ogg

Further, to build on this visual identity and to create a folklore that stands the test of time, all our team members came together as a collective to create a wall art around TAAS. The team felt that the International Space Station was a true depiction of TAAS - it is a global collaboration symbolizing the efforts of many nations and represents one of humanity's greatest hallmarks of thinking as a species. (Appendix A contains the Story of Ogg). These ideas coming together as a mural was a very symbolic way of not only the journey of the species, but the power of the collective.

Today, this wall acts as a totem, each brushstroke representing each individual and our own collective standing the test of time. When new members join the organization and are staring at this wall in wonder, there is somebody around to take them through Ogg's story and through Ogg give a visual journey of Ather's culture.

Image 5: Painting our TAAS mascot - Ogg

Folklore

We also began intentionally collecting stories that could become folklore around our values. These stories that featured on our intranet - Interstellar - focused on real-world application of TAAS values in day-to-day scenarios, be it leadership decisions or incidents from the assembly line. Through these stories, we bring to the fore people who live the values and also reflect on the way we should approach problems, make decisions, and arrive at solutions (Appendix B elaborates on some of these stories).

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For the long haul

Up to Speed. In our haste to deliver and meet timelines, we sometimes missed the big culture shift faced by those joining us from traditional auto OEMs, non-engineering backgrounds or other diverse groups. To ease this transition, we created a new member assimilation program called 'Up to Speed' that educates both managers and team members on unlearning and relearning these assumptions, aligning to the True North, and solving for the community (Species).

FAME. A reward program 'First Among Equals' (FAME) was also rolled out for team members who have lived our values in the way they make decisions, performed for the team and organisation, and demonstrated great potential. FAME helps us identify and applaud those who bring a distinguished value addition to the Ather story.

Vector. Vector is our performance management program. It relies on conversations, with the underlying belief that better context leads to better understanding, thus better engagement. This philosophy was curated keeping in mind the magnitude and direction people can take and achieve, and paints a picture of how choices we make at work reflect our values, and ultimately, how that impacts our goals.

The way the process works is that the leadership team prepares and arrives at Uber goals for the organization at the start of the financial year. These goals, and their timelines are then explained, discussed and cascaded to the teams and all its members by the functional heads and managers to become our True North, and are reviewed every quarter. Between two reviews there is also a place for check-in for members and managers to have conversations.

Self-directed groups

We also introduced many self-directed groups, consisting of cross-functional team members, to come together and work on policy-making, culture curation or informal learning, in a decentralised manner and with a focus on decision making and increased ownership. Having such systems works for us because then culture building is experienced not as policing, but rather as individuals passionately working towards building a great org.

Working Committee on Culture. These are our foot-soldiers driving interventions and tapping into feedback from all corners on TAAS. They support culture building through influence rather than power, and shape and drive our TAAS goals year-on-year.

Policy Committee. This working group builds the essence of TAAS into our corporate policies. The backbone of all our policies is fairness, transparency, trust, and explaining the 'why'. The idea is to request team members not to outsource their ability to think and act or for us to police their behaviour - giving strength to one's personal authority or judgement.

Learning Assistance. This Committee supports and provides monetary assistance to those pursuing self-development needs which are in alignment with the organisation's goals.

Little Big Things

While those were some of the big strands of the culture fabric that we curated, we didn't lose focus on the smaller strands that require attention.

Catching them young. Very few companies believe that engineering (or more broadly building) can actually be the source of massive value creation, despite almost all modern enterprises tracing their origin to new developments or products. The few companies who do, more often than not, end up as consultancies. We wanted to build and actually be the folks driving this change and not just watch from the sidelines. This is why we wanted to invest in and build a student community - whether we hire them or not - by introducing them to our ethos, offering mentorships with our engineers, and a chance to visit/work in our labs. Campus hires are an important talent pool for us. These young minds bring in loads of raw enthusiasm and an innovative streak that is absolutely important for a company that is trying to put out products that solve real-world problems in the energy domain.

Informal learning. Our work is the central arena of our organizational life, energized equally by the requirements of customers and our own capabilities as an organization. However, in order to become an open system, we also needed to take the time out to create shared learning experiences. 'The Boring Conference' is one such platform where team members who are enthusiasts or experts in any field share their experiences with the group - be it bird-watching, illuminating a village in Ladakh, ethical eating, or neuroplasticity. We also facilitate 'Book Reviews' to create a space for book lovers and learners, so we can all explore uncharted literary terrains through thought-provoking reads. We also host 'Auto for All' sessions for those not familiar with the engineering side of things at Ather. This is a forum to hear about the science behind how auto subsystems function, why they must work that way, and what happens when they don't.

Together, these 'big little things' and 'little big things' helped us set up systems and processes that can bridge the gap between our Baggage to Drop and the Stardust to Seek (from our first set of Culture Conversations). More importantly, they surfaced assumptions held by the group and created spaces to engage with and converse about these unconscious processes.

Culture Conversations 2.0: Exploring where we are

It had now been 2 years since we started on our culture journey. From arriving at TAAS to weaving it into our organisational fabric, we have come a long way. But to continue this journey, we wanted to go back to see what's playing out consciously and unconsciously in the system - it was time for another set of Culture Conversations.

Did we move the needle from CC1.0?

All the things we had done so far were about creating strands - spaces to engage and exchange. And they had produced some good outcomes.

We were now mindful of "More of the same" - and thus were willing to hire and engage with teams and team members who were not replicas of ourselves. We were also conscious of not being judgemental of other subsystems. We went from being explicitly engineering-oriented to recognizing that other functions are needed if we want to build an organization. We were also starting to learn to look at the system as a whole and not just wear the lens of subsystems. This helped us make great strides in decision making and in closing.

While these were the positive shifts that happened, there were some lingering themes that still needed work. These emerged through CC2.0.

Process of CC2.0

Systems psychology dictates that systems - individual, group or social - often experience an illusion of homeostasis, although in reality, the system is in continuous disequilibrium of various degrees. As an organisation, we confront multiple challenges on a daily basis - setting up an EV ecosystem in India, interacting with local bodies to define the EV industry, creating products and infrastructure that appeal to new-age customers and partners alike, and scaling EVs in ways that match the robust legacy of internal combustion engine vehicles in India.

Confronting these challenges often create unconscious, uncontrollable, and unspoken anxieties in the system. *How do we continuously confront this unconscious set of wishes, fears, defences, fantasies, impulses and projections? How do these tensions manifest in subsystems - between the need to belong or to stay separate, and the need to get on with the task or to avoid it and the discomfort it brings?*

While we continued to maintain the spirit of hosting open and inclusive conversations, we took a more structured approach to analyse all the qualitative data that emerged by drawing up word clouds, conducting sentiment and thematic analysis. This was another way of us setting up process maturity in an organisation that was now twice the size of what it was just a year back. The system was evolving.

Using the same format of one-on-ones, dyads, triads, and focussed group discussions and covering new joiners, experienced folk, tenured and diversity groups, we hosted a series of 26 culture conversations covering 20% of the organisation. We asked questions that can surface the unconscious assumptions that the group held:

- How are you experiencing Ather? (in a single word)
- How are you experiencing TAAS (values and culture) at Ather?
- How are you experiencing the collective leadership at Ather? (no names)
- How do we make decisions based on TAAS?
- What else can we do to keep TAAS in people's minds?

What emerged (Appendix C) is a list of themes that reflected the organisation working through its basic assumptions and showcasing its vulnerabilities.

State of the system

There was a lot of data around emotions, anxieties, and cultural levers and blockers from these conversations. Some of them were great and showed the kind of progress we have made, but we also had data that was not so picture-perfect.

Identity and Subcultures. What are we? Are we a Design organization or Manufacturing organization or R&D organization? Are we a corporate or a start-up? These are frequent questions that came up as we continue to expand across spaces, grow in strength, and add more diversity to our teams.

What the system needs to realise is that these categories are not mutually exclusive and nor do we have a choice in keeping it exclusive. Thus, in this tussle of trying to define ourselves, the needs of the business, product ecosystem, and customer get relegated. And also a fantasy that we can define what we want to be, while not recognizing the needs or presence of other stakeholders.

The more important question that we have to ask ourselves is - *Do we want to be this 'closed system? Or an 'open system' where feedback from customers, suppliers, and team members is received and engaged with?*

Leaders overtly or covertly continue to encourage pockets of subcultures - leading individuals to think largely as 'Me, my department or my function'. The basic assumption of 'me-ness' is demonstrated by leaders by not playing or taking up the organisation role, but getting stuck with their functional role. Ultimately, this reticence of the leaders is experienced by the system as an unwillingness to collaborate or solve for the organization.

Fear of Process. Strong emotions and conflicting views around process - 'Process will free up resources for innovation' vs. 'Process kills innovation.' Team members are split between those who want more structure and those who fear the change. Process also continues to be associated with senior members (age), and with some 'uncool' functions.

'I have no time' is the common justification for not following process but the underlying scenario is simply a lack of desire to respect or understand the 'other'. But unconsciously, this can also be a fear of 'Will it take away my freedom?' - a wish to run our own fiefdoms.

Diversity - the Elephant in the Room. Diversity related to age, gender, experience, and leadership seems to be the elephant in the room. This is surprising because diversity by definition cannot be an elephant in the room, it is largely visible, calling attention.

The dilemma the leadership and organization are struggling with seems to be around, 'how do I convert this visible diversity to an invisible elephant in the room'. But unfortunately, we seem to trip and fall on what we wish to hide.

For example: As a team, we are aware of the big culture shift for folks joining us from traditional auto OEMs and other organizations, but we aren't doing enough to ease that transition. We seem to need their competence, but are not willing to accept the whole person. The 'hostile dependency' is displayed.

What we are missing is 'Mutuality'; sharing and appreciation without expecting or demanding for sameness. A desire not to obliterate differences or pretend they don't exist but to accept them. The realization that we are different, but still believing that each is valuable.

Leadership and Communication. Highlighting problems seem to be over-indexed, while 'solving' which was one of the behavioural indicators we articulated in TAAS was lost. Teams displayed a constant need for an omnipotent leader to resolve friction between subsystems exhibiting 'basic assumption dependency'. While the teams and leadership recognized the need for interdependencies among sub-systems, the ambiguity and resistance to engage was still very strong. This resulted in the organisation celebrating fire-fighters, instead of recognizing our code inspectors.

The dynamics of TAAS. The system half-heartedly engages with TAAS as if there is some shame attached to be working with culture. This ambivalence is shown even by the Working Committee on culture who did not want to be visible from the beginning. Many leaders also joke or shy away from TAAS. Some use it only to point out how 'others' are not living it.

The fear towards knowing and engaging with culture data seems to be high. As if engaging will mean committing, and the question seems to be, if one commits will one be held accountable thereafter.

Conclusion

Mending and evolving culture

Acting on these insights, we have increased our frequency and channels of communications to set the context and reinforce the 'why' of what we are doing - through regular org-wide 'All-Hands' (our version of a town hall meeting), 'Mini All-Hands' (functional or at team level), Podcasts called NVH (Noise Vibration & Hoarseness), Interstellar (intranet) updates, Ask Me Anything sessions, and calling out Rumours - especially since most of us are working remotely.

We have also started an Affinity Group to focus on Diversity & Inclusion. The intent is to focus on community building centered around speaking a language of inclusion and recognising that everyone is equal but not the same.

We are also helping Leaders gain better self-awareness, support recognition of their life scripts and unearthing unconscious assumptions so they can access their full leadership potential.

This year's uber goal for the organization is to see how all our key processes are aligned to TAAS. From this year, we have also created a matrix organisation structure where each function (working as verticals) focuses on building capability, and programs (working as horizontals) focus on execution. This is to realize that we can't be an exclusive design/engineering company, rather an inclusive place that values all functions.

Just as the Kanchipuram Sari has stood the test of time, we believe our approach to weaving our cultural fabric - one strand at a time; will also last. No quick fixes...we intend to weave our culture one decision at a time, one process at a time, one policy at a time, one team at a time, one member at a time...and we are aware that it is a long road ahead. As we grow, we have to keep reinforcing TAAS and make it integral to how we do things at Ather. Back to what we had stated at the beginning of the paper - Culture-building is a journey and not a destination.

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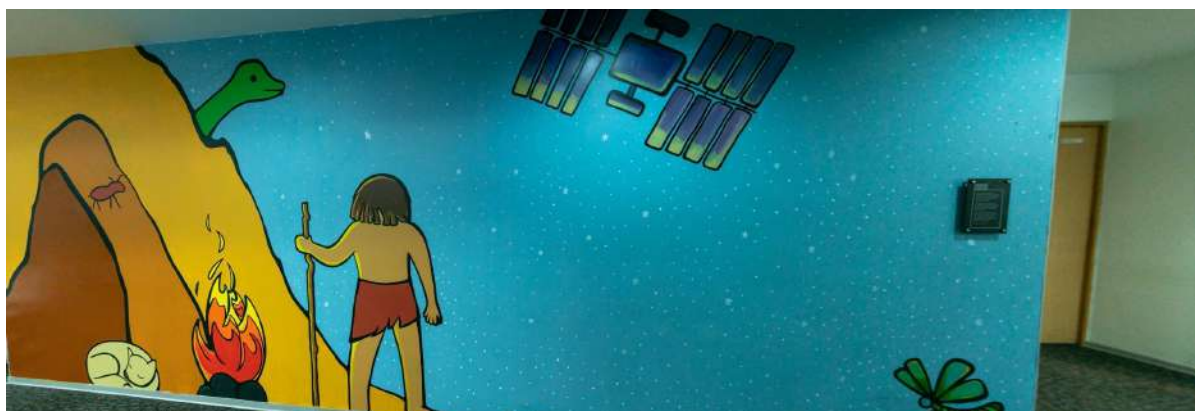
Appendices

Appendix A - The Story of Ogg

Image 6: Our TAAS Mascot - Ogg

The underlying concept of this mural was to show a slice of life as we know it - over the ages and in one frame.

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The early human standing and looking at the night sky with wonder is a representation of our innate curiosity about the mysteries of space. He stands not too far from his cave, the earliest form of shelter.

His stick is basically what evolved into all the tools that we have used through the ages. The initial draft of the tool was a spear. This changed to a stick after we thought of how the spear evolved into more advanced weaponry (even though it was mainly used for hunting in those times) which has only caused harm to mankind.

The fire outside the cave is a reminder of how life for the caveman changed - both in good and bad ways - after he learned to make fire. A glimpse of the long-necked sauropod dinosaur peeking from behind the cave takes the viewer back to prehistoric times. The same can be said about the giant dragonfly on the bottom right corner. (it is rumored in Ather, that the dragonfly is symbolic of the software and hardware bugs we have to debug on a daily basis!) The tame canine sleeping blissfully is an early domesticated wolf - the forerunner of the modern-day dog. The perfect companions to human beings as family, friends, guides and colleagues!

The cave artwork represents the beginning of art, even though art in prehistoric times was different in terms of its sheer purpose and intent. Everything that has followed as art - through different schools and movements, and 'isms' and right up to artists qualifying the notion of what is art - has reflected how humanity has progressed on an intellectual and emotional level.

And then there's the International Space Station in the sky at which our human seems to be staring in awe. It is a representation of the other end of technological progress; a sign that maybe this is the start of humanity understanding and inhabiting places besides our own pale blue dot (which we should care for now more than ever) in the future, perhaps?

Appendix B - Folklore from within the system

Team members living the TAAS values:

- LinkedIn Article by a Team Member
- Blogs written by team members on the TAAS page in Interstellar (our intranet)
- An external recognition - TAAS gets recognized in a national 'HR Best Practices' Showcase event held by National Human Resources Development Network, India.

Appendix C - Insights from Culture Conversations 2.0

1. Word clouds

Image 7: How are you experiencing Ather? (positives)

Insights

- Diverse, approachable and spirited people

- Fast-paced, challenging work with a lot of learning

- Fun and innovative work, driven with high focus and energy

- Ownership for task and result

- Evolving workplace

Image 8: How are you experiencing Ather? (dislikes)

Insights

- A feeling of chaos and misplaced energy
- Conflicting views around bureaucracy, process and hierarchy
- Presence of multiple and conflicting pockets
- Crisis of intent vs delivery; sprint vs marathon; fighting vs solving

2. Sentiment analysis. We ran an algorithm based on the NRC emotion lexicon to identify positive (Joy, Surprise, Trust) and negative experience of emotions (Anger, Disgust, Sadness, Fear)

Table 1: Sentiment analysis data

Values	% of Total Positive experience of emotions	% of Total Negative experience of emotions
Always be closing	4.24%	6.11%
Be nice	11.86%	12.72%
Know your true north	30.51%	29.52%
Move fast and don't break things	33.05%	31.55%
None of us is as smart as all of us	18.64%	18.07%

Insights

- Values are recollected; but behaviours needed to demonstrate values have low or no recollect. Thus, leading and reflecting as positive and strong negative emotions
- Misinterpretations of values and behavioural indicators
- Conflicting views on a specific value
- Living/experiencing one's own understanding of the value and not what the value actually means in TAAS

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