

NOT KNOWING AND COMING TO KNOW

METHODS OF INQUIRY INTO UNCONSCIOUS (HIDDEN) DYNAMICS

IN ORGANISATIONS

NIODA Symposium Papers 2021



This collection provides some of the papers delivered at the 2021 NIODA Symposium. The abstracts were all peer reviewed. The full papers reflect the work and opinions of the authors.

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Want To Know What Lies Below-the-Surface! Really?

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Why this Paper? The Context

Is reparation between the white race and non-white races a possibility? Left unexplored, the pandemic of racial violence will stimulate primitive persecutory identities in all human collectives.

Retaliation is spreading. By the time we reach *an eye for an eye that leaves the whole world blind* (Gandhi), we will live through the traumas of Asian Lives Matter and White Lives Matter (WLM).

A man assaults an Asian woman wearing a face mask ... in New York City, calling her a diseased b****. These scenarios are only a tip of the iceberg.

Earlier writings from Europe classified non-white races in hierarchical schemas, in which the white race positioned itself at the apex, keeping hidden the shame of wrongdoings while continuing to foster the carefully crafted myth of white-supremacy.

Brittany Cunningham, founder of Campaign Zero, asked *How could ANYBODY not realize the lethal nature of racism? This is all true 401 years after the arrival of the first slaves on these shores, 155 years after they were emancipated, more than five decades after the passage of the voting rights acts.* The Rev William Barber ... of the Poor People's Campaign, said *death by racism goes back to the founding of the country. It is a wound that has caused untold suffering over centuries* (www.timesofindia.indiatimes.com/world on 15 June 20)

Mesut Ozil quit the German national team with a powerful public statement in which he accuses the nation's FA of treating him with racism and disrespect. An immigrant to Germany from Turkey, he annoyingly captured his experience representing the German soccer team: *I'm German when we win, an immigrant when we lose* (ITV News. Sunday, 22 July 2018).

Indian cricketers endured racist slurs from the crowd for a second successive day in the third Test against Australia in Sydney, in January 2021, causing a brief halt in the fourth day's play, expulsion of some spectators from the ground and an all-round condemnation of the incidents. Siraj, still grieving the death of his father a little over a month ago, was called a Brown Dog and Big Monkey by people in the crowd, sources told Press Trust of India.

Mridula Amin of ABC News informed the world that 'Australia Talks' shows we agree there's a lot of racism here, but less than half say white supremacy is ingrained in our society, following a report which said: Australians are familiar with racism. Three in four Australians say there is a lot of it here. In fact, the prevalence of racism is one of the more widely agreed-upon propositions bowled up to the 60,000 Australia Talks respondents. Even if "I pay too much tax" mustered only 31 percent support, most Australians were pretty sure about the racism.

We are reminded of the recent "The Rhodes Must Fall" in Oxford movement, stressing the role of Cecil Rhodes, an Oriel College, Oxford alumnus and British imperialist, notorious for his remark that the African continent was *inhabited by the most despicable specimens of human beings* (The Confession of Faith, from The Last Will and Testament of Cecil John Rhodes. ed. Stead, WT. Review of Reviews Office: London. 1902).

The paper is about the pandemic of racial violence and the possibility of escalation into civil conflict. Samuel P Huntington, a noted American political scientist, put forward the thesis in "The Clash of Civilizations" and the "Remaking of World Order" (1996. Simon and Schuster India, Noida), and claimed that the future trend of world politics would be defined by conflict between Western and non-Western civilisations.

Following in the traditions of psychoanalytic thought extended to our intersubjective knowledge of history, economics, geo-politics, and systems psycho-dynamics the paper offers a method of inquiry into unconscious dynamics ... of inter-race relationship in the background of human conditions in Europe. It keeps in mind the chasm that is often blurred in the brutal realities of imperial power in colonial spaces that are eventually erased, relegating the wrongdoings to private conversations and internal archives.

Thinking was endowed with the characteristics which made it possible for the mental apparatus to tolerate an increase in tension of stimulus while the process of discharge was postponed (Freud, S. 1911, p. 225).

A Peep into Ancestral Roots through History, Economics, Politics in Europe - What lies Above-the-Surface?

For five centuries, life in Europe was a history of man-made wars and the devastations of sickness, poverty, and climate.

Many of Europe's fields were battlefields, and many of Europe's cities were built on bones.

Wars and savagery perpetuated by the nobility and aristocrats delivered persecutory violence to generation after generation of the lower classes within the white race.

The 16th century saw Black Death, which had killed about a third of Europe's people. Disease was ever present: scarlet fever, measles and typhus were the main killers. Syphilis was rife among prostitutes and their patrons. Malaria was endemic in swampy areas.

During the 17th century Little Ice Age, snow lines moved lower and glaciers advanced into Alpine valleys. Drought brought starvation to thousands. In the winter of 1708-09, rivers froze, even the swift-flowing Rhône.

A walk past open sewers in shanty towns like London's Bethnal Green and Paris's Faubourg Saint-Marcel explained why mortality rates among the poor was so high. One in four babies died in the first year.

Death from disease, the climate, poverty, and war spared none. Engels remarked that the upper class in Europe, the wealthy exploiters, were a *deeply demoralized class, incurably corrupted by selfishness, corroded in their very being*. The critics' objection to Engels is often their reluctance to admit his facts. No man, communist or otherwise, could have visited England from abroad in those years without a sense of shocked horror, which plenty of respectable bourgeois liberals expressed in words as inflammatory as Engels' own – but without his analysis. *"Civilization works its miracles", wrote de Tocqueville of Manchester, and civilized man is turned back almost into a savage. "Every day that I live", wrote the American Henry Colman, "I thank Heaven that I am not a poor man with a family in England"*.

After 1620, Europe suffered from food shortages as the population increased to about 118 million by 1648, resulting in political instability. By 1640, rebellion was everywhere. Although this is often called the century of scientific revolution, this was completely irrelevant to the mass of Europeans as they squandered most of their energies in massive wars. During the whole of the period there were only seven years of peace in Europe. People revolted against the powers of princes and kings over their bodies and properties and to protest against taxation, interference with trade and arbitrary imprisonment. Across most of Europe the peasantry represented vast numbers of people, and one way or another, they were almost always in revolt, with occasional open rebellion, as in Naples in 1647. All the armies of Europe had adopted the military reforms initiated at the end of the previous century by Maurice of Holland. This resulted in obedient, responsive units of soldiers able to function efficiently in any part of the globe. The new drill and techniques spread from officers trained at Maurice's Military

Academy, which was founded in 1619, first to Sweden, then to the northern Protestant European states and finally to France and eventually Spain.

There is [now] no place for industry, because the fruit thereof is uncertain, and consequently no culture of the earth; no navigation, nor use of the commodities that may be imported by sea; no commodious building; . . . no arts; no letters; no society. And, which is worst of all, continual fear and danger of violent death; and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.

Taxation of farmers weighed heavily on the people. Public debt was not yet perfected – the English did that in India from 1699 – so hard-pressed monarchs had to find new revenues. In the 1640s, the largest state in Europe, the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, disintegrated; much of the Spanish monarchy, the first global empire in history, seceded; and the entire Stuart monarchy rebelled – Scotland, Ireland, England, and its American colonies. In addition, just in the year 1648, a tide of urban rebellions began in Russia, and the Fronde Revolt paralyzed France. In London, King Charles I went on trial for war crimes. In the 1650s, Sweden and Denmark came close to revolution. Scotland and Ireland disappeared as autonomous states.

Economic, political, and social history informs us about this long and persistent history of trauma lying below-the-surface, in the collective unconscious of the white race from Europe. The French Revolution did little for poor relief, but the reverse. Nor was the record of the Enlightenment in the 17th and 18th centuries impressive. Anti-clerical and impatient with tradition, the philosophers were more fluent in criticism.

From the Napoleonic Wars to the great Revolutions of the 1820s and 1840s, to the Wars of Unification for both Italy and Germany and beyond, the stage was set for the World Wars of 1914-18 and 1939-45. An estimated 9Mn to 85Mn perished, which was about 3% of the 1940 world population, estimated to be 2.3 Bn. Non-white people did not start the annihilation, but suffered unparalleled collateral sacrifice of lives from colonies in Asia and Africa. Europe came close to destroying itself in the 20th. century. The experience of World War II convinced white supremacists to abandon their traditional sport of slaughter within the race, because the next try would be the last.

Undoubtedly, a tragic history of collective human suffering and trauma lying unexplored under the hubristic glaze and glitter of Western scientific progress. The upside of this progress can be found in two significant developments: one, the research and development in medical and health sciences to combat disease and, two, progress in the design and manufacture of weapons of mass destruction (WMDs). Shameless loot from Asia and Africa funded the research and investments, solidifying the fantasy of the white supremacist. The word loot is an Indian contribution to the English dictionary, justified by the personal wealth of GBP 401,102 made by Robert Clive of the East India Company, in 1750.

Psychologists assume that identity formation is a matter of finding oneself. Thus, defining oneself within a social world is among one of the most difficult choices a person ever makes. In the face of identity struggle, many end up adopting darker identities, such as suppressed violence and abuse. Sadly, to the psychopathology of hate in the development of this persecutory identity, the white race aristocrats and nobles added life-threatening sea-voyages for the white race commoner.

Ancestral Roots in The Americas

In 1790, the first census in America listed nearly 5Mn foreign-born residents on this land of promise – fertile, abundant wild-life, rivers full of fish – for all who could till the land, enjoy the fruits of labor, and live peacefully.

The Granger Museum in New York displays a wood-engraving of the 1637 massacre of Pequots by the peaceful Mayflower pilgrims. Smallpox and measles carried from Europe killed many, along with loss of ancestral lands to white colonists who began to claim the country as their own. By 1890, the indigenous population had decreased from 10Mn to 325,464, and was forced into reservations. In South America

and the West Coast, violence reduced indigenous populations in most regions, and complete depopulation in others. A continent which was the most populous and fertile on earth was destroyed.

Slaves from Africa, along with Chinese and Japanese immigrants, worked in swamps, mines, construction sites, farming, and the Central Pacific Railroad. A series of economic crises in the 1870s made many whites lose jobs, raising fears that a **yellow peril** is taking over the country, leading to racist attacks. During World War II, about 120,000 Japanese in America were forcibly confined in ten different camps, called War Relocation Camps, a system of legalized racial oppression. An example of anti-Japanese propaganda was the Jap Hunting License, a faux-official document, button or medallion that authorized the white race to an open season of hunting this non-white.

The Civil Wars (1861-65) were exclusive wars of supremacy within the white race (www.battlefields.org).

Engaged in annihilating the other white from Europe, and brutalizing the non-white native Americans, the white race turned to Asia and Africa from the 16th. century.

Ancestral Roots in Asia

Ralph Fitch, upon his return to England from India in April 1591, reported that he found *"two very great cities, either of them much greater than London and very populous ... They have many fine carts ... carved and gilded with gold ... covered with silk or very fine cloth ... much merchandise of silk and cloth, and of precious stones, both rubies, diamonds and pearls"*.

In 1857, children of the deposed emperor of India were shot point-blank by a British captain after they surrendered. *"I deliberately shot them one after another"*... explaining later *"I am not cruel, but I confess I did rejoice at the opportunity of ridding the earth of these wretches."*

A violent splitting off of the self and excessive projective identification has the effect that the persons towards whom this is directed are fantasized as persecutors, making it a noble duty of the white race ridding the earth of non-whites.

George Macartney, the first envoy of Britain to China in 1792, recalled the ornate pageantry of Emperor Qianlong's audience tent, that *"calm dignity, that sober pomp of Asiatic greatness that we have not yet attained"*. In 1900, American, Austro-Hungarian, British, French, German, Italian, Russian troops came together and unleashed uncontrolled plunder of China's capital, and executed the Boxers who had revolted against European incursions into China.

Indonesians were reported to be *civilized longer than England*. Their technique of rice cultivation, the skill of the craftsmen in gold, copper, and bronze, their social organization and life in towns and cities well before Christ is archived. Indians and Indonesians visited China as early as 166AD *at the time that a representative of Marcus Aurelius arrived in the celestial kingdom*.

Ancestral Roots in Africa

Colonialism began in South Africa in 1652. The article of trade in which the white race showed the greatest interest were slaves. The number of slaves transported from their African homes to colonial possession in the Americas range from 9Mn to 15Mn. The Boer Wars were about supremacy between white race subsets, on ancestral non-white land. Atrocities during the export of natural rubber from Congo, a land under the rule of the Emperor of Belgium from 1885 to 1908, are well-documented. Together with epidemic disease and famine, the atrocities contributed to a sharp decline in the Congolese population.

At the Berlin Conference of 1884-85, the European powers allocated the Congo Basin region to a private charitable organization run by Leopold II, who had long held ambitions for colonial expansion. From the 1890s, following the boom in demand for natural rubber, which was abundant in the territory, all uninhabited land in the Congo was nationalized, with the majority distributed to private companies as concessions. Some was kept by the state. Between 1891 and 1906, the companies were allowed to do

whatever they wished with almost no judicial interference, the result being that forced labor and violent coercion were used to collect the rubber cheaply and maximize profit. A native paramilitary army, the Force Publique, was also created to enforce the labor policies. Individual workers who refused to participate in rubber collection were killed and entire villages razed.

Ancestral Roots in Australia

From 1788, Britain had begun to transport convicts from its overcrowded prisons to Australia, starting the first migration from Europe to Australia.

About 160,000 white-skinned felons were diverted from North America, till 1868. Estimates in 1788 showed 300,000 to 1 Mn indigenous inhabitants in Australia; in 1901, fewer than 100,000 of them remained.

Research suggests three major reasons for this societal destruction: disease and killing.

Diseases typical of the white race that exposed the population lacking immunological defenses to destruction included smallpox, venereal disease (eg. gonorrhea), influenza, measles, pneumonia, and tuberculosis.

Intra-personal Journeys

Intellectuals in India continue to hold the firanghee, a derogatory euphemism for the white race, with disdain combined with curiosity and skepticism. In the Indian mind, the myth of white supremacy was restricted to bigger ships and louder guns, used indiscriminately to suppress rebellion. As trade and commerce between the firanghee and the local Hindu and Muslim elites grew exponentially, so did the antagonism in vernacular subaltern literature and theater across India. It is common knowledge that the white race was denied entry into inner sanctums of privileged Hindu and Muslim homes, thus insulating the home from potential defilement. The educated elite knew of Grierson Hypothesis, advanced in the 1930s by George Grierson, compiler of the Linguistic Survey of India, that white race invaders came from mleccha-desas or barbarian lands. The legacy that the white man is dirty (unhygienic), a disease carrier, and likely to kill under stress continues even till this day in the ethos of most elite Indians.

Visiting London in recent years, I was unable to miss the resurrection of Winston Churchill, current hero of the white race from UK, immortalized in films and the War Rooms in London. This very man is remembered in India as the Butcher of Bengal. The Bengal famine of 1943 was a major man-made famine of the Bengal province in British India during World War II. An estimated 300,000 people, out of a population of 60.3 million, died of manmade starvation, malaria and other diseases aggravated by malnutrition, population displacement, unsanitary conditions and lack of healthcare.

Personal attempts to dialogue on the subject of racial violence and the need for reparation faced rejection, till NIODA accepted the abstract of this paper. The last rejection, on 20 July 21, was this: *"Thank you for submitting your manuscript 'IS REPARATION DIFFICULT? Intersubjective Evidence and Its Implications for Re-awakening Collective Shame and Guilt. Reflections by a Subaltern Psychoanalyst' to Psychoanalytic Dialogues for our consideration. Two reviewers and a coordinating editor have read your paper. The reviewing team felt that there were interesting ideas and themes that you were seeking to explore in this manuscript. But the paper is difficult to understand and needs significant revision and reconceptualization to make your ideas cogent and coherent."*

Interesting ideas and themes, but difficult to understand.

What lies Below-the-Surface?

An implicit assumption in classical psychoanalysis is that the larger historical universe is nothing but a manifestation of the projections of the individual psyche and / or, history is a featureless context for human projections. Neo-Freudian psychoanalysis has been ahistorical in other ways; it finds itself bound by limitations of the rationalistic imagery of the 19th. century world view. When psychoanalysis moves in

an existential direction, its inter-psychic insights are insulated from issues thrown up by history. It is acknowledged that history is bound up with conflicts and struggles within peoples' minds, and there is evidence of the increasing need to recognize that psychological people live in a history that extends beyond themselves. These simple principles form the basis for contemporary psycho-history. The historian finds a pure Freudian individual-psychopathological model frustrating because it explains the barbarism of people as individual aberrations. Similarly, the historically informed psychologist finds Freudian explanations problematic because they lean heavily on the Oedipal event, whether in connection with a pre-historical generational conflict or with the psychopathology of a leading historical actor, such as Churchill and Hitler.

Freud helps us make sense of the pandemic of racism, this collective psychosis of persecutory anxiety, by reminding us that all the essentials lie beneath the surface of mind, buried and inaccessible. Analytic interrogation into ancestral roots, of both the individual and the human species, can reveal the concealed.

Jung reminds us that *our collective unconscious is the deposit of ancestral experience from untold millions of years, the echo of prehistoric world events to which each century adds an infinitesimally small amount of variation and differentiation.*

Trade-related and other motivated visits to America, Asia, Africa exposed the persecuted from Europe to primitive economies based on bountiful nature providing more than enough for all. In primitive Asian families, mothers personally fed their children satisfactorily. The glue of relatedness in primitive societies integrated the individual with family and community, easing the need for splitting, although gratification does provoke envy and is impossible to remove completely.

Contrastingly, the (in)human conditions in Europe furthered the destructive urges of the white commoner shipped overseas, making defenses more and more extreme. The child hates the breast of the proxy mother, a nursemaid, because it is felt to be mean and grudging. Infantile relation with the first object, the breast, becomes split. Introjection of the object as a whole brings about a synthesis of the hated and loved aspects of the infant's object relation. Failure leads to a regressive reinforcing of persecutory fears, and strengthens severe psychosis in the identity. Synthesis with loved objects becomes difficult. Unable to tolerate the powerful emotion of hate, it is directed on external reality, which stimulates it.

To the collective white race pathology of a persecutory identity was added envy, soon followed by greed. The envious eye is attracted by objects that capture a projection of the self, because the alienated self lacks the good-breast state, generating hatred and destructiveness, central to envy's energy. The chronically envious are continuously vulnerable to envy reactions.

The word greed does not appear directly in Freud's collected works. Upon examination, Klein locates greed in the oral stage of development, stressing that there is a dynamic interplay between the innate aggressive drive and actual deprivation. Children with strong aggressive drives show easy arousal of persecutory anxiety, frustration, and greed. When loving feelings prevail between the mother and her infant, the child is able to feel gratitude toward the loving object. However, when there is gross maladjustment and the libido-aggression balance in the infant's intra-psychic world is tilted toward aggression, then unfettered access to the good things in life stirs up more hunger and more hunger; this angry hunger constitutes greed which, by definition, is inherently insatiable.

The Right To Do Wrong

A subset of the white race from France played a role in the Rwandan genocide of 1994, resulting in the killing of 800,000 civilians. (Story by Reuters, reported by CNN on 20 April 21). Yet another subset from Germany slaughtered more than 100,000 Namibians between 1904 and 1908, a German colony from 1884 till as recently as 2015, situated in South West Africa (Germany Officially Recognises Colonial-era Namibia Genocide. 28 May 2021. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe>. Viewed on 01 July 21). Survivors were locked in concentration camps to die, and the bodies of another 100,000 people were

shipped to Germany for experiments. They were eventually sent to German universities for scientific purposes. One notorious German scientist, Eugen Fischer, attempted to build a theory that proved the superiority of Aryans over all other races. Fischer requested Hitler to read his writings and the latter did. Moreover, the bones and skulls of the victims were displayed in museums in Berlin and Freiburg.¹⁶

We know that the myth of Aryan superiority resulted in the traumatic annihilation of 600,000 white race individuals, in Europe in 1947. Is it not time to bring a closure to this preoccupation, and acknowledge the other traumatic annihilation, from 1948 till now, of thousands of non-white civilians in Israel. *"It is particularly heart-breaking that the escalation of the attacks began at the end of the Muslim Holy month of Ramadan. The raid on the Al-Aqsa Mosque, which is one of the holiest places on earth for 1.8 billion Muslims, was shocking. I once again urge display of respect to all places of worship, including Al-Aqsa Mosque / Al-Haram al-Sharif,"* remarked Volkan Bozkir, President of the 75th. session of the United Nations General Assembly on 20 May 2021.

Mallence Bert-Williams from Sierra Leone went on record: ... *"the French treasury ... is receiving 500 Bn dollars, year in year out, by way of foreign exchange reserves from African countries based on colonial debt they forced them to pay. Former French President Jacques Chirac stated in an interview recently that we have to be honest and acknowledge that a big part of the money in our banks comes precisely from exploitation of the African continent. In 2008, he stated that without Africa, France would slide down in the rank of a Third World power* (TedxBerlin. January 2015).

Sontag wrote: *"It is the white race, and it alone – its ideologies and inventions – which eradicates autonomous civilizations wherever it spread ... which now threatens the very existence of life itself".*

Increasing military budgets overshadow the current reality of the human condition mired in economic inequality, lack of new jobs, and declining living standards. Militarization of the police will crush local public protest. Intensification of projective processes within subsets of the white race, and with non-white races will escalate global tensions, aggravating the psychosis of racism, terrorist incursions, war. Drawn to and repelled by the object of hate and envy, all races will hold the conviction that the existence of the other is threatening.

The Times of India reported on 22 August 2021 that USA and its NATO allies spent, by one estimate, more than US\$ 2Tr in the last two decades on a meaningless war that killed 175,000 human beings from both races. Afghan civilian casualty was 47,245.

Cinema, like sport, throws up repressed material. Tom Clancy's *Without Remorse*, released in India on 30 April 21, has this dialogue towards the end of the film.

The Protagonist, an African-American soldier, is explaining to the Secretary of Defense, a white European-American: *"About the mission. Sir, this was a CIA op. They ran it out of DC the entire time. They're trying to heat up tension with Russia".*

The white American bureaucrat responds: *"I'm not surprised ..."* to which the non-white soldier says: *"You sent me all over this world. I put my life on the line because I believed that we were on the right side of things ... So, you're going to tell me why? Why my family? My wife? My daughter? who were murdered".* Trying a tone of appeasement in the hope of delaying his own annihilation, the bureaucrat explains: *"You are making a mistake ... You know who won World War II? It wasn't the generals or the admirals. It was the economists. More tanks, planes, ships. And all that spending lifted the entire nation out of poverty. Freed the world of tyranny. A big country needs big enemies. The best enemy we ever had was the Soviet Union. Our fear of them unified our people. Gave us purpose. The problem today is half this country thinks the other half is its enemy because they have no one else to fight. So, we gave them a real enemy. One with the power to threaten their lives, their freedoms. Freedoms you take for granted. And it works".*

The title of this film is a psychoanalytic barometer telling us that subsets of white supremacists, occupying geo-politically powerful positions in two different regions, who once upon a time engaged in persecutory Cold War games, will now collaborate to fabricate without remorse two others in the human race because there is no one else to fight! The first other is the white-skinned Russian, and the

second other is the non-white African-American. White-skinned commoners in both regions will be collateral damage for the games their white supremacist leaders play. Racism and Black Lives Matter are becoming difficult to manage. Non-whites can now be annihilated for the sake of greater national objectives, and because *a big country needs bigger enemies*.

The Way Forward

Let sleeping dogs lie. Let the psychoanalytic community sleepwalk into oblivion and take the time to shrug out of its fantasy of white supremacy, obsessed with cogency and coherence. At the recent online launch of a book, it was interesting to note the firanghee assumption that what is European and American is automatically global, reflecting unexplored residues of white supremacy even among very scholarly practitioners.

Fortunately for the human race, reparation has started to appear in the individual conscious engaged in melancholic guilt-laced private discourse. Davids alerts us that personal shame and guilt, expressed privately, will ensure *“defensive repetition, thereby perpetuating racist mind-sets and acts and taking one further and further from the possibility of reparation”*. While interpersonal associations move slowly, an urgent collective action is necessary.

The claim that international politics will be defined by a clash of civilizations has come back into the headlines. In April 2019, Kiron Skinner, Head of the State Department's Policy Planning staff, described *US relations with China in terms of a clash of civilizations*. The then US National Security Adviser, John Bolton, reportedly remarked that *relations between the United States and China have elements of Samuel Huntington's Clash of Civilizations* (Musgrave, Paul. 18 July 2019. The Washington Post).

For sustainable reparation and healing, leaders of white race nations and other collectives need to publicly and formally apologize for their imperial crimes, acknowledge the shame and guilt, and go on record, just like Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada, did in the House of Commons for the 1914 Komagata Maru incident, in which Sikh, Muslim and Hindu passengers were denied entry to Canada and forced to return to an uncertain and ultimately violent fate in India under white race rule: *No words can erase the pain and suffering they experienced. Canada does not bear alone the responsibility for every tragic mistake that occurred with the Komagata Maru and its passengers, but Canada's government was without question responsible for the laws that prevented these passengers from immigrating peacefully and securely, for that, and for every regrettable consequence that followed, we, are, sorry, Trudeau said. Regrettably, the passage of time means that none are alive to hear our apology today, still, we offer it, fully and sincerely, for our indifference to your plight, for our failure to recognize all that you had to offer. For the laws that discriminated against you so senselessly, and for not apologizing sooner. For all these things, we are truly sorry* (CBC News. 18 May 2016).

Shashi Tharoor, an ex-UN diplomat turned politician and erudite public intellectual in India, asked UK to pay a compensatory one rupee for the 200-year loot of India (Britain Does Owe Reparations. Oxford Union. 15 July 2015. YouTube).

The Jallianwala Bagh massacre occurred on 13 April 1919. Historian Nonica Datta, who teaches in JNU, explains her father VN Datta's pioneering work on the massacre, republished this year, in an email interview with Avijit Ghosh of The Times of India:

Q. Why is it important to revisit the Jallianwala Bagh massacre?

A. It's important for the younger generation to learn about Jallianwala Bagh and to bring many hidden and uncomfortable truths to light. Silences besiege the history of the tragedy. The legacy of Jallianwala Bagh is yet to be fully acknowledged. Many facts have been suppressed in mainstream history writing. Also, in the face of present military and racial violence the world over, and the fact that Britain and other former colonial powers have not formally apologized for their imperial crimes, it becomes necessary to re-present this pioneering work. Written by a professional historian born a few years after the massacre in the city of

Amritsar, VN Datta's Jallianwala Bagh navigates a rare combination of an insider's experience of lived history combined with an academic exploration (Times of India, 28 April 21).

Can the Queen of England, along with the Prime Minister of UK, stand up in the Parliaments of UK and India and apologize for wrongdoings from their ancestral roots?

In the midst of a Covid-induced pandemic, some significant events went unnoticed. In July 2020, half the State of Oklahoma in the USA was handed back to the original people who inhabited America. Apparently, the same is happening in Canada.

Much of the Northern Territories of Australia have been returned to the original inhabitants, euphemistically called Aborigines by English, Irish, Scottish convicts who landed there from 1788 to 1868. The Maoris in New Zealand are also getting back the land that belonged to them. Hopefully, Tibetans and Palestinians will get back what was theirs.

Webster could re-classify US citizens with an accurate ID and repair a historic wrong. Native tribes, the original inhabitants, can be identified by their respective tribe, and all others in recognition of where they came from: English Americans, Irish Americans, Scottish Americans, Welsh Americans, Italian Americans, French Americans, German Americans, Dutch Americans, Russian Americans, Scandinavian Americans who took over this pristine land of plenty by use of superior firearms, brute force, and widespread genocide. Asian Americans can also be reclassified.

Trist and Emery shared their curiosity in how *leading elements* of the future already exist in the present. Early detection of emergent processes that lie concealed in existing human systems will create the opportunities to shape the future.

Fonagy acknowledges that *the opposition between psychoanalysis and systematic interdisciplinary research is to be regretted*. He did make a faint attempt towards *the development of an understanding of the position of those who are categorically opposed to interdisciplinary systematic research linked to psychoanalysis*. Inter-subjective research seeks to comprehend psychological phenomena not as products of isolated intra-psychic mechanisms, but as forming at the interface of reciprocally interacting worlds of experience. Psychological phenomena *cannot be understood apart from the inter-subjective contexts in which they take form*.

Intersubjective study and research, along with public discourse, will address ignorance and prevent Huntingdon's doomsday prophecy. Holding the other as an object of hate, envy, greed closes down the thinking necessary to deal with these, and blocks their integration into the conscious. Psychoanalytic discourse that is also intersubjective will sharpen insights and perspectives. Professionals, professional societies and associations will create a groundswell influencing adoption into the political structure of nations to shun WMDs and dehumanization.

Finally, for both whites and non-whites, humanity has two choices: give up hope and ensure that the worst happens, or be optimistic, grasp the opportunities that exist and make the world a more humane place. Not much of a choice!

Feedback from Group Discussion on 10 September 2021

A lively and engaging discussion followed the presentation. A participant found it gut-wrenching; most agreed that the time has come to discuss reparation publicly. A participant from South Africa expressed her reservation about the term non-white; the author clarified that he is non-white and that he has no problem accepting this reality as a differentiator.

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What matters in Method (-ology): movement and critical messiness

Dr Jo Chaffer

Freelance consultant, researcher, facilitator, Australia



I've been freelancing around the world for a decade plus, bringing critical challenge and support-enough to leadership, organisational, community and personal change. My approach is towards replacing magical thinking with critical questioning and agency.

Formerly with the Initiative for Leadership & Sustainability (IFLAS), UK currently learning how to be Aussie

Good morning. Good day. Good evening.

Welcome to this session.... Let's check in – a question to each of you (for which I don't wish you to share an answer): how safe are you feeling right now?

How safe do you feel behind the screen, anchored in your own physical space? Say, compared to if we'd all been in the networking space of NIODA, coffee cups in hand; doing that confency chitter chatter, jostling, easing into?

More or less? With containment – in a holding, safe space?

Who or what was making you feel more or less safe, building that containment?

How do you know that?

And if I was curious about your world, I wanted to inquire, how could I know that? How could I know about the ebbs and flows of safety in you and your people, in all of its multidimensionality, as an inside-outsider, on the fuzzy boundaries of your organisation?

This talk is about how I came to know about psychological safety, through containment and leadership within an inquiry in two firms in Kathmandu, Nepal.



It's about the ongoing process of continuously working out what matters, specifically what matters to the people in those firms; their experience of safety; (and mine too!); what might matter in research when it comes to 'coming to know'.

It involves movement, messiness, mixing up of Western and non-Western ways of being and knowing and much more.

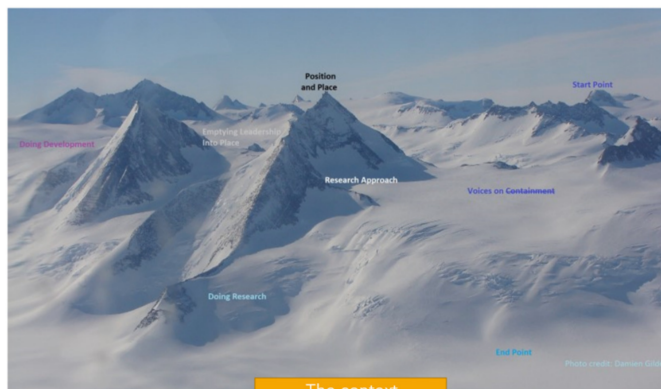
So for the next wee while I invite you to come with me on a journey through methodologies, through attachment and abstraction, through letting go and staying still enough to come to

know. Maile sunneko.

The graphic on this slide is my visualisation of doing containment – the dance of co-creating safe-enough, critically attentive-enough spaces-places for people to do the work that is needed.

It also describes the critical messiness of doing research, of being research and of moving with research.

Before going any further, I'll bring in a little context to help anchor us into the story.



Leadership development: containment enough

The context

What you see on the screen is the Content page of my doctoral thesis, the end point of 4 years of inquiry in search of doing leadership better via the firms in Kathmandu and through a focus on the containment needed for safe-enough, alive-enough dynamics.

This talk is a product of that inquiry.

The thesis was presented as a series of discrete chapters, that the reader was invited to pick-up in any order. It was an invitation to retain leadership, rather than be a follower of the author – to make critical choices as they moved, based on what they noticed in the text, what

they noticed in themselves and their reflections on this.

The reason I share this is not just for the pretty picture, but because this actually represents moving messily through methodologies, not letting the methodology lead, not being a follower of a framework, but actively staying in relation with this framework, staying curious, committed and critical – choosing new frames as the inquiry landscape and my internal landscape changed; choosing new ways to be in-relation with.

The 'what' of the inquiry – Containment

- Containment, from Donald Winnicott: a holding environment (the conditions needed for successful therapy)
- Based on 'attachment', safety of the world created by the mother (1958)
- My intro via Martin Ringer group psychodynamics (eggs!)
- Bion, Neri, Flinndualities of group, of facilitation roles..
- Organisational development / behaviour heroic leaders doing it for us
- Evolutionary bases... social emotions....
- Dependent Origination, Cynefin, 'absorbing into', Ba 場,

The focus

Back into safer terrain – into psychological safety and containment, a key idea, which I'm sure you're familiar with. This slide shows some of the influences on the growing of the idea....which I'm not going to talk about. The first point is that I found myriads of ideas of safety, of place-based, group based sense of safety and 'holding' in other cultures beyond the Western particularisation. The second point is to remind myself that the 'why', my curiosity around containment of it grew out of my own practice – I had noticed that sometimes containment could be too much - groups or people felt too safe, we lose criticality, get too sleepy and smug - safety therefore wasn't always a good thing, or we

could have too much of a good thing. I'd also noticed that the weaving of containment could be anyone's work, we all have agency, yet in the literature it's usually the facilitator, the leaders' role and often in organisational literature this leader was some sort of heroic type. I wanted to find out more...

The 'what' of the inquiry – Containment



practising problematising methodologies

The focus

I wanted to challenge ideas on safety. I did this through problematising everything, including the word containment itself – which is what the funny line, Heidegger's *sous rature*, is for.

Methods of inquiry into unconscious (hidden) dynamics in organisations

It might appear to be a spurious, linguistic trick is actually an ongoing reminder to stay critically attentive to the word's contentiousness - to avoid getting stuck in metaphorical buckets (Hawkins & Shohet, 2012) and to visualise containing as something that doesn't involve some agentic 'other' building walls and putting up boundaries for us.

The funny line is a continuous nudge to stay critically attentive, to question assumptions of even (and perhaps especially of) the most innocuous language. It turned out to be a key method to both inquiring and learning about inquiring.

The practice of problematising methodologies – is the focus of this talk.

- Planning an inquiry: choose your methodology
- Expect change
- Expect the unexpected
- Expect to move

Making a start



A methodology is a type of strategic approach. What type of strategy do we need and how do we choose?

The notion of planning the inquiry, choosing our methodology to inquire into a situation we as yet know very little about feels antithetical – like choosing to scuba dive, yet having no idea whether we are traveling in water, air or land.

As any inquiry situation is a reflection of (and connected to) the world we are in, it is highly likely to be riddled with chords of volatility and uncertainty. It will, without doubt, be far more

complex (politically, socially etc) and ambiguous than we could ever have begun to imagine before setting out on our research. If an organisation, a firm, created a strategy that was not grounded in analysis of 'what is', took no account of the interplay between itself and the operating environment and, critically, did not build in regular review and course correction steps, it would very likely fail, and it would be wildly derided for its fecklessness. So why would we expect a researcher to do the same with their strategy?



We should be expecting our strategic approach to change Expecting movement

But we do have to start an inquiry somewhere. We have to choose....

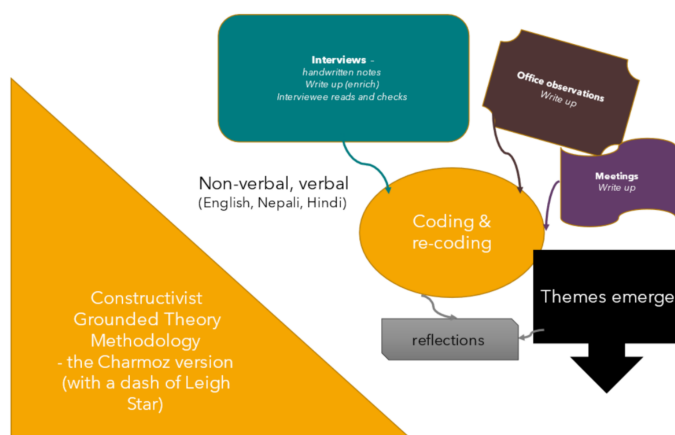
Where did I start? Geographically, in a place where I was at my best; occupying an insider-outsider position that kept me constantly on my toes: in Nepal.

After several years of consulting, I had a unique and highly privileged 'in' to a multinational enterprise (MNE) headquartered in Kathmandu. Privileged access to their top teams and to work and be with them to experience safety, containment process and doing leadership.

On this slide you have an overview of the firm I worked with. I knew the Group Directors, having helped shape their global branding. I was granted full access to the entire HQ, in return for some free consultancy and reporting.

Inquiry Essentials – who with, where

- **Co A** - FMCG distributor: part of group of 35, multinational HQ KTM;
- family firm 3rd generation Indian origin.
- Co A - 10,000 employees.
- Access to Directors and HQ team of +/- 50 including Business Heads of major verticals plus IT, HR.
- Experience containment processes (safety +/-) with them – and the connection with doing leadership



But where to start the inquiry? How to be a 'proper' researcher? How to play that game and meet the hidden rules of the academy? I did my research on research...

After much consideration I landed on Charmaz' Constructivist Grounded Theory Methodology (CGTM) as a way in to starting the face-to-face aspect of the study. Why CGTM?

At this point (2016-7) I understood the world of research to be split into those positivist, truth seeking, dissecting types, most likely using numbers and other countables (the quants with their power to predict); and then the other lot,

the qualitative, peering types, peeling back and critically scrutinising their subjects and also recognising their role in the co- construction of the world, the models and theories that emerged. Politically, socially the quants held the floor; there seemed to be a wonderful array of methodologies to choose from, if a little confusing. My uncertainty in selecting the most 'appropriate' stemmed from two factors: firstly many of the methodologies seemed so blindingly obvious as 'good practice' that I failed to believe they could be real 'science' at all. Secondly (and paradoxically given what I thought I believed about iterative, constructivist inquiries), I struggled to '**believe**' the innumerable methodologies that seemed to be purely context specific the 'here's what I did and why and now I'm calling it methodology 'X' school'. I read the words, they all made sense, and I perceived the logic, but I didn't believe. This epitomised the tension I had with the academy and its highly structured, rule-bound being oozing rational, logic-based and highly masculinised authority, all of which, I felt were a (pretty ugly) mask for what was essentially a church of place-based beliefs and personal practices that had become reified, ossified and then eulogised by super-alphas and their tribes. But I had a PhD to undertake – I had to play by the big boys rules.....

The highly structured approach of CGTM seemed an 'easy' set of rules to follow. It seemed to qualify with what I figured was expected of 'proper researchers'.

Charmaz' dynamic abductive approach correlated well with my lived experience. Susan Leigh Star's (2010) moving piece on her experience of doing CGTM brought a feminine voice that allowed for emotions in the inquiry. As the 'middle ground' between 'extreme empiricism and complete relativism' (Suddaby, 2006) it seemed to be a good fit for what I thought I should be doing and what I actually believed.

Not wanting to be perceived as lazy (Suddaby, 2006) I read all I could on the Method and created a research plan that was as close to clean CGTM as I could make it.

I had a decision made. The substantive area was containment. I stopped reading and started the conversations.

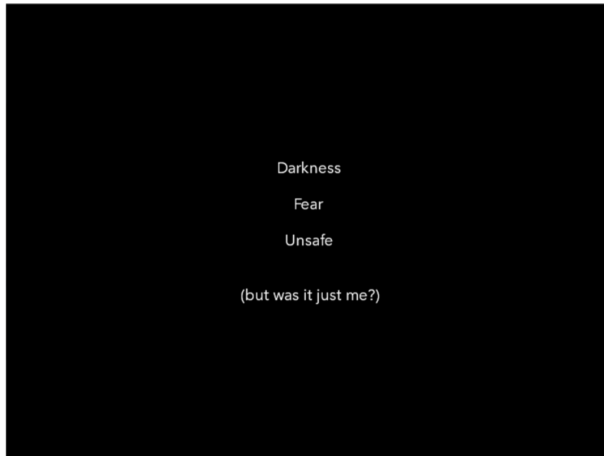
The techniques and tactics (Methods) to be used involved semi-structured interviews with individuals and work-teams mostly in English, some in Nepalese; observations of team meetings, of the day-to-day doing of business in the various office and people spaces; and several facilitated sessions of reflection-on-findings towards next step, 'action'.

Looking back I realise I was suffering from a fairly acute case of imposter syndrome and needed a strategy and, to some extent, a plan that had proper handrails. CGTM seemed, with all its jargon, its structures and process guidance, to be 'proper research'. This need was likely a hangover from my earliest experiences of research as an undergraduate student, trained in biochemistry labs with some of the granddaddies of evolutionary genetics (Maynard Smith) and population and conservation ecologies

(Harper, D., Streeter, D. et al). These still held an imprint in my emotional- lived understanding of 'science' even if intellectually I thought I had broken the shackles of the quantitative world.

My apprehension about 'proper research' was also a reflection of the intimidation I felt, positioned as I was at the time, between very 'alpha' researchers and feeling very much the apprentice, or actually the tea-girl (unwittingly discounting 15 years of contract research!).

So the work began – I immersed myself in the firm – intensively for a month, regularly over a full year....



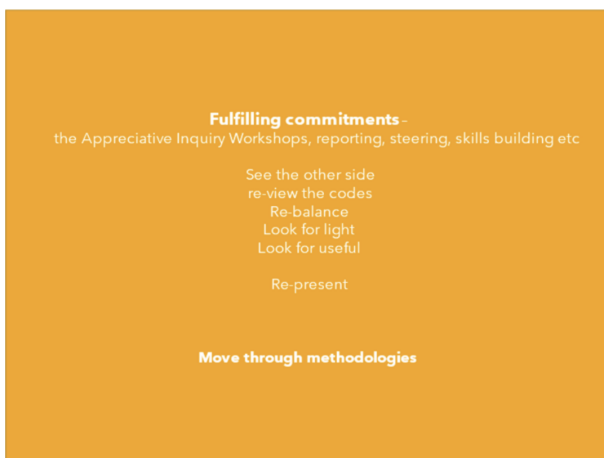
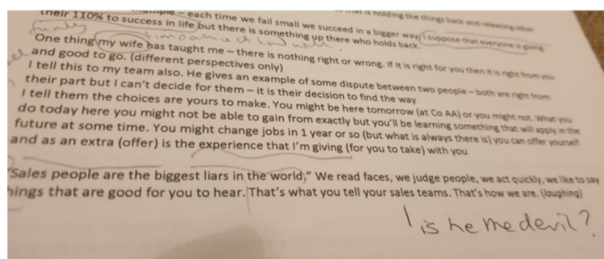
I was diligent in following the CGTM way.....I got saturated and the codes ... oh yes, I got codes emerging alright.

The codes that emerged were all around dark power – writhing black snakes of it coursing throughout. The 'codes' all pointed to tyrannies – of numbers, of the urgent, of tulo manche (big men), sub-groups, informal power. People living in constant fear, driven by fear.. performing brilliantly or leaving.

I felt entangled in the web, directly exposed to some of the overt power plays by the BH and others. I was overwhelmed and unable to think critically. My personal containment had collapsed.

I believe my internal balance and ability to judge was being affected badly by the power plays. I'd become too sucked in to 'the team' and was losing criticality

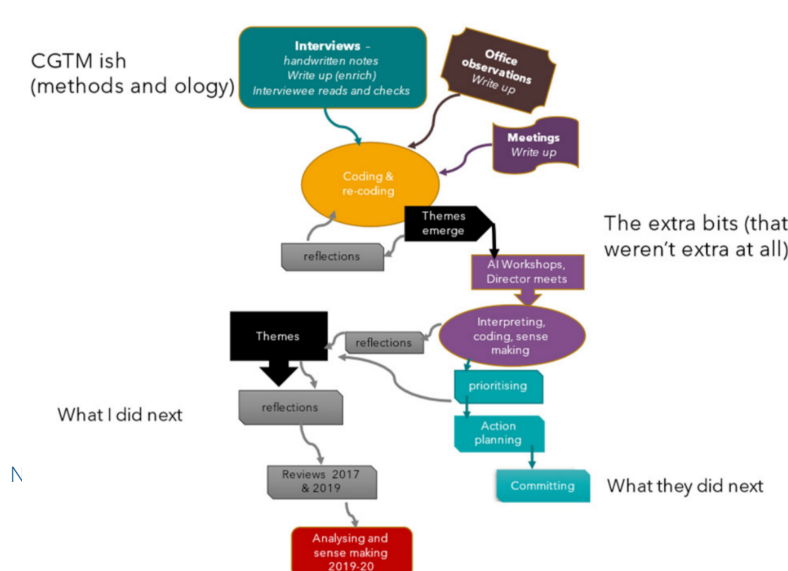
Is this the darker side of saturation? Getting too safe?



Stop moving and instead stick at assertion?

Thank goodness for commitments! In the contracting with the Directors to gain research access, I'd committed to adapting the results towards a strategic reviewing process; to supporting their nascent HR team in some professional development strategy and to run some development sessions. I also had to report back to the Directors – in particular my friend and sponsor, 'Adam'.

What could I say that could be useful? How could I be truly participatory, egalitarian and 'for' them?



The darkness was just one reality – it was my experience at the moment of the immersion. But how much was of 'place'; how much was of me; how much was of me in place? Was this their experience /experiences? I looked in the CGTM bag but found no useful questions....at this point I had 'saturation' and was supposed to be capturing and caging an emerging theory. But there was no theory – just

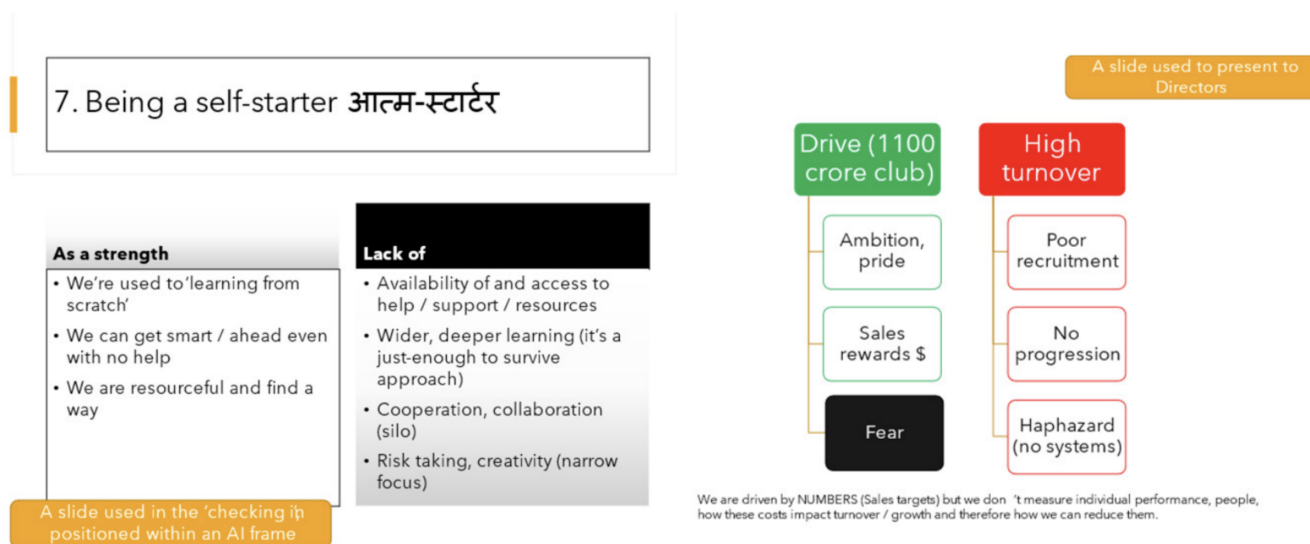
'into unconscious (hidden) dynamics in organisations

a series of black themes – if this was theory, we were doomed!

I was saturated but too unsettled to stop and assert. This assertion wasn't solid enough, nor was it useful in its current form...

So with the challenge to find usefulness in the themes, I re-scanned – reframing the darkness as 'lack' - the positive absence of, and therefore implying the positive presence of something useful, desirable and achievable on their terms.

These next 2 slides show the results of that re-framing – still retaining the original dark themes, but positioning them FOR something that could be useful. First to the teams in a series of AI workshops, the second to the Directors....



I came to regard the extra interventions as an essential part of the research inquiry process. The many different perspectives shared by participants, their insights and opinions, not to mention the insights from observing people working together in these sessions, were a vital contribution to the inquiry. The participants' voices became part of the community of co-inquirers. The choices they made in these sessions, the new ways of working they 'tried on' as research agents and the actions they subsequently took back in the work-place illuminated the potential for the research to be transformative.

The messiness reinvigorated everything: I seized opportunities to critically scoop up richer, deeper and, crucially, different (types of) knowledge and understanding, to have different contributions to the theory-in-practice generation (and its demolition) was a lived and-both bricolage. It felt more democratic, dynamic and more robust: we were re-moulding the methodology (and methods) responding to new insights as they emerged. Think and research with a Constructivist Grounded Theory to start, add some Participatory, Appreciative and Action principles to breathe practice into theory patterns: notice better, be alert, then try to think research differently in response to what is actually happening (rather than what I believed might happen when I was planning the inquiry). It was messy and also more 'true'.

It wasn't CGTM – and that was OK! I had reached my own saturation – I couldn't overcome my resistance to taking the next step on the CGTM track, that of plucking the emergent theory and getting it oven-ready for hypothesis testing – it felt like backdoor deduction, sliding into researcher heroics.....

Noticing and noting the change in research approach and cross-matching this to a palette of methodologies enabled some academic rigour.

But there was something more fundamental going on.



Moving on, across and to the middle

- A different ontoepistemological position provided new insight and new options - Nagarjuna's Middle Way
- To Conversations with peers (the epistemic guarantee) how much of this is my nonsense? How much of this is CoA?
- To CoB - a new place, a start up, youthful, values led
- Argghh!!! Too safe, too much containment!
- It wasn't me ... and it also was....
- CGTM was leading, I was following- a wake up call!
- Letting go of handrails

From a different ontological and epistemological base, that of Mahayana Buddhism, specifically that of the 5th century skeptic Nagarjuna and the Middle Way, what was happening was the development of knowledge, where knowledge is practise. Nagarjuna had followed the classical Indian tradition of the Naiyayikas, using argumentation to develop the epistemic guarantee i.e. knowledge is that which is justifiable, based not on an 'out there' reality, but on the agreement of a (scientific) community. Unlike the Naiyayikas Nargajuna's) refuted the uniqueness and finality of the consensus process. His 'position' (Gorisse, 2009) was that knowledge, as with all phenomena, "is a purely arbitrary slice of space-time chosen by us as

the referent of a single name, and not an entity demanding, on its own, recognition and a philosophical analysis to reveal its essence." (Garfield, 1994 p.220). Knowledge is practise. It is a temporary being, both becoming and un-becoming. And empty of 'it', of essence.

I needed to check in with a community to find agreement, to work out whether what I was experiencing, had experienced at CoA was belief or knowledge. Was it something justifiable or just me in my madness?

I met with peers, friends and respected elders from the Nepalese communities and shared my work with them. We talked. I learned much and found new choices.

My new choice was to re-engage the CGTM approach in a different place, with different people. So I used my networks to engage with a very different type of firm – youthful in construction, in its people, its approach to doing business, strongly values driven.

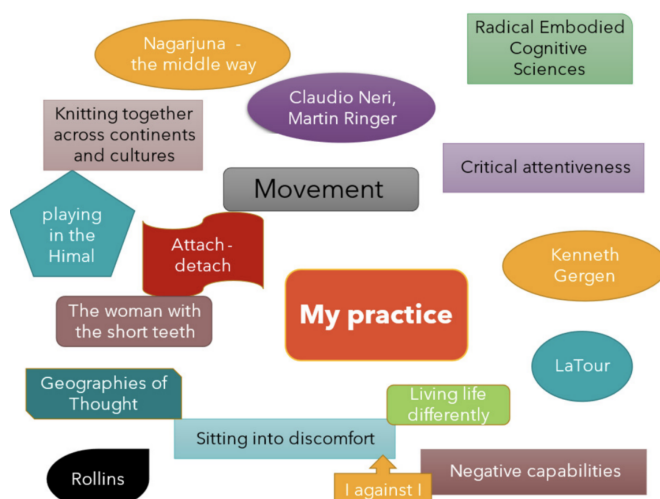
I decided to re-deploy the first stages CGTM, feeling confident that 'I got this' ... these were my two mistakes. Despite it's young, vibrant stature, the Directors of CoB were concerned that there was not enough challenge, that people were 'too much friendly'. I felt this too - CoB teams seemed too comfortable, sleep walking lovely days, happy folk led by their valuing, valued gurus. I couldn't read them... they just kind of slipped by.

But it wasn't all them.. At first I thought it was the cosiness of the firm, but I realised it was also partly me... but it was me ...I wasn't attentive enough, present and critical.

And CGTM didn't fit. I had failed to do the hard beans of reading into it and co-creating the approach. I had left myself at the door, in attempt to be the 'proper researcher'. I was performing research.

It was time to get out and find a fresh and more enabling perspective on the 'what next' of the inquiry.

I needed a way to recalibrate – to inquire without getting trapped within no longer helpful structures. I restarted the search for doing research better.....



Firstly, I re-engaged with my own practice. Then I found the Posts.

Both brought relief and a revaluing

My Practice: Re-narrating the CGTM process at CoA as a practise of shifting perspectives, questioning from different positions and ongoing conversation had brought me back to my underpinning beliefs around the dynamic tension

hods of inquiry into unconscious (hidden) dynamics in organisations

of shifting as itself the key to exploration, to analytic rigour.

This was how it was in my practice worlds.

In these worlds I have strived to avoid adopting the habituated and comfortable feelings of 'knowing' and instead to continue to seek and step into unknowing as an appropriate and effective way to explore and evolve leadership as a development practise. This dynamic approach, of remaining un-settled and curious seemed to also be an appropriate, ethical and practical approach to knowledge evolution too.

In other words, the discipline of the academic inquiry seemed also to be in not fully settling in a position. To bring the past positions with me. To be of place. To stay grounded in impermanence and ongoing incompleteness and let these drive curious exploration and evolution. To practise practice. And, to better acknowledge my position, my place within the research – not performing it, but living it.

To do that meant some reflections and untanglings on the why, the how and the who that I brought – and what these did.

The posts

The post-qualitative movement – a term coined by Lather and St Pierre where researchers attempt to “imagine and accomplish an inquiry that might produce different knowledge and produce knowledge differently”

The posts: In her 2014 piece Elizabeth draws on Derrida's work to succinctly dismiss the binary of material/ linguistic, of face to face and text. It brought relief to this lonely, confused place where there seemed to be no sense in the separation of knowing-from-reading and knowing-from-experience; no sense in separating the knowing-from-experience into the highly valued, designed experience of the research stage and discounting the stumbled-through experience of life and practice.

Further, her articulation of the paradox of valuing face to face investigation over the written word (literature review), yet only being able to 'make

(Lather 2013, p.653 in Honan & Bright, 2016)

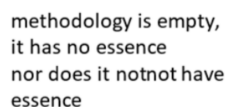
real' the face to face through conversion to text that is then processed, reviewed and reified as 'literature' confirms for me the non-sense of this corrupted hermeneutic circle. I went back to my notes and to the spider scribbles. I looked again and re-weighted, re-valued the discussions, experiences, reading, observations, reflexions, emotions, atmosphere, the non-verbal and the aroma. I may have been temporarily de-railed but I had all the resources I needed to re-turn critically and with confidence-enough to work better with these.

Perhaps my sleepy-eyed trundle towards uncriticality had actually been a useful near-miss and may even enable better scrutiny in future?

I felt reassured by what St Pierre calls post-analyses i.e. “begin with the epistemological and ontological commitments of the analysis” (St Pierre, 2014 p.10). Challenge the Cartesian assumptions upon which both quant and qualitative methodologies are founded: as Foucault said 'refuse what we are', choose to rewrite the descriptions of the world – or more easily, choose to look to other ways of knowing, being and becoming that have also existed for millennia – how others describe the world.

Know your intention, practise Right View, Right Way and let the methodology emerge.

In more confidently untethering from the expectations of the 'proper researcher' frame into a more methodologically “uncertain and responsive” form (Koro-Ljungberg, 2010, p.605), perhaps I was shape-shifting to “responsive researcher” (ibid)? Perhaps I could relinquish the handrails of CGTM and still have 'validity' (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015).



Methodology?

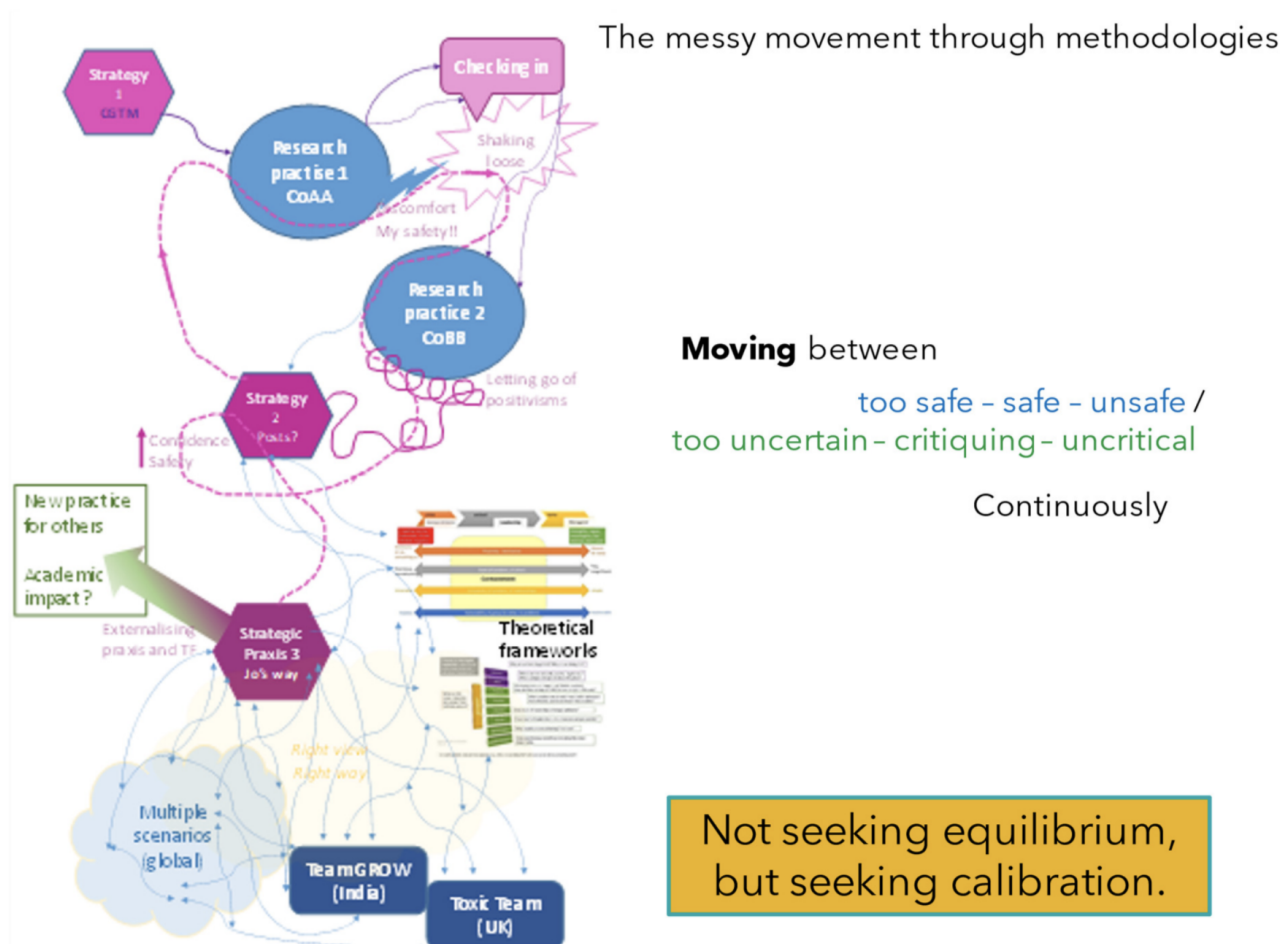
I think there may be a second trap in this relation with methodology: in the reification of methodology, I wonder if we also in some way ascribe them with causal power: the power to reveal / create/ understand knowledge and reality? Or if not the methodology, then it's creator?

I had initially made the same slip myself in seeking direction, certainty and permission to proceed 'as a researcher' from the imagined leaderful voices of Charmaz, Leigh-Star and the Glaser-Strauss combo of the various Grounded Theory Methodologies. I assumed, to some degree, that the causal power of Constructivist Grounded Theory Methodology (CGTM) would somehow 'flick on' the researcher switch in me.

I realised I needed to re-imagine my relation with methodology

It took a while to feel safe-enough and confident-enough to raise my critical voice and re-envision what methodology is for. It was the Radical Embodied Cognitive Science lot that got me there – realising that methodology can be a model 'for' enabling research rather than 'of' doing research.

So I think I might add the sous rature, the funny line to remind myself of the problematisation in methodology. It is not a visualisation OF what is problematic, but a prompt for the discipline not to disappear into the "magical thinking" (Little, 2019) of ascribing 'causal powers', but to retain the locus of agency in the self-in-relation – to stay messy, to keep questioning, to keep moving.



Reflecting on my frustrated and fuzzy attempts to articulate me n methodology, I noticed I was trying to explain by emphasising and re-emphasising the -ing of all of the keep-ing, do-ing, problematis-ing s. The -ing is the continuous tense, the tense of movement. Movement is the continuous attaching and abstracting; the breaking and forming and re-shaping of new relations; the occupation of new positions – new perspectives; the interruption of grasping (or its antidote).

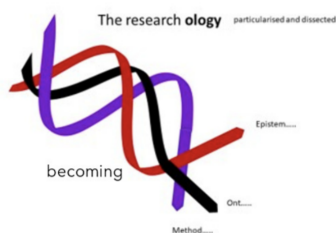
Moving between too safe – safe – unsafe /too uncertain – critiquing – uncritical.

Continuously.

Not seeking equilibrium, but seeking calibration.

Movement is the contribution to methodologies of inquiry into practice. The contribution this thesis makes is the breaking of norms around application of methodologies. Not a new methodology (that would take us into reification, magical thinking and more nonsense), but a new approach to how we use methodologies. If movement is at the heart of doing containment, then doing containment is an approach to using methodology for inquiry into practice. Moving between approaches; responding and reacting to what emerges from the practice-under-inquiry by adopting and adapting different methodologies. Keeping methodology problematized. Seeking methodology-enough.

On positions, perspectives and ologies



My conceptual framework, the strategic approach from different partial positions:

- Action
- Participatory
- Autoethnographic
- Phenomenological
- Bricolage
- Sensory ethnography.....

Reframing again on the possible methodologies employed in this thesis:

- This inquiry can be viewed as action research, and should be if we choose to emphasise the difference it has made, is making to the participants and their situation.
- This inquiry can also be viewed as participatory research, and should be if we wish to emphasise the egalitarian participation of all actors, and place, and the different expertises and experiences they contributed.

- This inquiry can be viewed as auto-ethnographic if abstracting outwards and seeing the researcher as object of inquiry, the artefact of the research (although I have objections to this perspective, see below).
- This inquiry can be viewed as phenomenological, attaching inwards to specific situations and the meaning making we sought to derive.

It is all of these and also none of these, not completely. These are all partial positions we can (and should) move between. In moving we are forced to consider what we are losing and what we are gaining, the usefulness, the bias, the limitations of each in relation to the thing which we are inquiring into. If we never quite settle, we have to keep an open, curious mind and keep alive the struggle to not be entrapped (get too safe) by what the methodology points us to, but to what might be happening outside of these limiting frames.

At this point the splitting of the research inquiry into its various 'ologies' has revealed its limitations: the 'ologies' interdependencies are metaphysically reduced and recombined into a single, more useful, 'inquiry' whole, and probably wrapped up too with concepts of 'becoming' wrt those engaged in the researching process. The questions of what exists in the world that can be known (by us, by everything), and how that knowledge is created (by whom, for whom etc) and how we go about finding out, are of course inextricably interconnected and interdependent... and co-evolving – as one shifts there are pushes and pulls on the others. When inquiring into practice, relations and dynamics we are in shifting relations with these concepts, with realities – I suggest in coming to know our ontological and epistemological perspectives are loosened, becoming..... thus our perceptions of and choices in how we continue to go about finding out, how we inquire cannot stay rooted to the 'before', but must root with the coming to know.

So in conclusion...

If what is happening could be better understood by using a different lens of inquiry, a different methodology,
then dip into your bag of methodological knowledge
and use your practical wisdom and courage to try that something different.
Or something new.

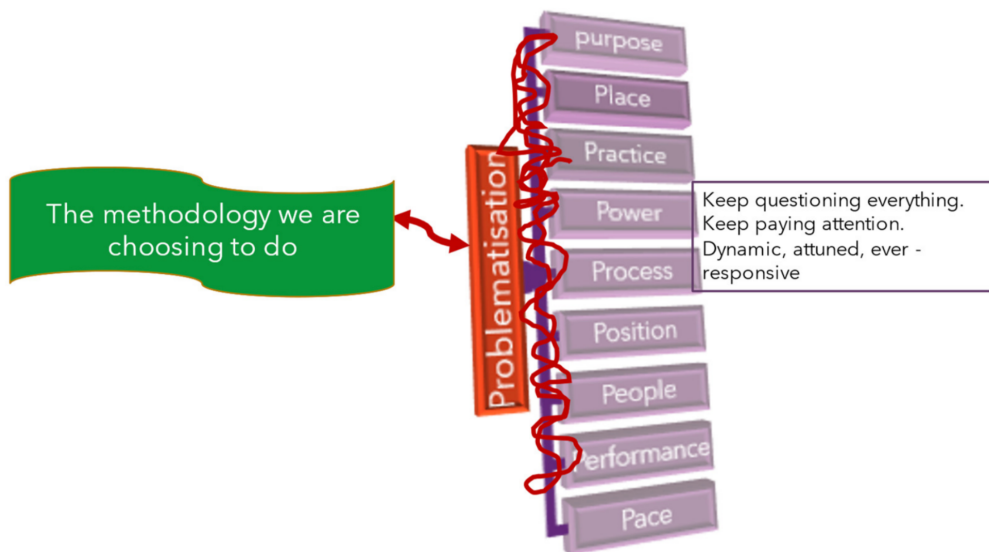


Epilogue

For anyone wondering what emerged from the research into containment and psych safety in leadership development ...

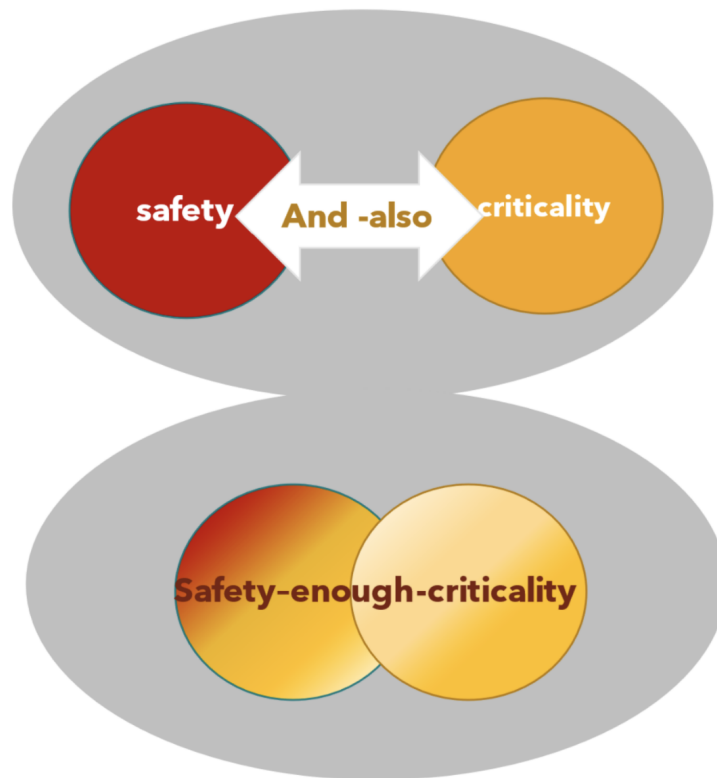
Keep dancing the line

Tool kit for doing research better?



P lenses – a tool for problematising the leadership happening and the leadership needed... also a tool for problematising methodology?

And on containment?



collapsing dualities– interconnected, dependent origination

Collapsing binaries

There are two actions required to shift focus from the ends of the duos to the relations. The first action is to shift emphasis and bring the and/also out from the background as mere linguistic transition between two primary objects. Re direct attention to the and/also, to the relationship. I use the italic here to notch-up emphasis, for equity in achieving equality. I seek to change the balance of focus to the in-between interconnection: to the bit worth exploring.

And also to remember that the relation is more than the linear in-between of the poles. And also is also a reminder to bring the 'everything else' of the situation in to the picture.

The second action is to begin to collapse the objects into one another, to dissolve the distance and recognise their incomplete impermanence, to shift the sense from complete things to partial perspectives. This is the function of 'enough' – what it is for.

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When Leaders are Vilified: A phenomenological analysis of the inner transitional experience of leaders who are vilified

Mr Ross Emerson

Director/Owner; Psychodynamic Consultant, Executive Coach, and Board Advisor,
Ross Emerson Ltd, UK



Ross is an executive coach and consultant well positioned to support senior leaders facing complex challenges. With over 30-years of business experience drawing from international roles in Canada, Japan, United Kingdom, Monaco, and India along with his breadth of global experience, Ross was selected to be part of a Global Expert Coaching Team for senior executive leaders at some UN Agencies. In addition to owning his own private client coaching business serving clients around the globe, Ross provides senior executive coaching and consulting services through the LHHP International Center for Executive Options and the Senior Directors Unit EMEA hub in London; and he also coaches senior executives in the Kellogg-Schulich EMBA programme, which in 2020 was rated by the Economist as the #2 EMBA programme in the world.

During a successful career in financial services spanning over 25-years, Ross held senior roles in banking strategy, operational risk management, learning and development, global payments products, corporate sales, wealth management, and enterprise leadership. In 2013 and 2014, Ross won Royal Bank of Canada's Private Banking Gold Award given to the top enterprise leaders across Canada. Prior to that in 2009 and 2011, Ross won the Barclays Chairman's award for Individual Contribution to the Monaco and to the Europe regions respectively. In 2002 Ross was privileged to be part of the World Youth Day team organising the visit of Pope John Paul II to Toronto. In 2003 Ross relocated to England and worked as Deputy Fundraising Director at the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and after several years, Ross was headhunted by the National Youth Theatre of Great Britain to join its Executive Committee as Development Director.

Ross has served as Non-Executive Director on the boards of two UK charities in the past, and served on the board for the Canadian Centre for Diversity between 2012 and 2014 as Chair of its Development Committee as well as being Treasurer for a short period. Ross has coached senior professionals across Canada, the UK, and Continental Europe.

In 2019 Ross completed INSEAD's Executive Master of Consulting & Coaching for Change Degree program and graduated with Distinction. The program focuses on successful Organisational Transformation and Change Management and comprises the disciplines of Organisational Psychology, Organisational Development, and Systems & Complexity Theory. In addition to this degree, Ross previously completed a Master of Business Administration Degree with specialisations in strategy and marketing, an Honours Bachelor of Arts Degree in International Politics, and a Graduate Certificate in International Business Management. Ross has also successfully completed his UK Investment Management Certificate, the Canadian Securities Course, and held the Personal Financial Planner designation in Canada. In autumn of 2021 Ross will commence a PhD course of study where his research will focus in the leadership arena.

When Leaders are *Vilified*

Exploring the Inner Experience of Leaders Who are Vilified



by: Ross Emerson



NIODA SYMPOSIUM 2021 – NOT KNOWING AND COMING TO KNOW
METHODS OF INQUIRY INTO UNCONSCIOUS (HIDDEN) DYNAMICS IN ORGANISATIONS
MELBOURNE, 9TH SEPTEMBER 2021

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Agenda



BRIEFLY OUTLINE THE
RESEARCH



CASE STUDIES (3) FOR
CONTEXT



SHARE FINDINGS &
RESEARCHER EXPERIENCE



IMPLICATIONS FOR
ORGANISATIONS
(TIME PERMITTING)



WRAP UP

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Catalyst for this Topic

- Coaching work involving people implicated in the Grenfell Tower disaster in London June 2017



- I started to develop a new lens on the topic
- Because of the emotionally charged situation and severity of impact on people, one could conclude that many people were being vilified. This is not a judgement, but an observation.

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Research Goals

1. Map the inner transitional experience of leaders who have been vilified
 - Caveat – Vilification *without justification*
2. Determine why this experience occurred
 - Identify the *subconscious drivers*
3. Objective
 - Devise a *conceptual model* for understanding above and below the surface

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Relevance

- Widespread application - It could happen to anyone... It could happen to you!
- Better understanding of this transitional space provides useful insights
- Organisational leaders may be presiding over these types of situations, or possibly be in this situation themselves. To do so more effectively they need understand the hidden dynamics at play in the organisation and the person

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Methodology

- Qualitative research method selected - better for understanding an *experience*
- IPA and thematic analysis using first-person narratives of “the villains” employing critical incident method
- Socio-analytic Interviewing techniques using a psychodynamic lens to get beneath the surface

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Fieldwork₍₁₎ – Defining Key Terms

- **Leader** - A senior professional with management or executive accountability, influence over other people, and in a position to have impact them.
- **Villain** - Someone who is *perceived* by others to be, or themselves *feels* that they are being treated negatively by others for an unintended negative consequence that occurred through the carrying out of their professional obligations.
- **Transitional Experience** - The inner experience encountered, either emotional, psychological, or both.

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Fieldwork₍₂₎ - sampling

- Qualification/Eligibility discussion (ex: nature of incident; intention; sphere of influence/control)
- Focused, semi-structured 1-hour interview initially
- Thematic Research questionnaire + Live 3-hour socio-analytic interviews
- Critical Analysis – Above and Below the Surface (conscious and subconscious)

Sample Characteristic	Sample Description
Age range	38 - 69
Average age	53.4
Gender mix	66.5% Male 33.5% Female
Geographical mix	NA = 25% SA = 8% Europe = 42% Asia = 17% MENA = 8%
Industry/Sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Consulting• Financial Services• Capital Markets• Legal• Government• Education• Private Equity• Leisure & Hospitality

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Case Study 1:

CHIEF COMPLIANCE OFFICER, INVESTMENT BANK

SITUATION: DISCOVERY AND DISCLOSURE OF
FINANCIAL IMPROPRIETY (FRAUD)

Case Study 2:

CHAIRMAN OF HOTEL/LEISURE GROUP

SITUATION: SEVERE PHYSICAL INJURY DUE TO
GUEST IGNORING WELL-SIGNED SAFETY RULES

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Case Study 3:

GLOBAL MANAGING PARTNER, PROF. SERVICES FIRM

SITUATION: CORPORATE RESTRUCTURING RESULTING
IN REDUCTION OF WORKFORCE

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Role of the Villain

- Responsible for doing harm or evil; void of moral virtues
- Contravene the ethos of society; mirror of what is abhorrent
- Traditionally the antagonist
- Necessary for projecting blame when closure for the unexplainable is required
- Necessary for one to feel good about oneself; the villain reminds us of what we *could* have become if left unchecked
- Necessary to identify who the hero is
- **Struggled to find any scholarly literature about the inner experience of the villain**

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Mapping the inner experience

Time Stage → Meta-Experience ↓	Early Stage	Mid-term	Long-term

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Mapping the inner experience

Time Stage → Meta-Experience ↓	Early Stage	Mid-term	Long-term
Emotional State	Strong response	Increased intensity	Deep scarring

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Emotional State	Strong response	Increased intensity	Deep scarring
Impact on Relationships	Negative with self	Negative with others	Me versus the world

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Social Defenses	Reflection and introspection	Isolation and retreat	Cognitive processing; memory suppression

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Recovery & Healing	Well-being focus	Desire to heal	Catharsis; self-identity narratives re-written

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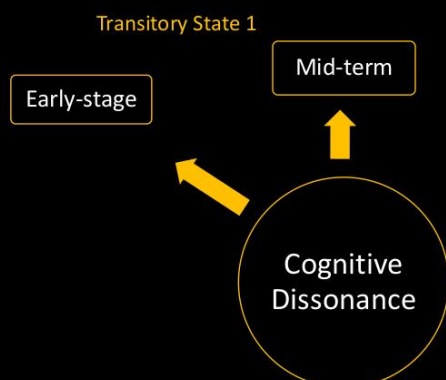
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Research Findings⁽¹⁾ – What is happening above the surface?



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Research Findings⁽²⁾ – What is happening below the surface?



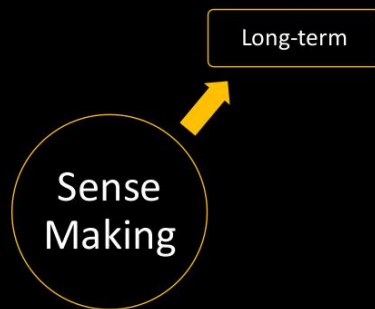
- Highly uncomfortable state
- Painful; stressful; impacts emotional and physical well-being

1. Andiappan & Dufour (2017)
2. Chang, Solomon, Westerfield (2016)
3. Levy, Harmon-Jones, Harmon-Jones (2018)

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Research Findings⁽²⁾ – What is happening below the surface?

Transitory State 2



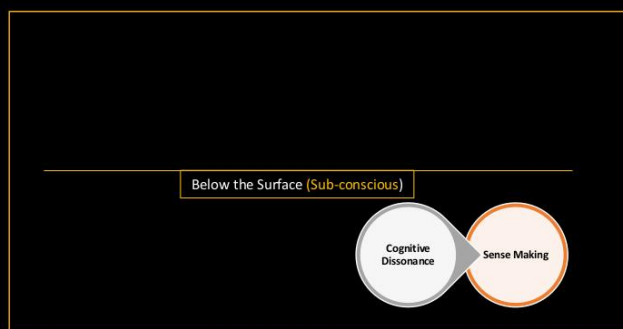
- Find ways to alleviate or mitigate the cognitive dissonance
- Finding new meaning; rewriting inner and outer narratives

1. Andiappan & Dufour (2017)
2. Cunliffe & Coupland (2011)

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Research Findings⁽²⁾ – What is happening below the surface?

Sequential Transitory States



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Mapping the experience above and below the surface

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|-----Cognitive Dissonance-----| |----Sense Making----|

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Research Findings⁽³⁾ – Why is it happening?

Causality (1)

Stigma
as the
trigger

- Negative Judgement
- Triggered by perceived vilification

1. Major & O'Brien (2005)
2. Petriglieri (2011)

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Research Findings⁽³⁾ – Why is it happening?

Causality (2)

Threat
Appraisal

- Subjective assessment and evaluation
 - *Primary* – how harmful is this to me?
 - *Secondary* - what am I going to do about it?

1. Petriglieri (2011)
2. Lazarus & Folkman (1984)
3. Chang, Salomon, Westerfield (2016)
4. Lyons, Pek, Wessel (2017)
5. Stryker & Serpe (1994)
6. Burke (1991)

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Research Findings⁽³⁾ – Why is it happening?

Causality (3)

Identity
Threat

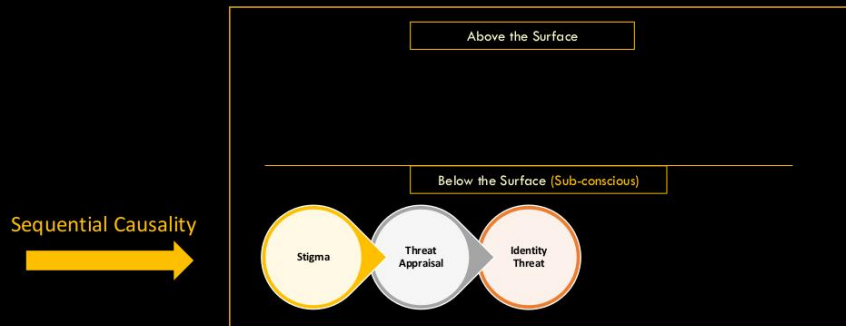
Once Confirmed

- Activation of identity threat coping responses:
 - *Protection responses*
 - *Restructuring responses*

1. Petriglieri (2011)
2. Lazarus & Folkman (1984)
3. Chang, Salomon, Westerfield (2016)
4. Lyons, Pek, Wessel (2017)
5. Stryker & Serpe (1994)
6. Burke (1991)

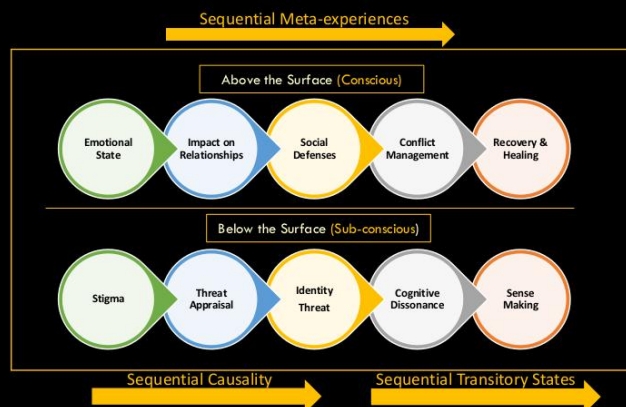
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Research Findings⁽³⁾ – Why is it happening?



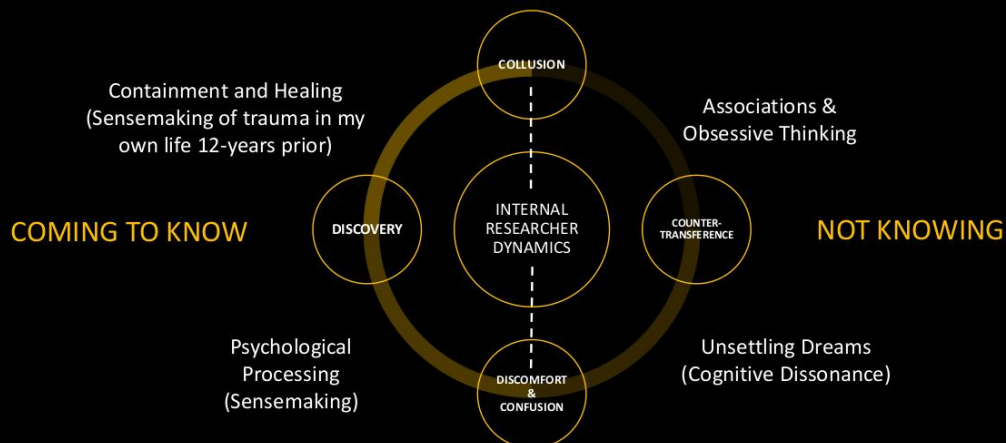
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Proposed Conceptual Model: When Leaders are Vilified A traumatic inner experience brought on by Stigma-induced Identity Threat



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Researcher Experience



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Implications for Organisations

Implication	Consideration	Protective Action
Employee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impact on mental and physical well-being 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Avoid denial Resist long-term isolation; Seek appropriate support (medical/emotional/psychological) as soon as possible for both short and long term Acceptance necessary to heal
Senior Leadership		
Policy		
Liability		
Risk		

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Implications for Organisations

Implication	Consideration	Protective Action
Employee		
Senior Leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Leadership effectiveness compromised 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monitor and support key stakeholders comprehensively Put appropriate/specialised coaching or counselling in place Engage with the person, don't detach/distance Training programs for leaders at every level
Policy		
Liability		
Risk		

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Implications for Organisations

Implication	Consideration	Protective Action
Employee		
Senior Leadership		
Policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impact on human capital and benefits policies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incorporate appropriate amendments to ensure that these situations are pro-actively considered Provide appropriate support, viewed through the lens of doing what is necessary to stabilise the organization as quickly as possible Appropriate provision for transition from role or organisation
Liability		
Risk		

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Implications for Organisations

Implication	Consideration	Protective Action
Employee		
Senior Leadership		
Policy		
Liability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Duty of care to human capital Potential legal action by human capital or external stakeholders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborative engagement and provision of appropriate support for human capital and close circles Community engagement External support professionals identified in advance Pro-active preparation of crisis management plans and regular simulation for implementation
Risk		

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Implications for Organisations

Implication	Consideration	Protective Action
Employee		
Senior Leadership		
Policy		
Liability		
Risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Negative financial impact during business disruption Operational risk affecting business performance Reputational risk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Contingency planning Ring-fenced crisis budget Robust human capital succession plans in place Proactive preparation statements for early response for crisis management and damage limitation Regular crisis training

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Closing Thoughts

1. The shadow side of Judgement – of self and of others
2. Through the lens of well being
3. The system as a possible villain
4. Reflection: As human beings, capable of reasoning and compassion, should we more often be asking the question “Are the villains sometimes also the victims?”



Final Reflection

“YOU LEARN EVENTUALLY THAT, WHILE THERE ARE NO VILLAINS, THERE ARE NO HEROES EITHER. AND UNTIL YOU MAKE THE FINAL DISCOVERY THAT THERE ARE ONLY HUMAN BEINGS, WHO ARE THEREFORE ALL THE MORE FASCINATING, YOU ARE LIABLE TO MISS SOMETHING.”

-- PAUL GALLICO

THANK-YOU

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Keywords:

Keywords: leader; villains; stigma; threat appraisal; identity threat; transition; cognitive dissonance; sense making; trauma; well-being; recovery; victim.

Webpage:

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Unconscious dynamics and their influence on our methods of inquiry: Case of the non profit sector

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As a social development and group relations practitioner, I have been thinking and writing about system psychodynamics of the nonprofit sector and their impact on working to task. The invitation from NIODA for papers on the theme of 'Not knowing and Coming to know' made me wonder about the influence of unconscious dynamics on the methods of 'coming to know'. This paper is set in the context of the nonprofit sector in India. It is part of my continued sense making as a practitioner in this sector. It explores how system wide unconscious dynamics may influence processes of coming to know and the possible implications for our methods of enquiry.

The nonprofit sector is referred to by many names including charity, development aid, philanthropy, social work, community development and social justice work. Primary Task refers to the reason for the existence of any system, one that gives it meaning. The primary task of the nonprofit system is to support the client community to increase its ability to influence its context in a way that realizes their potential.

It is rooted in the idea of service for a community or cause, that one may or may not be directly part of or affected by. Work is typically undertaken through time bound 'projects' that aspire to some specific outcomes/change. Such projects are a collaboration between a donor/government and implemented by an agency in collaboration with local community.

Knowing/Not knowing/Coming to know and the Primary task

The complexity of task of the non profit system is high. Working to the task requires an acknowledgement of uncertainty, an orientation to learning from experience, adaptability, and finding spaces for exercise of influence. There are emergent outcomes at each level. Take for instance, a project aiming to support the community in increasing profitability from their agriculture practices. The project encounters emergent outcomes in the interaction of the physical elements – soil, seed, rain, pests. There are unfolding dynamics within the households in the community and the emerging relations with others in the community. Availability of new infrastructure, such as irrigation, may encourage farmers to make new choices that are not desirable, e.g. increased water extraction. Human and ecosystem relations - unfolding, negotiating, influencing - make not knowing an inherent part of the development process.

The 'coming to know' process is one of negotiation of different interests to influence both - a common articulation of the present challenges and the desired state of change. This informs action. A program focusing on women may receive support from the larger system, including the household, if it focuses on maternal health or certain aspects of maternal health that emphasise the caregiving role of the mother. It may be less acceptable to speak of her own rights, including those of access to safe contraception or abortion services. The process of arriving at issues of women will thus need a negotiation and dialogue among different interest groups. 'Coming to know' processes are critically linked to this ongoing negotiation across diverse views and experiences. Task related questions (Who is

the defined community? What is their own vision of their potential?) define some boundaries helpful for these explorations.

The 'coming to know' processes are also critical to inform the accountability requirements for investment decisions of the non profit system. Resources in the non profit system are committed for certain expected outcomes. This means ascertaining aggregation (all that was done) and attributability (what was achieved because of what was done), thereby informing further investment decisions or mid-course corrections. It is assumed that these 'coming to know' processes are evidence based, rational and objective, free from bias. These are usually outsourced to 'experts'. Knowledge is treated as something finite, which can be acquired through conscious, rational techniques of knowing.

There is a rich literature in the development space that critiques or challenges such objective evaluation approaches. This critique includes the lack of examination of unintended outcomes or emerging effects of interventions. Meta studies show that evaluations are likely to be more rigorous if the organization expects to see chances of success. Success is essential to justify and enhance investments and policy support. Critical development literature emphasises inclusion – so questions such as - Whose frameworks? Whose questions? Who is consulted and who is not? – have helped place community perspectives on the table in reviews and evaluations.

Helpful stances

What are some helpful stances that ensure that these processes are working to support the task?

Many aspects of the context and system in which the client community is located are not clearly in public view – they may be in the realm of 'not knowing'. This requires building trustful relationships and a containing environment where the client community and stakeholders would engage in coming to know together. With complexity, comes the need for relying on action as a way of revealing, discovery and adapting.

It may help if external agents have a stance of "optimal ignorance" to understand and work with this 'not knowing'. Optimal ignorance is often explained as getting only as much information as is needed for practical purposes. It suggests not privileging detailed, 'expert' knowledge and using instead the closest approximation already available in the context. This term can also be seen as containing the external expert's intellectual need – one's knowing and need to know - in a way that it does not eclipse co-exploration.

An experience in taking of helpful stances and uncovering defenses

Tomato cultivation had been successfully practiced in a village in Eastern India, profitably for three seasons by almost all farmers. The village received many visitors and evaluations. Due to strategic changes on geographical focus, the nonprofit organization had to close the program. As the village had checked the boxes on all the articulated assumptions for success of the program, it was expected that this work would continue – it was 'irreversible'. Few years later, some of us learnt that the situation had changed. We were curious to know what had happened and decided to revisit the village. While we were all associated with the erstwhile program in different roles, none of us had formal roles at the time of our visit. The visit generated insights for all of us to be applied in our roles elsewhere. My colleagues were implementing a similar program in other areas and realized they needed to provide continued oversight in the transition – 'leave but don't go away'. I was running a digital service and concluded that this experience validated the need for continued information support for farmers.

On reflection, it seems there were some undiscussables in our enquiry. We were comfortable completing our enquiry without meeting the farmers who had led this change. We had intended to enquire about "what happened? Our conversation unconsciously, became "why didn't the community continue what was working well for them". This prompted the community to take a defensive stand – explaining difficulties they faced in continuing rather than engage in co-exploration or share their feelings regarding the program. We seemed to seek accountability towards ourselves (what could I have done better?) and to the 'interventions' (what works?). We were not able to seek any accountability to the

community (what in it worked for you?). Our expertise and conviction - that agriculture interventions can only do good - had set an assumed and unspoken limit to our exploration. While the community didn't grow tomatoes anymore, what had this experience shifted for them? Had it left them worse off?

Unpacking this experience to understand system psychodynamics

Kurt Lewin talks of different forces which determine inclusion or exclusion into an existing social channel. The non profit is often called on to hold the vision of a different force field from what exists, in the face of uncertainty and in a difficult context. In this case too, the conviction held by the nonprofit system had helped build the ability and confidence in the initial group of farmers to move from more familiar and regular wage labour to more risk prone agriculture and self-employment. This village inspired many neighbouring villages to take on similar initiatives. It built the track record for the organization needed to raise more resources.

To do its task, the non profit system needs to assume some predictability of actions to be able to function. By focusing only on what is predictable, the nonprofit system, unconsciously, furthers its assumption that change is delivered mostly by actions of external agencies. These phenomena – A valence of “We shall overcome” and do what appears to be impossible together with needing predictability, may lead to an omnipotent stance – one where the nonprofit attributes to itself a central role in bringing change. A simplified view of development as delivery of projects is also easier to hold than one where development is seen as a change in social relationships. This becomes an unconscious defense against the anxiety of uncertainty and complexity and manifests as a certain omniscience – as if it knows what will happen and can make it happen. It brings with it a dynamic of narrowing the gaze to fit what this system needs to see or show.

Our revisit to the village helped us to hold on to our own cherished assumptions as facts. Assumed good intentions blurred access to new experiences, which could challenge these assumptions. These cherished assumptions are also held in common, making it more difficult to challenge this idea of reality for those within our group.

The non-profit system allows itself to cling to ideas which may or may not have been tested objectively. The fear of breaking established or future relationships unconsciously privileges a stance of status quo over working to task. Holding a preoccupation with itself, the system runs the risk of becoming a club - a closed system insulated from its context.

An important aspect of the primary task of the non profit system is to ‘pass the mic’(rophone) to the community; that is, to work in such a way that the community's own influence is amplified in their context. The primary task itself shifts from passing the mic to becoming the mic – which is amplifying oneself.

These dynamics seem to have made it difficult for us to take up the helpful stances of optimal ignorance and holding a space for co-exploration. ‘What else may be happening?’ is a difficult question to hold in the process of coming to know, as it threatens the omnipotence of the system.

Unconscious dynamics and our methods of enquiry

It appears that the ‘practical’ use for project management, or the intellectual need to ‘know about development’, tends to be privileged over ‘coming to know’ in a way that supports the primary task of the system. System psychodynamics seem to reinforce what is existing – so even if something at the penumbra is seen or named, it may not really influence. The coming to know process then runs a high risk of becoming tokenistic - a coin in a game or instrument to gain access or appreciation. Or just do something minimally, without much intention of change.

Exploring implications for practice

Community development practitioners have access to a rich tradition of participatory methods and action research, which focuses on inclusion, listening and leveling the field – handing over the stick. As

we have seen above, these processes are not exempt from system wide unconscious dynamics. How might we learn from the unconscious processes embedded in organisations so that these methods may help us come to know better?

An illustration: 'I am Kisan' was started as a digital service of curated information that reduces risk in decision making of farmers, to support their journey of self-reliance. It was first envisioned as a mobile phone application. 50 farmers were invited to collaborate in the development of this application. Meetings tended to become spaces for seeking feedback about the application. It was more difficult to jointly identify what may be useful to farmers. Farmers often narrated all features about the application, while never having accessed it themselves. They seemed to not want to discourage us. They also had existing relationships with our partner organisations. It was challenging to get authentic responses about their engagement with the technology. We privileged responses that involved some action – e.g. checking phones for daily market price messages and held other 'successes' more tentatively. This experience seems to show that community, may also operate from same unconscious phenomena as can be seen in the nonprofit system. It is not enough to just bring diverse people to think together.

As promoter of this service, I realized that I was imposing my ambition on this young enterprise - my quest for 'success' was rooted in need for personal validation. My desire of scale of this service was my wish for power and influence. I needed to work with my sense of powerlessness and a fear of not being needed, own disappointments and personal ambition to be able to take up my role in co-exploration. It allowed me easier access to the question – is the mobile application the only answer?

Proof of concept of I am Kisan entailed farmers seeing value enough that they pay for services. This meant we had to relate with them – to both understand what was important for them and demonstrate the value of our service to them. We started developing more specific purpose statements of use cases for the technology solutions. For watermelon it was "Access to information that led to zero post harvest loss to farmers due to lack of market information and linkage". For bitter gourd it was "Access to information that increased duration and production of crop due to better management and timely harvest". Having such specific goals, put a boundary to see what had actually worked and extent to which it could be generalized.

What helped was to keep a clear idea of the purpose – to support farmers' journey of self-reliance by making digital technology work for them. Co-discovery seems to happen with building of relationships and building on unintended outcomes. The task of the enterprise itself emerged – from being curated information that reduces risk, to offering information and services which build confidence in the smallholder farmer in accessing markets.

Enablers

In the non profit sector, but maybe elsewhere too, methods of enquiry and their outcomes cannot be separated from how one uses this 'knowing' in service of the task of the system. As a development practitioner, using 'knowing' for task, perhaps means forming a strong intention towards a value-based approach to one's practice.

A significant enabler seems to be an embracing of 'not knowing' as a generative space that allows for unintended consequences to be seen. Certainty comes from the word surety, pledge – full assurance of mind and an exemption from doubt. Being too certain can also serve as a signal to explore what need is being served by eclipsing doubts and actively start seeking what is not so evident. Directing attention to unintended or emergent consequences of our work could reveal one's own collusion with system psychodynamics. This collusion could be fueled by own desires and ambitions. One may unconsciously be force fitting one's experiences to avoid challenging one's cherished assumptions. This exploration could then help in taking one's role more authentically in connection with the primary task. Clarity on primary task serves as a north star in navigating one's knowing, not knowing, and coming to know.

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Storm tossed but not submerged: developing individual and collective knowing through group holding environments in organisations during crises and beyond

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Introduction

I want to tell you about a case study, about Quiet Conversations. It is an online reflective space, where anybody in the organisation can attend.

It is hosted by me and my colleague, Fred, in an organisations that we both work for. We have been running Quiet Conversations regularly since July 2020.

People voluntarily attend as a member of the organisation's community, rather than based on a particular role they hold. They can share their thoughts, feeling and ideas. Or they can simply listen.

I contend that Quiet Conversations activated the organisation's 'community system' by creating a portal into this system. I suggest that the space allowed many people, including me to 'come to know' at individual and collective levels.

I suggest that being together in this way helped us notice and cope with the waves of emotions that we felt and continue to feel during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This is an illustrative case study (Berg, 1990) that illustrates particular concepts of 'holding environment', and 'community system'.

I want to make the case for why it is really important to create reflective spaces like these at this time. They can be sources of strength and creativity. Many of us here appreciate the benefits of reflective spaces generally, and how beneficial they could be before the current pandemic, but I think they are particularly important now as it is clear that for many of us, working as part of a hybrid team – or working with hybrid teams – is here to stay.

Today I will:

- Tell you about how Quiet Conversations came about as a case study
- Talk about what I mean by 'community system'
- Share thematic data from the sessions
- Focus on the organisational tensions in creating this reflective space
- Share some theories and practices
- Identify potential barriers to setting them up
- Share what I came to know
- Argue for reflective spaces to be 'held' not only during crises but beyond.

The Case Study

The case study is in the organisation that employs me, a state government department. I have worked in this organisation for 14 years and my role is a senior manager in organisational development. The organisation has over 4000 people located across Victoria. For those of you who are here today from outside Australia, Victoria is a southern state of Australia.

To be clear, the case study is not one of a group relations-style event: participants were not there to study in real time what it felt like to be a member of the reflective group, as in a group relations conference or therapeutic group analysis (Foulkes, 1975).

How did our idea come about? The idea germinated in March 2020 from my colleague, Fred. He asked me if I wanted to work with him to create an online 'community forum' for staff. The forum would allow anyone to check in with their colleagues, discuss their challenges, ask questions, or get information, support or advice. The forums would focus on **wellbeing** and provide a space where people who felt isolated could connect with colleagues from around the department. Initially our thinking was that we could also invite external health and/or wellbeing professionals to present on particular topics of interest. We also thought that we could promote the department's wellbeing resources, and people could reach out after the forums if they felt they would benefit from a one-to-one conversation.

I agreed and we set about seeking **authorisation** from the senior executive.

In parallel, soon after our initial discussions, the Secretary (CEO) of the department commenced all staff online forums. These were forums where he could share key information and help people across the organisation feel connected during the crisis.

Eventually, after five months (including a change in the relevant senior leader who would need to approve the idea), we launched Quiet Conversations on 29 July 2020.

We also brought in another colleague with a communications and journalism background to be a part of the crew. Having her expertise was really helpful in doing the promotion necessary for the event.

There were a couple of hurdles we had to jump before we were up and running.

First, the senior leader who was charged primarily with authorising our project resigned. We had to prosecute our idea again with the new leader and that added a little time.

Second, we had to convince the senior leaders of the **value of the program** and show how we were going to manage risks.

Senior leaders expressed concern that there was a risk that staff would 'hijack' the forums and complain about their manager or organisational policy. Legitimate concerns were also raised about how we would be able to support people who got upset in an online environment.

Third, we had to show how this project would be **different** to the support services the organisation already provided. These services were individualised services available to all staff, including psychological and counselling support. This reflected, I think, an individualised, transactional approach to engaging with staff during a crisis which was limited to sharing information about support services available to them, rather than thinking about staff as people who may wish to process their experiences of the crisis with colleagues, and who may not necessarily be wanting to raise issues but rather feel a sense of connection and belonging to the organisation at an uncertain time.

In the early days of getting Quiet Conversations up and running, we reflected that it felt like we were a virus that was considered a threat to the body of the organisation.

Originally the direction came back that we could hold forums but limit them to trial a pilot of three small groups with a maximum of 6 people. We then managed to negotiate up to 20 people and, after a successful pilot where our numbers ranged from 5 – 20 people, Quiet Conversations was born.

We usually kick off each session with our own reflections or insights and then invite people in to the conversation. The conversation develops organically during the hour. Many things are shared: stories, tips for coping, thinking frameworks, people even make connections afterwards.

We recently held our 20th session.

The sessions started out being held weekly. From 2021 as the government's restrictions eased, we held sessions fortnightly as the demand did not seem to be as high.

We have had a range of staff attending the sessions from different parts of the organisation. Most participants were women. One week we had one senior leader turn up. Some people were regulars, others attended one or two sessions and didn't come again. Numbers have ranged from zero to 32 people.

But before I go to the data from the sessions to see what became known and why it was useful, let's see what is the community system of an organisation?

The Organisation Community System

Many of you will be familiar with the idea that an organisation has 'task' and 'role' systems. The 'community system' is a system that supplements these systems. I have taken this idea of the community system from the work of Susan Long who hypothesised about it in a paper that drew on her experiences as a director of group relations conferences.

'Community system' takes its name from the community system event, used in group relations conferences. This is an event where participants are there primarily in their role as a citizen of the conference community, rather than as a role holder in the conference's political or task systems (eg. Director, staff member, administrator, participant).

In Long's definition, in the organisational community system:

...we take up the role of community member somewhat akin to 'citizen' of the broader organisation, although without the implications of an organized civic state. The community system has the flavour of a system where roles are focused around inter-subjective equalities. Here relationship is as important as relatedness. This may seem just another expression of the sentient system, but it is more than just the emotional and friendship bonds formed in the organisation. It is a system of institutional and social values at a communal level. Perhaps it is the level where a common symbolism is formed.

...inter-subjectivity amongst interacting members of a community system provides a social 'glue' as does a common task, and as does a common culture...

I will shortly mention some other concepts that I think are akin to that of the 'community system' but I now want to share the themes that came from these sessions over the last year.

Themes

We heard many stories of people's experiences over the months.

I'll now read out some of the insights from the sessions. I've grouped them into themes. I think it might help if you let them wash over you and hold fast to the ones that resonate with you.

Vulnerability and not knowing

- Some people couldn't always support others in their roles in the same way as 'before'. For example, for those who worked in a customer call centre role, working in the same physical space meant that debriefings about tricky calls or sharing information could happen quite easily: working from different places meant that this support was not so readily available and required different ways of working.
- It was acknowledged that this was a new experience: people felt ill-equipped to support some colleagues.
- Learning from mistakes and ignorance was preferable to being blamed for them (an assumption that we should 'know' all the time).
- COVID-19 is putting us in touch with our vulnerabilities. We are in transition and we're not sure where it is heading.
- Having a sense of control was important to us before COVID-19: now we're realising how quickly that can change.
- How people wanted a psychologically safe environment but it was not always safe to ask questions and speak up.
- The world has changed and we are in transition – but we're not sure where to.

The organisation's responsibilities and expectations

- People felt fatigued and exhausted, but also gratitude for the organisation being supportive in saying that it was important to look after ourselves and each other.
- Some felt pressure to put on a brave face (equating to a denial of the reality of their experience)
- [The session] built greater awareness of the "turbo charged" nature of the organisation. The question of whether we can ever do enough was posed.
- Strong, containing leadership was important and desired – the Premier of Victoria was often held up as a positive role model.

Acknowledgement that experiences across the organisation were different and valid

- People's experiences vary and should be respected. We can only know what they are by taking the time to stop and listen to them.
- Hearing others' experiences builds our knowledge and understanding of the community and the diversity of experience of the pandemic.
- Permission and space needs to be given for us to share our experiences.
- It's important to hear how others are going and this was a good method.
- The more we talk about things, the more we realise what we can control and what we can't.

Connection

- It is important for people to know that they're not alone in their experience.
- Energy is needed to be empathetic to others

Intersubjectivity and voice

- It was considered important for the organisation to treat its people like humans, not robots.
- That everyone's voice, whatever their role or grade, matters. People at lower 'grades' also have ideas that may be useful at this time.
- Wellbeing needs to be integrated into every facet of our working – not something 'added on'.

Being connected to a community was a source of creative insight

- Gaining a greater appreciation of how complex life was and how more complex it was becoming
- The realization that people were not alone, that their experiences, frustrations and tribulations were experienced by others.
- Discussion about creating ourselves during the pandemic, not just 'surviving'
- Discussions about what we could do at this time that was helpful

- One session even functioned as a way for the group to develop some principles to help them navigate the difficult times:
 - Create empathy with colleagues
 - Know that you're not alone
 - Build connection to reduce isolation.

Tensions - hierarchy

As I have outlined, while the organisation was open to the idea of us putting on this forum, initially there was some caution, and Quiet Conversations emerged as a negotiated outcome with those who held senior roles in the people and culture part of the organisation. I want to unpack this further because it has implications for establishing reflective spaces in organisations.

In negotiating our outcome, sometimes I felt like we were promoting a very threatening idea indeed. It felt like we were challenging something that sat very deep within the organisation.

I have a couple of ideas as to what might have been going on here.

First, that 'something', I suspect, was the deeply embedded, unconscious idea that those at the top of the hierarchy are the ones who 'know' in a crisis, and that those below 'know less'.

This got me thinking about the meaning of hierarchy. It translates as 'rule of a high priest'. I was staggered to read that it has only been used in the English language since the 1880s. It is a dominant 'concept in the mind' in many organisations - a "deeply embedded cultural phenomenon" (Harding, 2006, p.239) - and the public sector is no exception.

I think that the idea of Quiet Conversations highlighted a tension in the organisation – a tension **between**, on the one hand, the deeply embedded assumption that people with positional power in the 'higher' parts of the organisation's hierarchy 'knew', and on the other, with the idea that a gathering of staff – in the 'community system' was also a source of valuable knowing.

Second, it may also have touched on the anxiety that may be produced in management by a loss of the control of staff who would meet but who could not be seen and monitored.

The implication is that it may be difficult for senior leaders to think about an organisational community system not only as a concept, but a **place of value and a source of strength and knowledge**.

Third, the idea of creating a reflective space in general may have challenged something very deeply held in the system: that this was the sort of work that was **more safely dealt with outside** the organisation as an individual activity, through the employee assistance service.

Was there perhaps a desire for things that cannot be controlled – like emotional responses, complexity and perceived weakness – to be attended to outside the boundary of the organisation? Or for emotional responses to be 'managed' so they don't feel so threatening because 'real' and therefore confronting?

It is possible that the organisation's anxiety of wanting to manage what was said played out in a **parallel process** with me. In the very early forums, I found myself paying a lot of attention to the rules of engagement for each forum - making sure that participants understood that the forums were confidential, that people should listen and be respectful during the session, and that external support was available if they needed it. Of course, these are all good, foundational boundaries with which to establish a proper holding environment, but I was preoccupied.

I don't wish to overplay the data I have available but I do want us to think about how we can support organisations to establish reflective spaces.

I came across something that Gilles Amado wrote that may help us here: that, in general, organisations in industrial societies find it difficult to develop self-reflective capacity and nurture psychic spaces (Amado, 2009, p.4):

"one could say that organizations hate potential spaces as they themselves tend to reject ambiguity, ambivalence, doubts, paradoxes, weaknesses, reverie and unconscious meanings, are afraid of the chaotic results of the free expression of fantasies and emotions amongst employees, except when instruments of their own power."

Theories and practices

Using our community as a resource to process emotions is not new: this is ancient work that has been practised for thousands of years across many cultures. But it has a new urgency for many organisations.

For over 30 years, many researchers (eg Emery, Trist, Kahn, 2001) have argued that the relationship between organisations and employees has become more entrepreneurial, that organisations are less bounded, and tasks and roles more uncertain.

As William Kahn argued in 2001, for example, the hierarchical structures and support from leaders and colleagues that used to provide a "secure base" (Kahn, 2001) with which to manage employee anxiety and distress have been partially eroded. Without such a secure base for attachment, workers have had to become more self-reliant (Kahn). In addition, as organisations have fewer resources (time, resources, energy) the possibilities of support from colleagues and leaders becomes less (Kahn, 2001).

The 'secure base' that Kahn talks about is, of course what we could also call the 'holding environment', (and of course I'm drawing on Winnicott here): effective caregiving that is provided by a care giver to a child. The concept was born in Donald Winnicott's psychoanalytic work with children. And it has since been adapted to other settings, including to organisations.

A helpful holding environment provides a **safe harbour** where an anxious or distressed person can express their experience, be heard, calmed, appreciated, understood, until they right themselves and continue on their way (paraphrasing Kahn, 2001).

"The premise here is that adults who experience strong emotions often need settings in which to safely express and interpret their experiences, that is, to temporarily regress to intentionally nurturing environments." (Kahn, 1991, p.263).

Emotional regulation – Indeed, Kohrt et al. suggests that emotional regulation is a dynamic interpersonal process and not something only done by one's self. Our social relationships - including with those with whom we work – play an important role in reducing our distress (Kohrt). "Friends, family and social groups are kinds of 'extended frontal lobes'...that help us to calm down and cope with loss, trauma and violation." (Kohrt, quoting the work of James Griffith, psychiatrist).

And Australian trauma psychologist, Dr Rob Gordon, argues that, for communities impacted by trauma, it is important to bring people together to repair the **social fabric** that has been damaged from a disaster event. Disasters "have complex consequences for body, mind and social system. [And these systems] are all dimensions of recovery" (Gordon, 2004, p.17).

"Resilience operates at the level of individuals, small groups and entire communities." (Jones, 2021a).

One of Gordon's recommended practices to repair the social fabric after a disaster includes establishing formal and informal reference groups to encourage people to share and tolerate different experiences (Gordon, 2004, p.22).

The importance of being connected during difficult times to support and recover is also reflected in research that examines how Great Britain responded to the threat of aerial bombing during the Second World War suggests that:

- “during the Blitz, people living in towns ... [drew] on social networks and communal activities for emotional support and practical assistance” (Jones, 2021).
- In a 1940 report on civilian morale to the British government, the anthropologist Tom Harrisson, wrote about how when people felt part of a larger community, they felt a greater level of reassurance and the threat of aerial attacks were felt as “less personal” (Jones, 2021).

And, of course, since the Second World War, a number of therapeutic practices developed that take the group as a site for insight, learning and growth (although these traditions vary in the assumptions and theories they use):

- group relations
- therapeutic group analysis – or group processes

Both have as originating principles the idea that individuals can thrive when thinking as part of a group.

Why we need reflective spaces

There are more reasons than just the current pandemic to warrant our establishing reflective spaces in organisations right now. I've mentioned the idea – from Kahn and others - that organisations do not provide the same attachment experiences as they once may have done.

As hybrid working becomes the norm for many white-collar roles, maintaining connection to one's organisation, team and colleagues, is more important than ever.

Organisational behaviour researchers argue that the pandemic has “merely highlighted issues brought about by work environments that have drastically changed in the last 30 years” (Mortenson and Hadley, 2020, p.1).

“Modern teams also tend to lead to short-lived and superficial relationships. There isn't enough time for people to form true human connections. When people feel interchangeable, don't even know exactly who is on their team, or continuously join short projects, developing social connections became an elusive task. Making matters worse, people feel lonely and think they are the only ones suffering from loneliness.”

In their research of global teams during the current pandemic, Mark Mortenson and Constance Noonan Hadley (2021) surveyed global executives and managers just before and in the early months of the pandemic. They found that teams were already making people lonely due to working in hybrid structures, often on short term projects on multiple project teams for short periods of time.

Experiences of loneliness and social isolation were common: 76% of those surveyed before the pandemic said they struggled to make connections with their teammates. Over half felt that their social relationships at work were superficial.

While new working arrangements bring benefits to the organisation, they argue that these characteristics come at a cost (Mortenson and Hadley, 2021, p.2):

As a remedy to workplace loneliness, these academics recommend, among other things to create a recognised online 'home' or base where people spend most of their time in an “authentic community filled with a stable roster of colleagues, allowing relationships to flourish” (Mortenson and Hadley, 2021, p.2).

I think that creating a 'home' for teams would ideally include the elements of a good enough holding environment that Winnicott spoke of and the conditions of which Kahn outlines in some practical detail (Kahn, 2001, p. 266).

And using a slightly different lens, if we view organisations as comprised of networks that operate like ecosystems, we might see QC as an example of activating a subsystem of that network.

Barriers to establishing reflective spaces

I want to now turn to some potential social defences in an organisational system that may present some barriers to establishing reflective spaces and some approaches.

Groups as threatening

Open, unscripted, community spaces where people are encouraged to share their experiences can be difficult to tolerate by an organisation's leadership. This will be particularly more likely when trust is low. Such environments may be considered as threatening to organisational ideals of order, certainty, clarity, reaction and action. The idea of the group as a threat might also relate to a fear that sharing troubles or experience may have a contagious effect (Foulkes, 1964/2018, p.27)

- **Small doses** - Start small, provide reassurance to leadership, ensure you have the skills to facilitate the environment and address issues that might arise. Show that you have plans to address undue discomfort that participants might feel.
- **Share the learnings** - Communicate in general terms how the work is progressing and how it is assisting people – internally and to leadership. Maintain confidentiality of course, This may help 'normalise' the practice and question the idea that what is being done is threatening.

Over-valuing self-reliance

Depending on the organisation, we may also need to tackle an over-valuing of self-reliance over interdependence.

There may be resistance to thinking about members of an organisation as anything other than individuals who work in teams.

- Build on the idea that building wellbeing and resilience occurs at an individual level, by suggesting that it also occurs at the group, organisational, and societal levels.

Emotions as threatening and vulnerability as 'weakness'

A culture that considers displaying so called 'negative' emotions as taboo may also provide internal resistance. The idea that people sharing their experiences is a sign of weakness, rather than a source of strength is a hard belief to challenge. That this aspect of organisational life be worked with elsewhere (that is, outside of the organisation's boundaries by counsellors and psychologists may be a common belief.

- This is a harder challenge depending on the organisation we're talking about. Using language like 'shared experiences', 'help people connect', and 'provide support' may be helpful turns of phrase to describe what is hoped for.

What I came to know

Good case studies require the researcher to examine their role, group membership, and the qualities of the relationships to the study respondents (Berg, 1990, p.68).

Before concluding, I'll offer some reflections on what I came to know:

Finding my role

- Upon reflection, it took me a little while to find my role as a co-facilitator of the group. I think this was related to my own lack of awareness of the existence of the community system. I remember imagining that my role might well be something like a consultant at a group relations conference. The idea of the 'role in the mind' that I held on to, of course meant that I did not allow myself to participate quite so much as 'one of the community' but as someone part of but a little separate to each group – perhaps someone 'who knew' or was supposed to know.

- Soon I learned that what was required from me was someone who could be present as a member of the organisational community and who had taken up a role of co-holding the group - not as someone who knew more than everyone else, but as someone who could bring their own experience to each session as a way of helping the community make sense of the variety of experiences across the community system.
- This links, I think, to one of the paradoxes of being in a group like Quiet Conversations and to the lovely quote from Kenwyn Smith and David Berg (1987/1997, p.102) that “the group exists, grows, and becomes strong and resourceful only if the individuality of its members can be expressed.”

Discovering a new system

- My other reflection also relates to coming to know something new. When Fred approached me to see if I wanted to set up a forum with him, I felt that it was an inherently good idea because I thought that it would be beneficial. But it was only by facilitating the sessions that I came to realise how beneficial it was. I had not realised the important resource that this organisational community was.
- It was not a straightforward insight for me though. In writing this paper, sometimes I struggled to see how I could talk about the value of Quiet Conversations in a meaningful way.
- In writing this paper it took me some time to decide how I would properly ‘value’ the insights in the data from the sessions that I presented earlier. I have been struck by my ambivalent feelings about the data. On the one hand, the insights seemed so fundamental to the point of being elementary, or obvious; and on the other, my attention was caught by just how grounding and ‘anchoring’ they are.

And while this wasn’t a therapeutic intervention, I think what the Twentieth Century psychoanalyst and founder of group analysis S. H. Foulkes calls ‘therapeutic factors’ are evident in sessions we have facilitated.

This concept of therapeutic factors I discovered recently in his work. In an article written in 1942, he and a colleague describe the experiences of their facilitating a series of therapeutic groups involving 50 people that were run in the early part of the Second World War. They (‘Group Analysis: A study in the treatment of groups of psycho-analytic lines (jointly with Eve Lewis), 1942, p.33-34) noted four important therapeutic factors:

- I. The group situation fostered social integration and relieved isolation
- II. Participants related to others’ experiences and this acted as an ‘analytic agent’ in themselves – what they called a mirror reaction
- III. The group situation activated the collective unconscious, meaning that the sharing of symbols and themes provided stimulation for insight
- IV. The exchange of experiences between participants made the discussion more lively, full and altered the emotional situation “just as children accept many things from each other which they would oppose if they came from their parents” (p.34).

Conclusion

Many people thanked us for the safe space we had created.

One person’s gratitude particularly stands out: simply and profoundly they said that the sessions had “saved [their] sanity”.

We are all pondering how we can foster connection and ‘knowing’ while physically distant from each other, and technologically present. “To know we have to be able to think which means being able to put thoughts together” (Alford, undated, p.6) with others.

If we need to remind ourselves of the importance of learning with and through others, we might consider adapting a phrase of Donald Winnicott's (The Theory of the Parent-Infant Relationship, 1965/1985, p.39):

'There is no such thing as an employee', meaning of course, that whenever one finds an employee one finds organisational care, and without organisational care there would be no employee.

Utilising the strength and resources of the community system through a reflective space is I think an example of organisational care, and an important resource we can activate and make use of, right now.

The community system exists. It is just a question of how we make it visible and nurtured as a resource for our organisations to help people feel storm-tossed, but not submerged.

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Finding our Moorings during Uncertain Times

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Sunitha Lal is the CHRO at Ather Energy. She is passionate about exploring and curating organizational culture and is a strong proponent of the oral tradition of storytelling. Sunitha calls experience the luxury of grey hair, and she swims in the overlapping spaces of words, mindfulness, yoga, tying the great unknown to the human experience. She is the author of *Dotting the Blemish and Other Stories*, a collection of short stories about women that reflect and comment on the inherent prejudices we have as a society.

Introduction

2020 was a difficult year for everyone. In my organisation, Ather Energy, we were sure-footed and were standing on the 'knowing', and then the pandemic happened. The 'not-knowing' was vast and looked like a raging ocean - we were worried whether we would be swallowed up in its depths. It is somewhere in those high-anxiety days that we also found our moorings and looked for creative solutions to stabilise.

In 2020, I wrote a post on LinkedIn called 'Finding your moorings during uncertain times' talking about Ather's pride of 'knowing', and our experience and struggles with 'not-knowing'. Serendipitously, NIODA had also chosen the theme about 'knowing' and 'not knowing' for this year's symposium.

In this paper, I will use group relations concepts and unconscious processes to explore how we grappled with our shattered omnipotence of 'knowing', worked through and confronted what we 'did not know', and sailed through to a new state of finding our moorings in a changed world.

Author's Note: All through this paper, I will alternate between using "we" and "I". "We" refers to the leadership collective at Ather, and "I" refers to my own observations and experiences.

The Organisation and its People

Who we are

We, Ather Energy, 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. Our founders are young and thus our CXO group currently has peers who are 30+ years and others who are 50+ years. Incidentally, even across the organization in all leadership layers, you will find young leaders alongside peers who come with years of experience from the industry.

Though the electric mobility industry itself is very nascent and still evolving, we were always passionate about design & engineering, wanting to build the entire ecosystem for Electric Vehicles in-house. Our product line includes India's first line of truly intelligent and high-performance electric scooters - the Ather 450+ & the Ather 450X - which are complemented by a comprehensive public charging network called the Ather Grid, and a network of experience centers called 'Ather Space'.

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 automotive, more specifically, 2-wheelers.

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.

The story called Ather

During the time of the pandemic in 2020, we went through two fund raises, built a green-field factory on time, designed and launched a new product variant, forged alliances for charging infrastructure, entered into partnership with strong retail partners pan-India, and marched into new cities – all this was possible because of the 'Team' that stood by the organization, believing in the story called 'Ather'.

These were also the times when it seemed difficult, as the image of the 'team' changed and there was fear that what we held together would be lost.

Ultimately, over the course of last year, we have realised that what is important is to believe and remember why we chose to be a part of this story of Ather and how we play a role in writing it.

The Fallacies of Knowing

Knowing is a fallacy and there is a great urgency around 'knowing' in organizations. . While it may sound philosophical, we experienced this fallacy last year as a vulnerability and as a pretence, over a series of situations:

Stormy Seas

At the beginning of the year 2020, we were running out of funds and were trying to raise capital. There was a huge fund anxiety in the system, and everyone was worried that the pandemic will result with no money in the market

We had stretched all our resources for years into product development but did not have much of a revenue to show for it. We had a product that seemed to have a good product-market fit but selling at the current price point had no commercial viability.

The cost of building was higher than the cost of selling. On the other hand, our costs had been constantly growing and halting the cost escalation did not look easy. The more we sold, the more it could hurt us.

Unless we looked at our darkside and embraced it, there was no aiming for moonshots. We had to bite the bullet and increase the price of our product, during an already crunched economy.

Everyone wondered whether we were fast-forwarding an impending crisis!

Foggy Blinders

In Ather, we implicitly take pride in our empirical thinking - probably as a way to keep everything under control. Sometimes, it can also be a reluctance to look at ourselves at an individual level, terrified of what we may find if we look inward - a need to feel comfortable, comforted, safe, and omnipotent.

Moreover, we are strong believers of first-principles thinking. Naturally, logic is the binding force and 'knowing' is crucial . Everyone wants to have all the answers. Everyone truly believed that mankind had all the answers. This was an unconscious bias of not wanting to accept anything that one does not see logically; 'what I don't know, does not exist and does not affect'.

The Difficult Dance

Remote-working, too, was something we had quickly discounted as a workstyle we would not choose or need. We believed and argued that only a few teams could transition to remote working with ease. Culturally too, in-person meetings and discussions were a primary mode of communication at Ather. It was more of a way of life, and our office spaces were also designed to foster this communication.

Similarly, as a hardware engineering company, till recently, we thought we could succeed without focusing on software engineering - a bias that 'what we see is all that we trust'.

But, in March 2020, we braced ourselves for a series of lockdowns owing to the spread of infections. Shifting the entire workforce to remote working was quite a challenge, especially when we didn't have a Business Continuity Plan (BCP) in place. We had never seen the need or urgency to develop such a BCP – comfortable with an exaggerated worldview we had.

We were sure of this self-image of not requiring remote working - not willing to see beyond the 'known'; almost narcissistic, leading us to be self-obsessed. Thus, creating and being satisfied with a self-image that was unstable and has not been tested by unfavorable conditions. We were constant in our preoccupation with 'What I don't see, I don't believe', a lack of empathy and inflicting the organization and everyone in it with this lacuna. We were thus caught off guard when the pandemic hit us hard.

No Wind in our Sails

While other organisations were offering freebies, like setting up a new home office, free WiFi, etc., we also wanted to see what we could do. But we were in the middle of a fund raise and cash flows were an issue. So, this required a balance of knowing how much to give, what to give, and from where to give.

There was also an underlying guilt of not doing enough while we expect our teams to deliver while, there was a lot that we ourselves didn't know.

Choppy waters and the depths of fears

So far, we've explored what we know and pretended and believed that we understood. It brings to mind this quote by David Armstrong:

"I was trying to exemplify and apply something 'known', when what I had to do was venture out from something 'unknown' and risk what links I would find" - David Armstrong, Organization in the Mind (Chapter 5, Recovery of Meaning, page 57, para 1)

In this section, we will talk about how this fear of the 'unknown' mobilized the team to look for assurances from the larger system - the organization. As we navigated these choppy waters, there was anger towards leaders for 'not fixing', vulnerability and anxiety in our family systems, and watching and waiting to see what happens outside our systems - all leading to giving up or withdrawing.

Myth of omnipotence

When we started the company, the majority of the workforce was young and they were initially rejected by the grey hairs of the industry claiming that their dream was too unrealistic. The way of managing this rejection by the team was by wanting to grow out of it on sheer technical strength and logical reasoning. But the offset of this was this feeling of omnipotence and rebellion; not wanting anyone's approval. Our belief in the myth of mankind's knowledge and assumed omnipotence was steadfast.

It took the pandemic for us to learn about 'not knowing'. It had been our staunch belief that smarts, technology, and science are enough to solve any problem, and we had faith that mankind has figured it out. It took time to sink in that there were large chunks of information that were unclear or were still emerging in this period. Every week, new scenarios came up and we dealt with unknown variables every day - the spread of the infection, operational guidelines from the government, changing rules of supply chain functioning, and multiple fall-throughs. We had to learn how much of 'not knowing' we would have to face and how even powerful international institutions and bodies were clueless.

We constantly ideated and tried various plans, while we were conscious that they could all change at any moment. But, we quickly rallied to manage the not-knowing; crisis management with the underpinnings

of change management. We worked on plans A, B, C, and D and were conscious that all of them might change.

Survival Mode activated

How will we survive? Where will we get money from? Job losses across industry were inducing panic. There were founder-CEOs who announced job cuts in their organization over Twitter. And we had investors or analysts patting them on the back for taking a tough stand. The question on everyone's mind was - will there be job losses at Ather?

Whom do we protect? Will there be pay cuts? What is the government doing about this? How much can we afford? Who has the answers? Who has to ask the right questions?

Everything became a Survival task, which led to off-task behaviours:

Fight/flight - Flight from the organization, fighting for recognition

Dependency - everyone knew that the answers to these difficult questions were unavailable even in the larger community and that everyone had access to the same news, but somehow demanded and expected our leadership to know these answers

Pairing - Everyone, including the leadership, were looking up to the 2 co-founders for all the answers

Festering wounds

To manage this crisis, we broke our contractual obligation and undertook pay cuts, and deferred pay revisions:

We deferred annual pay revisions and payouts of previous year's variable compensation

There were org-wide pay cuts for full-time team members, with the promise of paying it back when things improve

We offered ESOPs against variable pay delay, and interestingly despite a fear of a loss of faith, 50% of team members opted for this. Though deep down there was trust, there was also anger coating it - a dichotomy playing out

The only way we could hold it together was by being transparent and willing to be vulnerable in front of the organisation during an All Hands (town hall meetings).

Abandoning the ship

Though we had members passionately driving change, holding the fort, managing non-routine responses, and delivering results, for the first time, we also experienced some talent pockets unaligned, cynical, or leaving us.

We assumed that we needn't worry about the Engineering team which was one of our most tenured teams and had held the most pride for Ather. We thought nothing could be shaken here, but we suffered the most rumblings in this space.

It almost looked fashionable to say that I had an offer or I was approached by another organisation. Most engineers who left didn't say they left for better opportunities but instead were "disappointed in the path Ather has taken" and said that "it was not an interesting place to work" anymore. While all this may be true, it was also flight.

The funding situation internal to us added suspicion about our survival. This was experienced as persecutory anxiety by some. We were seen and experienced as not dependable, in some pockets, leading to our talent looking for safer spaces outside of Ather.

Fortitude and shame

Another experience that we had held dearly in the past was also affected.

A university campus has always had a symbolic reference at Ather, given the legacy of our own founders, and because our organisation was also incubated in the lab of a university. We have always had an allegiance for those we hired from campus and had invested in this talent pool.

But when we were unable to fulfil our promise to hire university graduates last year, this created a sense of alienation and anger towards the HR team and the leadership. We struggled to make sense of what is fair to the ones 'in' the organization vs what is fair to the ones we had 'offered', and team members wondered who would make this choice.

While we had to withdraw these campus offers, we also found alternate job opportunities in the wider industry for more than 80% of the students. This was never recognized by the system - a way of punishing the organization and the HR team for not keeping their word.

Pirates or a compass?

As a culmination of all this, the HR team was named as the culprit for all the pain the system had to undergo. The founders were good, HR was bad - we were blamed for all the painful decisions made. Splitting and projecting happened and someone had to be blamed, for the rest of the organization to move on. It took a lot to not cave in, but we might also have introjected some of these projections.

Many in the HR team also felt betrayed by the system and there was anger at me for not arguing against the belief and popular narrative and for letting this happen. I was an inspirational figure but also hated.

Some team members in HR decided to move on this year, though they denied that they were gripped by anxiety and were leaving for safer spaces.

Reparation: Loss and guilt

The pandemic also wreaked havoc on our own personal health. We experienced loss in our own communities.

We were unable to even meet and comfort those who are grieving because of our own fear and need to protect ourselves against an invisible and unknown enemy. This increased our guilt, despite the strong logical argument that we cannot visit them. We were also unable to comprehend this loss and emotionally invest in others. This created an emotional and psychological drain.

'Me'ness was encouraged for safety but it also permeated across other boundaries, as team members were not willing to understand each others' realities. Meetings and calls were scheduled beyond work hours, and we were expecting everyone to be present at all times, without clearly defining Boundaries.

Water, water everywhere

Our larger fear of 'not knowing' mobilized the team to look for assurances from the larger system - the organization - about jobs, job security, personal and organisational growth, and certainty.

Moreover, there was a fear of new replacing the old, with tenured team members feeling like they have lost their privilege and identity, and watching team members from earlier days moving on. There was anger towards us for 'not fixing'- why is the organisation not making efforts to retain them? This was followed by disappointment, leading to giving up or withdrawing.

Here, 'Me'ness was displayed as a way to protect the 'Self' from uncertainty and what it brings - leading to collusion within teams rather than collaboration between them.

Erosion of our "trust" fund

Everyone agrees that they have to trust each other; it's obvious. But while 'Be Nice' is one of our organizational values, and it talks about exhibiting the behavior 'trust by default', this got tested when we worked in uncertain times, and in a prolonged remote setup.

We needed to trust ourselves, then trust other teams to deliver despite challenges. We had to rely on other teams wherever there was a need.

We knew that Trust is fundamental; there is no clever way to negate it. How do we cultivate trust, when it was so easy and comfortable to blame instead of trust? How do we rebuild our 'trust' fund?

Finding our Moorings

During this time, we were clearly both dysfunctional and formidable. We realised we need to find creative solutions to overcome our fears and nullify our false comfort. In all the chaos and uncertainty we were experiencing, we tried to find our moorings.

Being Present

The underbelly of a change of this scale was ambivalence and anxiety. We leaned on being present - willingness to stand there and talk, to accept, to receive support and feedback, be vulnerable, stay connected, and share.

We used the process of engagement and reflection, to explore experiences, generate ideas, build resilience, and stay connected. We received this trust and support not only from our teams but also from vendors, suppliers, and from our facility owners. We had to learn to trust ourselves and others, to deliver shifting goals.

Noise, Vibration, and Hoarseness

Even before the pandemic hit us, we realized communication is the key. Leaders have to own this piece as their lifeline. But with the onset of remote-working, the importance of communication has become extremely clear.

We adopted different methods to reach out to team members and engage with them in meaningful conversations to understand and alleviate their fears. We encouraged questions and inquiry to set the context, create safe spaces, and build cohesiveness. We over-communicated through various mediums. Our efforts and this framework brought recognition to us from external parties. It also got us awards as recognition:

- All Hands (town halls)
- Revamp of Interstellar (our intranet)
- Culture Conversations (Focus Group Discussions)
- Ask Me Anything sessions
- Podcast - Noise, Vibration and Hoarseness
- Co-founders' connects and emails
- Rumour has it - call out and clarify rumours and gossip publicly
- Out of Office - getting to know our team members' interests outside of office
- Vantage - a chance to connect with talent and create an engaged community interested in Ather

From Hustling to Agility

Though we had doubled up several departments, we still felt less effective than the pre-pandemic Ather. Our alignment and agility was becoming a problem because of our tendency to hustle.

We adopted an 'Agile' way of working where all execution was through horizontals and cross-functional teams, and depth and focus came through our functions and verticals. While Agile as a project management methodology is typically used in software development companies, at Ather, we began to adapt it to the product development lifecycle suited for an automotive company. It is an iterative approach that emphasises the need to bring in small cross-functional teams to solve incremental problems and build and sustain subsystems of our products - the idea being that cross-functional teams collaborate better, with no hierarchy, and are capable of fast delivery and change.

Planning, executing, collaborating, and decision-making capability improved dramatically. With our focus on bringing cross-functional teams together to solve problems, 'negotiated' rather than 'delegated' authority became our backbone.

We were relentless in our execution - it was also a way of keeping ourselves busy, allowing us to feel in control, or feel like we're contributing. Keeping us busy could also be a distraction from what was happening around us (family, organisation, and society).

Sailing forward

Many times, it felt like we were walking on a slippery slope - one positive scenario would bring in energy but very soon gossip or rumors tried to pull us down. We had to create many moorings to lean on and to regain the strength to sail forward:

- Drafting a Diversity and Inclusion charter - focusing on building a team where everyone is equal but not the same
- Focus on Capability building
- Leadership development - Self-awareness in leadership, Working in collaboration, GR study circles
- COVID Response Committee - proactively recognise and manage risks to our health and safety
- Wellness benefits & policies - End of the year break, vax drives and reimbursements, COVID leave, Wellness leaves to recoup mental health
- Pay cut reversal - Transparency with sales numbers, reversing pay cuts starting with entry-level roles, offering a prorated pay revision worth 2 years for all team members

The New Sortedness

Reality finally hit. There is no going back to pre-COVID days. The uncertainty is here to stay and we have to take it as part of the scheme and plan with that in mind.

New Normal

While we achieved noteworthy milestones, our belief in the story called 'Ather' was tested by fear-induced anxiety. This period demanded of us to look inward, be centered, and continuously work on being better.

While some things are permanently changing, we realize a 'new normal' does emerge. It is time we own this 'new normal' and not make it fancy jargon. Instead of dumping away all that is not clear and externalising it as 'other', let us recognize it and own it.

Think As a Species

It is unfamiliar and difficult for an organization to accept that certainty is not guaranteed, and choose to be willing to learn and work towards 'coming to know'. Yes, there were disappointments, anxiety and ambivalence. But the fact that we achieved so many milestones - team members paying cash and buying

the organization's equity; building a new factory, product variant, new teams; and that we held each other accountable – all this was possible because of the 'Team' that stood by the organization.

We have gone back to our articulated values and behaviours under the culture collective, Think As a Species, for guidance. We have made peace with 'figuring it out', instead of 'having figured it out'. There is no shame in 'not knowing' and 'certainty' is not guaranteed.

This is the new state of 'sortedness'.

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Pivotal Development Events in the Lives of Emotionally Mature Leaders: A Psychodynamic Perspective

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Barry's life's work is centered on helping organizations improve performance by developing work cultures where employees more fully engage with hearts and minds. Over the last 25 years, he helped many well-known companies achieve their human development (teams, leadership) and culture building goals (empowerment, continuous improvement). Learning about and developing leaders with the emotional maturity to nurture and strengthen these cultures is the major interest area of his work and study. Barry has a PhD in Human and Organizational Systems from Fielding University in Santa Barbara, California.

How does one move from not knowing to coming to know? This research contributes an answer. The pivotal development experiences in the lives of 15 highly mature leaders were brought to light to enable study of their development path. The themes that emerged became an experiential map of their collective journey of emotional growth. Psychodynamic theory was used to understand how these pivotal experiences led to the leaders "coming to know." This document was adapted from my dissertation of the same name.

The Purpose of the Study

In volatile and uncertain times, organizations must be capable of developing cultures where workforces adapt and thrive (Hughes et al., 2013). What makes this difficult is that work cultures of this nature are most likely to occur where leaders have advanced -- and not easily achieved -- stages of emotional development. Thanks to the reciprocity between leader and culture, the organization becomes an extension of their healthy emotions; a place where, if allowed, the mature leader creates enough "developmental oxygen" that all can benefit from (Hughes et al., 2013; McGuire & Palus, 2018; Brandtstädter, 1997). The challenge is clear: We must focus on the looming need for emotionally mature leaders.

McGuire and Palus (2018) describe these enlightened leaders as having "capacities for awareness and imagination, becoming able to feel, conceive, believe and think in more complex, curious, systemic, strategic and interdependent ways" (p. 150). Gould (1993) spoke of leaders with a strong sense of "personal authority" (self) as well as "sophisticated skills, competencies, attitudes and knowledge about systemic and psychological forces that drive and shape organizations and the people in them" (p. 50). The 15 highly mature leaders that participated in this study have these kinds of capabilities.

This study was a direct response to the challenge for emotionally mature leaders. In order to become more effective at helping leaders develop vertically -- "coming to know" -- organizational development practitioners need a more elemental understanding of the emotional maturation process. The methods strategy called for a life course exploration of the desired outcome: a group of highly mature leaders. Narrative inquiry brought to light the most impactful development events in participant lives. Psychodynamic theory then provided a means to understand them. The research question that focused the study and generated the data is:

- *How do highly mature leaders describe the pivotal events that had the greatest impact on their personal growth and maturity as a leader?*

Theories that explain human emotional maturation would be required to make sense of how participant experiences impacted their development. Dr. George Vaillant's ideas were the first I discovered that seemed to fulfill that need. Using data from the Harvard Study of Adult Development, Vaillant

conclusively linked higher levels of emotional health – the use of mature defenses -- with effectiveness in many aspects of adult life (Martin-Joy et al., 2017; Vaillant, 1992).

Vaillant used psychodynamic theory to draw his conclusions. Emotional health can be reliably measured -- as in this study -- and theory underpins proven therapeutic approaches to help people heal and grow emotionally (Shedler, 2010; Zannarini et al., 2013). Further, psychodynamic theory carries with it copious quantities of relevant literature. Modern psychodynamic theory kept the most ingenious of Freud, and incorporated advances in developmental psychology as the years progressed. The mission has always been to help humans heal and strengthen emotional health.

With such a wealth of knowledge of vertical development and the capability to help people advance along that route, why not consider, learn from, and adapt existing expertise for use in organizations instead of losing time to reinventing a wheel that could never be better? A major problem is that this group of theories, while in robust application and continuous evolution in the clinical fields, has struggled to find a comfortable fit in the corporate world.

The selection of psychodynamics as the main theoretical framework created a second objective: to reaffirm the potential contribution of psychodynamic theory in organizational settings. It is not the expectation for all leaders to undergo psychotherapy. Nor should all human resource professionals become mental health therapists. I believe – even more so after conducting this research -- scholar practitioners in the non-clinical adult development fields should look to psychodynamic principles and techniques to enrich their understanding of human life in organizations. This study helps accomplish this by pointing the way.

Methods Overview

Narrative inquiry was used to explore the experiential content and context of the pivotal developmental events in the lives of 15 emotionally mature leaders. Experienced leadership developers nominated study participants they knew well and who scored high in psychological health on a clinical diagnostic. Several examples of excerpts from participant stories of their pivotal events follow. All names are pseudonyms to protect participant privacy.

Example 1: Calista's Father Teaches Her about What Matters

One day, when I was pretty young, my father took me to see his office at the naval base where he worked. He had a certain rank, and I could see the lower rank officers saluting him. I was really very, very impressed, and said, "Wow, you are very important." And he said just one sentence: "It doesn't matter who salutes me now. What matters is if they'll greet me on the street after I retire." (Calista)

Example 2: Penny and Sis Just Deal With It

Mom worked in a bar. There was a lot of late night time spent in that space, being surrounded by those circumstances. That, I think, creates in one a lot of independence that comes from coming home and taking care of yourself, figuring things out, getting organized. And, so we had this very interesting situation where we'd get home, get off the bus, head down and have dinner at the bar, stay there till way too late and take ourselves to bed. (Penny)

Example 3: A Mentor's Contribution to Humanity

He was very impressive... certainly intellect...but very much also as a scientist, interested in lifting up and broadening participation in science. He was elected to the National Academy of Sciences, and had all the accolades. He passed away so he can't get the Nobel Prize now, but he was short-listed and certainly in the conversation. His favorite accomplishment was getting an award from the Women in Endocrinology...a group of women scientists who got together within that big society. He had mentored early on some very accomplished women scientists who'd gone on to do some remarkable things. Here

was someone who had a lot to be proud of, but he was most proud of his support to break down barriers for talent. (Steven)

Example 4: Just a Team Member

I get the most excitement out of brainstorming with people on how to achieve some goal in a creative way that does not currently exist. It might be a tangible product or it might just be a way of implementing a way of doing business that is different from what everyone else does, with the idea, of course, that it gets ultimately better results. What I've learned about myself is that I'm not all that interested in sort of fine-tuning the knobs -- especially in health care, where I think there's a lot of fine-tuning of the knobs -- I think it's much more inspiring and enjoyable to get people organized around creating something that doesn't currently exist. (Bruce)

The Themes that Emerged from the Data

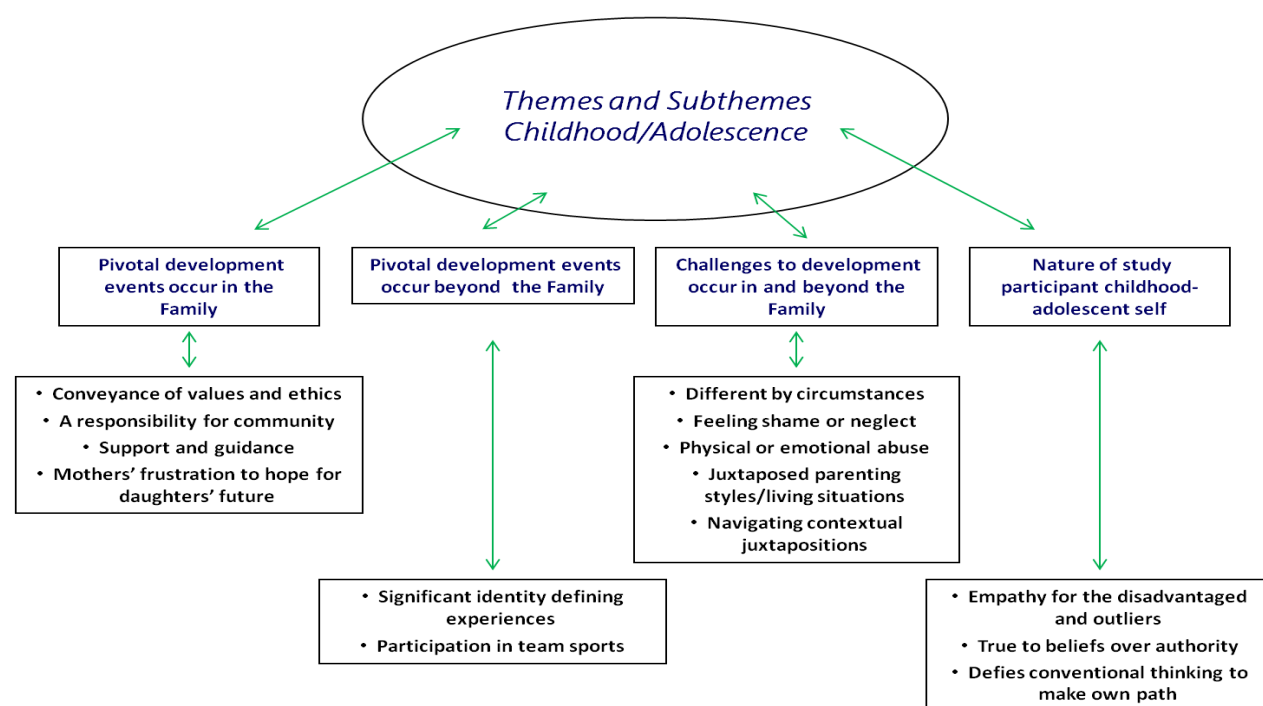
Thematic analysis led to two maps/macro-groupings: Childhood/Adolescence and Adulthood. The research question sought pivotal development experiences that could have occurred anywhere along study participant lifespans. Since humans grow through many seasons of development between birth and death, it makes sense that the themes/subthemes ahead dispersed along this continuum.

Overall, thirty-seven subthemes were assigned according to one of three different types of participant experience: (a) nurturing (e.g., family support and guidance; profoundly empowering mentors), (b) difficult/challenging (e.g., being an outlier; feeling shame or neglect; navigating cultural juxtapositions), and (c) those that described participant nature (e.g., empathy for others; true to beliefs; inspired by helping others flourish).

The thematic map for childhood/adolescence consists of participant experience that took place between ages 3-21. There are four major themes, each one with a corresponding set of subtheme groupings.

Figure 1

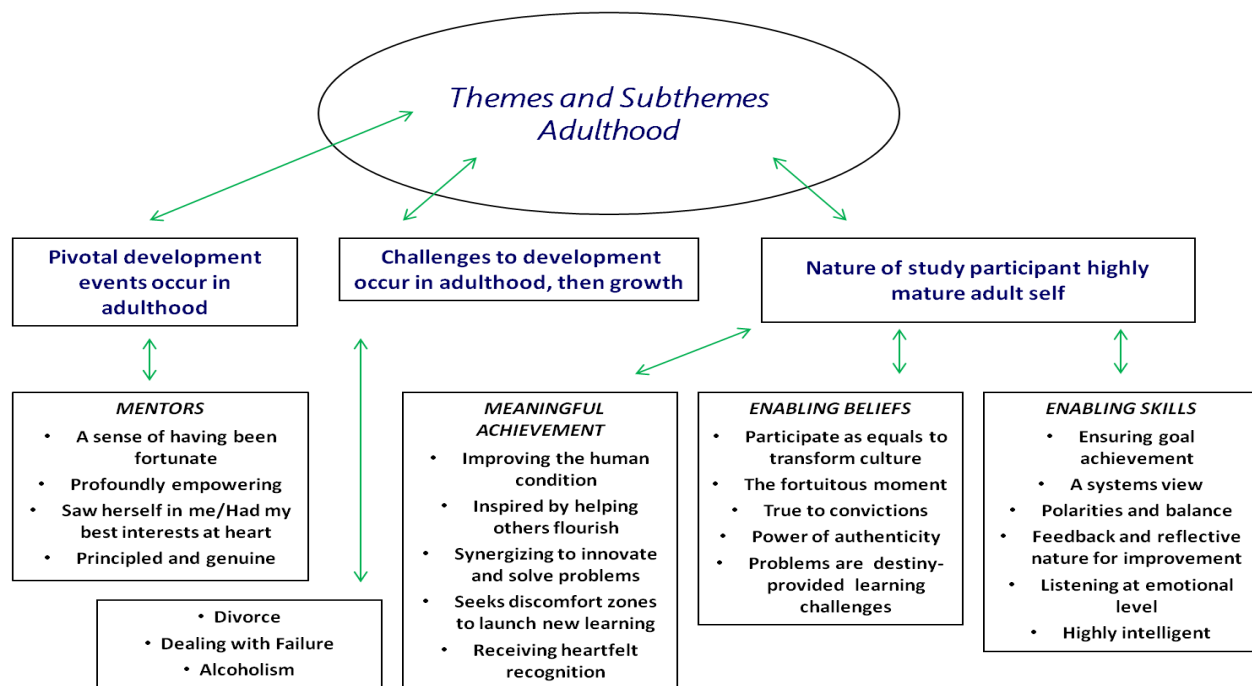
Thematic Map of the Childhood/Adolescence Data



The adulthood macro grouping consisted of themes (3) and subtheme groupings (5) derived from participant stories of experience from age 22 through the present of the interview. Considering the research question and time of life, it comes as no surprise that pivotal developmental themes were work related, devoted to participant relationship with their mentors. Further, interwoven within their work-related narrative, we find much of what truly inspires them, the beliefs that they use to make sense of reality in beneficial ways and some of the skills they consider particularly important to their success.

Figure 2

Thematic Map of the Adulthood Data



Conclusions, Contributions, Practice, and Future Research

The findings suggest that psychodynamic theory provides the richest framework for understanding how mature, integrated leaders developed. Further, by using the clinical lens to explain pivotal events of the nurturing type, a clear connection is seen between psychodynamic theory and how it can enhance the practice of organizational development. Finally, to most fully understand vertical development, a case is made for bringing temperament theory (nature) into the dialogue. A route for that exploration is proposed.

The Clinical Concept of Emotional Maturity Leads to Fully Integrated Leaders

In use among clinicians as a pre-treatment diagnostic, this study pioneers the Shedler-Westen Assessment Procedure's (SWAP) first use in a leadership development research context. Initially, use of the SWAP caused concern in both camps – among clinicians and organizational development professionals alike -- and most nominators required additional support. These challenges and how they were handled are covered in Chapter 3 of the dissertation. Using clinical instruments in the corporate world is not plug and play.

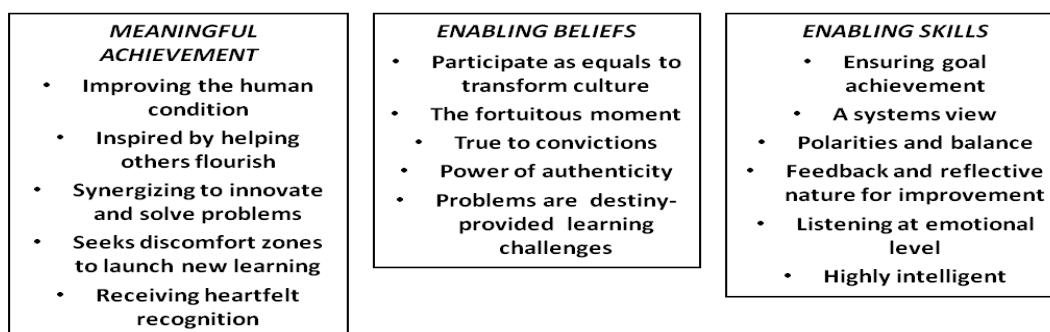
The SWAP is known for providing a valid and reliable assessment of the current state of a patient/client's emotional health (maturity). Because its 10 dimensions were determined through extensive, front-line clinician input, it is a particularly relevant diagnostic (Shedler, 2009). In this study, only the overall psychological health score – sometimes referred to as ego strength -- was used as a selection threshold

(80%). One must be fully versed in the language and culture of the psychodynamic field to make full use of the diagnostic power of the instrument.

Once nominators provided the study's participants, I came to know them directly and through deep contemplation of their interview data. I am confident that virtually any SWAP assessee with a psychological health score above 80% -- no matter the unique aspects of one's diversity -- would exhibit the multi-systemic worldview and growth-oriented passion necessary for improving the human condition. The chart that follows serves as a reminder. Put another way, I suggest that any group comprised of leaders with a SWAP psychological health score over 80% would generate adult theme groupings and subthemes much the same as the ones seen in this study.

Figure 3

Nature of Study Participant Highly Mature Adult Self



My ideas about the importance of emotional maturity in the clinical view (health, not intelligence) as a -- if not the -- key target for the development of leadership strengthened during this study. The clinical field evolved in service of the mission to improve human emotional health and quality of life. Only scholar-practitioners steeped in psychodynamic theory and practice could produce an assessment to quantify this metric. Organizational culture emanates from the emotional riches, or lack thereof, of its leaders (Avolio & Gardner, 2005; McGuire & Palus, 2018; Brandtstädter, 1997). This study has further clarified this relationship. For the kinds of organizational cultures able to successfully navigate constant change, a leader's character is everything. So is decency, in the sense of being a "good person." I propose that emotionally mature leaders evaluated in the clinical context can also be expected to be decent human beings as those in this study proved to be.

I put this question to SWAP inventor and psychodynamic psychotherapy scholar Jonathan Shedler; he responded: "I would say they would be a truly admirable person. So...yes." (J. Shedler, email communication, November 24, 2020). Ruthellen Josselson, scholar of narrative research and lifespan psychology, answered "probably" (R. Josselson, email communication, November 12, 2020). A qualitative study exploring the strength of relationship between human decency measures and high emotional maturity could conclusively confirm what this study and the wisdom of two formidable scholars suggest.

Future research can also seek to clarify at what degree of emotional maturity leadership capacities such as those described by McGuire and Palus (2018) and Gould (1993) could be expected to emerge. Often, leadership development interventions are targeted at achieving certain behaviors; for example, teaching a leader to be a good team developer comes to mind. No wonder it is common that they fall short. Perhaps, the thrust of leadership development should consider and seek emotional health as the clinical field knows it.

Psychodynamic Theory Enriches the Practice of Organizational Development

The sheer volume of research, perspectives, and brilliance in the clinical field invites intricate explorations into any aspect of scholarship and practice. At this point, however, I think a look at participant experience and psychodynamic theory from afar best supports this study's objectives.

The clinical field retains the Freud-influenced title of psychodynamics and is imbued with his ingenious, time-tested discoveries. Czander and Eisold (2003) suggest several that are of particular value to the psychoanalytically oriented organizational consultant. One is the awareness of transference and countertransference. When consultants are able to go beneath the surface to trace past cause, they design and carry out interventions with greater awareness, empathy, and precision (Kets de Vries & Engellau, 2008). At the best, this would strengthen an intervention's effectiveness. At the least, unwitting negative impact on people is minimized, resulting in fewer unintended barriers to deal with.

The hierarchy of defense mechanisms, their human purpose, and how they link to emotional maturity through snippets of behavior is also an important concept for organizational consultants to manage. Use of the adaptive defense mechanisms is an indicator of emotional health. Instead of reacting under stress, mature adults (leaders) are able to stay conscious and in touch with their feelings, enabling them to draw from the more complex emotional fabric available to them (Gloria & Steinhardt, 2016). Positive emotions tend to liberate thought and increase resilience (Frederickson, 2001). This study suggests the need for more quantitative research related to advanced levels of emotional maturity and strength of innovativeness and/or resilience.

It is, however, in the post-Freudian iterations of psychodynamic theory (object relations theory, self psychology and attachment theory) where I find the most useful explanations for how nurture affects the lives of highly mature leaders, and where organizational development professionals can anchor their practice in theory. These are the theories that evolved from clinician frustration with the Freudian perspective that envisioned self-contained individuals rather than beings in dynamic interaction with others and their environment.

A quick review will allow a stronger connection between theory and the research findings. Object relations theorists believe that humans seek connectedness with others and interchange with their environment from first breaths (Wolitzky, 2011). They also claim that the early mother-infant relationship is fundamental to either facilitating or working against healthy personality development; Winnicott's concept of "holding environment" must be mentioned here (Melano-Flanagan, 2016a). Finally, they theorize that personality disorders stem from failures in a person's habitat that result in a deficient internalization of early interaction with others. Proficiency in object relations theory will help organizational consultants decipher and effectively manage the shards of these past relationships when they inevitably emerge. Guidance is needed on how to help consultants ensure that the interaction is developmental without crossing the line into therapy.

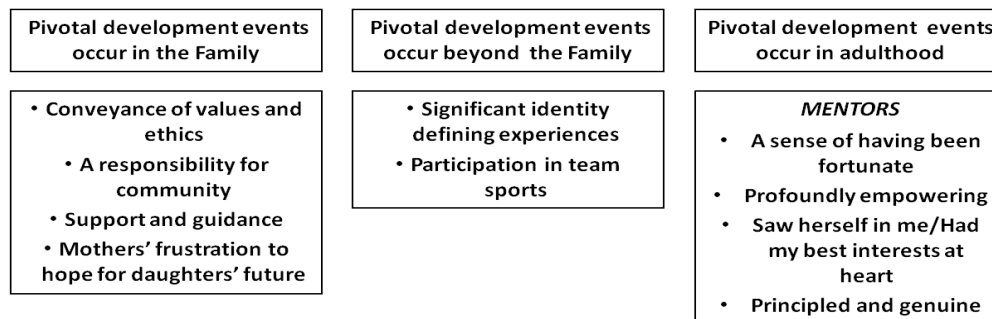
Built on the foundations of object relations theory, the same is true for the more recent and even richer theories of self psychology and attachment. Much can be written of their utility for organizational consultants. Suffice to say that Kohut added the essentiality of empathy and the tripolar self which consists of three development zones: The pole of the grandiose self, the pole of the idealized parent and the twinship pole (Melano-Flanagan, 2016a). Attachment theory contributed detailed, empirical work on the nature of effective caretaking throughout the lifespan. It also put forward the idea that if one suffers early on, one can heal in relationship with other healthy caretaker adults such as mentors or therapists.

All three theories -- particularly Kohut's, in my opinion -- help us understand what was so exceptional about the mentoring received by study participants. Here we can think of Mike, one of four siblings raised by a single mom, and the developmental importance of the mentors that came later in his life. Kets de Vries and Engellau's (2008) claim now makes perfect sense: Adults who have had wise caretaking tend to have more positive self-esteem, a better capacity for introspection, and an empathetic disposition.

A look below reminds us of the caretaking that study participants had at different points in their lives to reach advanced levels of emotional maturity. The organizational development practitioner must reflect on what caretaking really means: providing a safe context for emotional growth to occur. Or, in popular jargon: to absolutely have one's back. Bringing this reflection to our teams and coaching clients will contribute to more effective practice.

Figure 5

Pivotal Development Events in Childhood/Adolescence and Adulthood



Some experienced this in the orbit of the family, not limited to one's parents. Peter's growing self was nourished by his mom's unconditional love and his family's orientation to giving to society. Or, as the youngest of five, Khaled benefited from his parents' wise mix of unconditional love and structure. On the other hand, Youssef was "held" by an older sister who believed in his talent and helped him get a scholarship. Nicole's aunt, a nun, opened her mind as a child to the largesse of spiritual thinking. I will never forget Calista's story about the importance of love and loyalty she learned from her grandfather.

Others experienced "being held" and understood (empathy) during childhood and adolescence by a mentor-coach (Penny), an activist role model (Zoe), a teacher (Emile), or a first boss who noticed their potential (Steven and Caroline). Some (Brian, Caroline, Penny, Peter, and Steven) satisfied their need for belonging through athletics. Sandra's came at a summer camp where she became a fully valued citizen in the camp society. Some of the holding, empathy, and modeling continued in adulthood in the form of wonderful mentors. Brian, Caroline, Heather, and Sandra and virtually all the others discussed a series of exceptional mentors. Emile identified with and felt understood by his military commander. He also found the like-minded brothers in mission – the third pole of the tripolar self -- he had longed for when reading military books as a marginalized French-Canadian kid.

Up to now, I have delineated why I believe the clinical concept of emotional maturity leads to developing the most integrated leaders. A clear connection has also been made between psychodynamic theory and exactly how it can complement and richly nourish the practice of organizational development. Further, through the lens of psychodynamic theory, I have also explained how the pivotal events of the nurturing type described by study participants actually result in emotional development. Related to this last point, the nurture is only part of the vertical development story. What about the pivotal events of the difficult type?

How Humans Deal with Adversity depends a lot on Inherited Traits

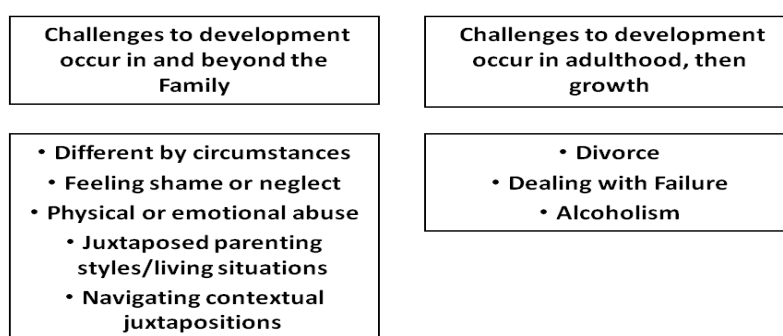
During the interview phase of the study it dawned on me that, to some extent, these highly mature leaders must have certain internal characteristics within that impacted how they related to their environment (nurture). The behaviors and awarenesses they demonstrated in childhood/adolescence seemed to herald their ways as highly mature leaders. Heather took a poor child home to play after school, despite her siblings' ridicule; as a leader, she is sensitive about her workforce's well being. Youssef loved to help other little ones with their schoolwork; as a leader, he spent 7 years in intense communication with his staff to find the win-win in relocation. With graduation looming, Caroline opted for changing high schools rather than return to an abusive teacher's class; as a leader, she disregarded

the union to split a work shift between two new moms. To this group of participants, it has always been about doing the right thing. They claim it is their nature to be go against the grain. They aren't inclined to "drink the collective kool-aid" as Zoe put it.

It had to be something besides just good caretaking or family environment though. Mike achieved a high level of maturity despite an alcoholic father who left the family. Every night, as little girls, Penny and her sister navigated from the bar where Mom worked to climb into bed on their own, ashamed of their unbrushed hair on the school bus the next morning. Eleven-year-old George just "got through it" when he traveled alone as a youngster or ruined his aerogram with tears when the Master shrieked. Some study participants had difficult childhoods. Some of them had better ones. Sandra came from a well-to-do, socially conscious family of lawyers; her role model mom was a Yale grad. Yet, as the youngest, she ached to be heard and understood. Unlike other family members, she was predisposed to dialogue, not debate. Ultimately, we learned that each participant had their advantages as well as their crosses to bear.

Figure 6

Challenges to Development in Childhood/Adolescence and Adulthood



The net path of vertical development for members of this group got them to advanced emotional health and success at creating work cultures where people grow and feel valued. I began to wonder how much of this was due to nurture and how much they actually brought to it from within, even as early as the womb, as Rothbart (2007) argues. I recalled Ainsworth's Strange Situation research on attachment (Ainsworth et. al., 1978), and how much emphasis was placed on nurture. Some of those little babies must have been ornery from the start, despite the best attempts at caretaking.

It became apparent to me that, to understand an elemental, nuts-and-bolts version of a lifelong vertical development process, the nature half of the equation, called temperament, would need to be brought into the discussion. Though beyond the theoretical scope of this dissertation, suggesting future research would guide towards achieving an even more complete understanding of the vertical development process than what was achieved in this study.

The study of temperament is a thoroughly researched sub-field of developmental psychology able to provide advanced guidance on the nature side of human development. Say, for example, one newborn is fearful, with only a brief attention span, and cries at the drop of a hat. Another might enjoy spirited play, can sustain focus on a goal, and seems drawn to exciting circumstances. These kinds of distinguishing characteristics -- carried in one's genes -- form the core of one's personality. They influence and are influenced by each individual's experience from birth to adulthood (Rothbart et al., 2000).

Rothbart and Derryberry (1981) argued that temperament is constitutional. By this they mean it is a "relatively enduring biological makeup of the organism influenced over time by heredity, maturation and experience" (p.37). Shiner and DeYoung (2013) discuss compelling research that confirms the similarity

between the trait configuration of school-age children and their adult selves. Perhaps this is why study participants seem to be adult versions of their childhood selves.

Since the dimensions of temperament have been defined and are measurable, it is possible to know which ones and at what unique blend they operate at for a given person. The field tends to align around Mary Rothbart's five factors: a) approach/positive affect (extroversion), (b) fear/behavioral inhibition, (c) irritability/anger, (d) orienting, (e) effortful control, and to a lesser degree, affiliativeness (Rothbart et al., 2000). Further, it is important to mention that psychobiologists have even been able to identify neural structures and neurotransmitters that correspond to temperamental dispositions (Rothbart & Posner, 2006). My quest for gaining the understanding necessary for developmental certainty is tempered by the realization that each person is really a biological entity, so different one from another.

I cannot help but wonder what the temperament-trait profile/mix of our study participants would tell us. Would they share the commonality of EC, for example? If so, does high EC along with a nurturing environment predict emotional maturity? Or, would there be a lot of variability in participant trait dimension mix? I would start with a quantitative study that explores the relationship between emotional health and temperament constructs to see if there are any dimensions that are common among highly mature leaders. The findings of this research would be invaluable to a more complete nature-nurture understanding of vertical growth, particularly as it relates to pivotal experiences that are difficult or challenging.

Closing Reflection

This research project was conceived from a deeply felt obligation to provide an audacious yet doable response to the looming need for emotionally mature leaders. Key to this is the adaptation of psychodynamic theory and clinician wisdom for the non-therapeutic application to human development in the workplace. This study explains and demonstrates the what, why, and points us in the direction for accomplishing this. The theory covered in this study represents what I believe to be essential knowledge for organizational development practitioners.

I have also delineated why I believe the clinical concept of emotional maturity leads to developing the most integrated leaders. As well, a clear connection has been made between psychodynamic theory and exactly how it can richly nourish the practice of organizational development. Further, through the lens of psychodynamic theory, I have also explained how the pivotal events of the nurturing type described by study participants actually result in vertical development. Finally, I became aware of and argued for the need to bring temperament theory into the dialogue in order to fully explain vertical development. A route forward was set for that exploration.

At the same time, a small, but definitive bridge between the organizational development and clinical fields has been built. Many small ones need to be fashioned if OD practitioners are to follow this lead. There isn't much of a tradition of interdisciplinary dialogue (Loch, 2010). Each of these two fields has a radically different culture, outlook, language, and approach. These differences cannot be ignored or underestimated. With roots deeply embedded in the medical perspective, it makes sense that clinicians seek first to heal what is most broken. The organizational field first looks to fortify what is strongest then move towards critical mass. Think about how different a therapist's action plan would be from an OD practitioner's based on the same assessment results.

There is much work and learning ahead in order for the organizational development field to reliably benefit from 120 years of psychodynamic knowledge. Granted, embracing the existence of these deep structure elements increases the complexity of the workplace, but not doing so results in weak, simplistic interventions that inevitably fall short of the desired impact. Having sharper tools (knowledge) will strengthen our response to the mature leader challenge. Effective practice requires an approach to organizational work that integrates deep (psychodynamic) and broad (organizational theory) strategies (Kets de Vries et al., 2013; Neumann & Hirschhorn, 1999). Whether the field of organizational

development exhibits the fortitude to take advantage of this extraordinary psychodynamic knowledge store remains to be seen. This dissertation shows that it is doable and there's much to be gained.

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Surviving authenticity in groups and systems: an experiential learning process

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The highlights of her career so far include leading the rollout of The Reach Foundation's Australia-wide Teacher Training program; leading the development and organisational change management of a community development strategy for young people at a local Council; and leading and implementing an innovative organisation-wide culture and capability plan working alongside leaders and teams, the Executive team and the Councillor group at a local Council.

Her key drivers are participation, authentic leadership, reflective practice, business and political nous, social intelligence and strategic optimism. Jackie is a lifelong learner with current qualifications in Social Work, International and Community Development, Training, and in 2020 completing the Masters in Leadership and Management (Organisation Dynamics) at the National Institute of Organisation Dynamics Australia. Since completing her recent studies she has been learning about renovating and becoming a puppy parent.

Introduction

This paper's primary aim is to recognise the value of learning about leadership and organisations through experiencing and reflecting together over time. I use Carr's (1996) three levels of Learning for Leadership as an experiential learning framework for stepping through my narrative of how I have made meaning of leadership and organisations as social systems over the last five years.

This paper uncovers a deeper perspective on organisations over the three learning levels. An awareness of unconscious dynamics in level one occurring in my first example at the 2017 Group Relations Conference pre-Masters study. At the 2018 Group

Relations Conference I experience a new level of insight, level two, and an authentic leadership framework (framework) emerges. The framework reflects the interrelated systems psychodynamic concepts of intersubjectivity, object relations and containment (Benjamin 1995; Klein 1985; Winnicott 1987). This evolves in maturity, required in level three, as I integrate the framework in a collaborative action research project with an international conservation organisation during what has now become the first year of the global pandemic of the coronavirus (Covid). Through this experience a further level of learning is reiterated on individuals, groups and systems capacities to survive authenticity through accepting their mortality, to then remain focused on the organisation's task.

This paper concludes with some key reflections of the experiential learning process. In this I recognise my own capacity to survive authenticity and accept others in groups and systems.

Understanding organisations as social systems through experiential learning

Learning about the conscious and unconscious dynamics of organisations as open social systems is not a traditional leadership training process. Open systems reflect living organisms, dependent on growth and ongoing exchange with their environment across their boundary for their survival (Roberts 1994). It requires a commitment to uncover something previously unknown in organisational life.

The process of experiential learning, as the name suggests, is about learning from experiencing first-hand. Schein (2015, p. 3) acknowledges that "the critical change [is] the acceptance of the reality that when one is dealing with human systems, one cannot isolate experimental subjects... Instead, our

empirical methods [have] to allow for the involvement of the subjects, whether as students, clients, or pure research subjects, in the activity itself”.

Carr’s (1996) Learning for Leadership frames my thinking in this paper. Though the author uses the context of experiential learning at Group Relations Conferences, I’ll also add an experience in a collaborative action research project to demonstrate the three levels that students (for the purpose of this paper) may experience in their learning process. These are:

Level 1: awareness

- When the student believes something unconscious is happening in a group or system, but they are unsure exactly what it is, or what to do with it.

Level 2: developing new insight

- The student builds the capacity to reflect on the way conscious and unconscious dynamics interact in a group or system to form new perspectives.

Level 3: maturity, involvement and detachment

- A sophisticated perspective, where the student questions the validity of previously understood realities. Similar to the metaphor of being on the dance floor and on the balcony at the same time.

The guiding method that is woven through the three-level process is reflective practice. Reflective practice can take many forms, though at its essence is the space and perspective to think about responses and experiences individually and with a group, of the group or system, without reacting or being affected by it (Smith 1976). Reflective practice is common in social work practice, where I professionally originate, but not so much in other organisational life. The opportunity in reflective practice is where professional and organisational dilemmas are able to be grappled with without blame or judgement. In this, new ideas are able to emerge in the individual, the group and the system. There are many ways that an individual or group can be reflective. Some examples below that I have used that may be helpful are:

- observation - to tap into the sensitivities, associations and nuances often remaining hidden within an organisation. This “unthought known”, is surfaced through a person in the observer role having an innate capacity to sense, intuit and make meaning from the unexpressed (Hinshelwood 2013, p. 50).
- socioanalytic drawing – the drawing of a system and role, that brings out unconscious experiences to be worked with (Nossal 2010)
- ‘not thinking’ – a deliberative attempt at allowing the unconscious to emerge in its own time (Bion 1970)
- reflective journaling – using writing without thought to reflect on and associate thoughts and ideas (Long 2013)
- reflexive practice – a group or team reflect together on the group and system as it is occurring, bringing to light multiple new perspectives (Long 2013)

Though this paper reflects experiences I have had, I also recognise that others may, and have had alternate experiences within these examples. I acknowledge that this kind of learning requires an acceptance that there may potentially be multiple realities occurring in any group or organisational system at any one time (Smith 1976). Again, this highlights the value of reflective practice to maintain a spirit of curiosity rather than definitiveness. Before I step you through the three levels of learning for leadership from my own experiences, you might be wondering why I started on this experiential learning process in the first place?

What made me want to dive in?

You could say it started when I was 13 years old.

It's Saturday 8th February 1997. I'm in Year 9 and just started at a new school. After dancing today, my friends and I head to Pascoe Vale Pool for some relief from the heatwave Melbourne is experiencing. At 2.10pm I dive into the diving pool and have a stroke.

A split had occurred between the two sides of my brain and body, impacting my ability to walk and talk.

It doesn't take me too long to recover physically well-enough to continue with school. In 2001 I launch myself into further study and a career in Social Work. I help vulnerable people connect with themselves and their systems, while I also attempt to connect parts of myself. I reach a critical turning point in 2012 when I start seeing a psychotherapist. I look on in awe at how sophisticatedly the time, territory, and task boundaries are held, which provides me a level of containment that I haven't experienced before (Green and Molenkamp 2005; Winnicott 1987).

I fast forward to 2015. I am leading a community development team that is located offsite from the main building. As I attempt to change the focus of the team to align better with the organisation and community needs, a couple of team members are behaving particularly overwhelmed and stubborn. As a tough leadership experience to manage, I connect with an external systems psychodynamic coach. I feel isolated by the organisation and am tasked to begin individual performance management, a traditional individual solution to a complex systemic problem. As I try my best to manage the team, that in hindsight may have been feeling lost, isolated, and rejected, I become emotionally worn down. With a sense of hopelessness, I wonder what it would take to lead this team to get the community outcomes that were in the plan?

In 2016, in a state of exhaustion I jump at the chance of a secondment to lead the Organisational Development function. It could be an opportunity to change the organisation from the inside out, to social work the organisation, I thought.

Level 1 - awareness

2017 Group Relations Conference – pre-Masters study

In November 2017, I walk through the gates of Melbourne University's International House for a leadership development conference unlike any other, a Group Relations Conference. Group Relations Conferences (conference) are an immersive method of learning about group phenomena, often in a five-day residential block. In these conferences members become part of the group dynamics in the here and now, designed to provide experiential learning that may usually be hidden in ordinary organisational life (Hayden and Molenkamp 2004). The Conference provides the opportunity to explore through experiences in the small group, large group, intergroup and whole of organisation dynamics.

There are six members and a consultant that come together multiple times over the five-day learning block in an experience called small study group. On the second morning when we meet for a second time, I find myself frustrated. I am frustrated that being one of the youngest members of the conference, I have been matched with one of the youngest-looking Consultant's, do they think I'm not good-enough?. With a sense of courage, I overt this frustration to the group. The group looks at me vaguely, and frustrated at me that I am spending time talking about this when they are grappling with their own anxieties. One person worried about her decision to attend a five-day workshop instead of being at home with her three young children. One person wondering what the purpose of all this is. A couple of people were silent, one almost appeared disinterested. Why did what was frustrating to others have such an impact on other members of the group being able to do what they wanted?

We all grapple with our first overwhelming and exposing experience of a Group Relations Conference; learning about leadership in a new way. Alongside these familiar emotions there are also feelings of elation, playfulness and hope. I have a felt experience, but I can't quite put my finger on it. I walk out of

the gates on Friday afternoon “amazed by [my] experience...discover[ing] that there seems to be an unconscious process at work in a group”, but I am not sure exactly what I am to do about it (Carr 1996, p. 47). Through this experience I have the awareness outlined in Carr’s level one.

Looking back now, I appreciate Klein’s (1985) theory of object relations as a reflection of one of the many experiences that might have been occurring in the group at this conference. Klein (1985) proposes that during increased anxiety splitting can occur through the separation of the unbearable parts of ourselves. This is understood as a primitive experience of the mother-infant dyad carried into adult life. The adult subject struggles between what is psychologically desired, provided for or withheld, and splits apart two conflicting feelings. This is known as the paranoid-schizoid position (Klein 1985). The split-off parts are unconsciously projected onto parts of the object, in this case the others in the group, while the subject associates the other parts as soothing.

These external experiences are taken into the subject contributing to their inner knowing, through introjection (Klein 1985). The subject is then able to know these projections in the other through projective identification, enabling capacity to move towards a depressive state of guilt and reparation where integration is possible (Klein 1985; Harding 2006).

In 2018, I begin the Master of Leadership and Management (Organisation Dynamics) (Masters) at the National Institute of Organisation Dynamics Australia (NIODA). I spend the next three years in a collegiate group uncovering the conscious and unconscious dynamics and defenses experienced in organisations as open systems, through each other. I learn that systems are defined by the boundary surrounding their activities (Reed 1988). I learn about defenses being the unconscious mechanisms strategically manifested in organisations to cope with the anxieties in the system related to the emotional labour of the work, at times inhibiting the capacity to work towards the task (Jaques 1955). At the end of my second year I have an experience where new insight emerges.

Level 2 – developing new insight

2019 Group Relations Conference - emergence of the authentic leadership framework

It’s November 2019. I attend my second Group Relations Conference as a second year Masters student. The words ‘Fearlessly Authentic’ are plastered twice on the transparent glass entry doors of the venue building that will be home for the next five days. They remain hidden from the front of my mind though, until after the conference.

In an intergroup workshop on the second day I experience something new. A group of five members form around feelings of rebellion, isolation, and rejection. The group names itself ‘Fresh Cheeks: dancing on the boundaries’ and works together to intentionally explore ideas of group formation, exclusion and inclusion, and belonging, before it is able to play across the boundaries of the other groups (Alderfer 1987). I am graciously able to assert compassion and accept myself enough to hear and work with other group members diverse experiences and their overt valences, the projections members have a predisposition to take up on behalf of a group (Bion 1970; Rioch 1970; Harding 2006). As a group we are able to genuinely listen to each other and manage our group projective processes to contain the group to be able to navigate its task in a safe-enough way (Klein 1985; Winnicott 1987).

Over the coming weeks an integrative framework of authentic leadership emerges in my mind. There are many authors that have used the term authentic leadership. In this context being authentic is referred to as being “known to be real and genuine and not a copy” (Oxford Learner’s Dictionary 2019, p. 1). Simpson and French (2005) note that leadership has previously been focused on leading a group or idea in an organisation through decisive action and results. Authentic leadership was popularised in the naughties encouraging personable relating with others. This framework of authentic leadership that emerged in me is able to be broken down into elements from applied systems psychodynamics.

The authentic leadership framework

The framework holds together the inter-related systems psychodynamic concepts of Benjamin's (1995) intersubjectivity and mutual recognition, Klein's (1985) object relations and Winnicott's (1987) holding and containment. The six elements are written in a linear fashion, but the process is not that straightforward.

1. Self-awareness - being comfortable and accepting enough of your genuine self and your own needs.
2. Expressing your own needs - having the capacity to express your needs with the group, and have them acknowledged and worked with, through active assertion and recognition (Benjamin 1995).
3. Holding others in mind - being able to keep others in your thinking at the same time as yourself and the task (Winnicott 1987).
4. Others expressing their needs - all members of the group having the capacity to express what they need, have those needs acknowledged and worked with, at this stage forming mutual recognition (Benjamin 1995).
5. Group managing its projective processes - the group is then able to manage its projective processes (Klein 1985).
6. Co-creation of safe-enough containment to stay on task - the group then has the capacity to negotiate and renegotiate its needs often to co-create safe-enough containment for the group to stay on task (Winnicott 1987).

This experience to develop new insight in level two is grounded in Benjamin's theory of intersubjectivity, which refers to the interplay between two or more subjects (Benjamin 1995). The awareness of the self as a subject alongside the awareness of the other as a subject in its own right, allows for the experience of the subjectivity of the self in the full presence of the other (Benjamin 1995). The challenge to simultaneously manage the tension of the independence of the self alongside the acceptance of the similarities and differences of the other in its own right, forms the experience of mutual recognition (Harding 2006). Through the experience of mutual recognition, the group is able to be aware enough of the projections that may be experienced together, to then manage its projective processes (Benjamin 1995; Harding 2006; Klein 1985). It calls on all of our abilities to hold ourselves in active assertion and recognition of the other, and to hold the constant and assertive tension required in the process of destruction and creation (Benjamin 1995). The intersubjective state of mutuality is complementary to the integration of paranoid-schizoid and depressive states of object relations (Harding 2006). If this recognition does not occur, the space in-between fills up with projections and anxieties, not allowing for containment (Klein 1985). Creativity, determination and growth of the group or system is likely inhibited (Klein 1985; Harding 2006). Winnicott's (1987) holding environment provides the containment required for an individual, group or system to feel physically and psychologically safe enough. These safe-enough conditions soothe the anxiety of the individual or group, and me in this context, for new thinking to be possible (Winnicott 1987).

This fluid process is not easy. I recall at the time of this conference feeling relentless and exhausted, but also feeling nourished and hopeful. This paradox is another feature of intersubjectivity. Paradoxes reflect the balancing of the presence of two or more alternative and often contradictory ideas at the same time (Harding 2006).

This six-element authentic leadership framework provides an anchor for thinking about group and organisational experiences. It reflects some common challenges in leading and working towards mutuality and integration that provides safe-enough containment for an organisation to be able to stay on its task. In the coming year, I have an experience within a collaborative action research project that evolves my learning about organisations and leadership to level three.

2020 Collaborative Action Research Project - integrating the authentic leadership framework

It's the end of July 2020. In our final year of study, our student research group of five is exiting the international conservation organisation (research organisation) for the final time of our collaborative action research project. The research question for the project is to 'look beneath the surface of the research organisation to explore what the experience of working there is like for its employees and volunteers'.

It takes me a while to emotionally, mentally and technologically decompress from this research project spanning the last six months, mostly virtually due to the impact of COVID. Over the next week I fill my days with non-thinking tasks. Being content with my half thoughts of the research. I have built over the last three years negative capability to sit with and tolerate the ambiguous and paradoxical experiences in systems psychodynamic practice to allow the revelations to emerge (French 2001; Lawrence 1994).

It's late on Saturday 1st August 2020 and I can't sleep. Stage 3 lockdown isn't working in Melbourne, and stage 4 seems imminent. I feel unsettled and isolated with the imposition of the additional restrictions, curfews, and compulsory wearing of masks. In the containment of my apartment and the darkness of the night though, I feel more creative than ever (Winnicott 1987). Conveniently distracted by the research organisation's task of fighting species loss, a hypothesis emerges that the research organisation is accepting its potential extinction, through utilising the containment of the research task, to enable the evolutionary thinking required for its survival.

I refer back to my initial commentary on the relatedness between object relations and intersubjectivity in the authentic leadership framework (Klein 1985; Benjamin 1995). The active assertion between destruction and creation allowing for mutual recognition is not a straightforward act. It requires a position of survival of all states, including aggression, to be harnessed with the self and experienced simultaneously with the other. As experienced in the intergroup workshop in level two, when the self recognises the survival of the other subject, the self also survives, through mutual recognition (Benjamin 1995). I recall a comment from the first General Participant session that the organisation 'needs heating and cooling...to be in its natural habitat', a potential reflection of mutual recognition. The organisation's previous inability to express and work with its diverse and often contradictory emotional experiences and projections of transition and change may have inhibited an acceptance of its reality prior to the research task. Though in a state of mutual recognition and integration, the organisation is now able to manage its own projections. A reflection from a participant that 'it's like the head, heart and soul aren't connected'. The research project sponsor responds that 'we have a methodology for guiding the head but there is no methodology for guiding the emotional work'. This is also demonstrated in the final sessions. The roles represented from the research organisation in the research project are able to both express their own unique needs and desires, at the same time as recognise each other's, as expressed by the student research group that:

- there are polarities and paradoxes of emotion and diverse experiences within the system,
- the organisation is in the grips of a fast paced, evolutionary experience where change is hard for everyone, and
- the organisation is a sentient and feeling organisation that is experiencing emotional growing pains as it evolved. It has a cognitive approach to evolution but not an emotional one.

The authentic leadership framework can be acknowledged at this time as a reflective experiential learning process within the research organisation. In the containment provided by the research task, this acceptance of reality and the transitory nature of all living systems, allowed for the organisation to think together in evolutionary ways.

Mutuality and integration can also be seen through the authentic leadership of the CEO sharing during her interview on the organisation's task, that 'it's intentional...the odds are stacked against us, but it's worth it'. The research group also reflect at the final session on the organisation's maturity and

willingness to collaborate. The organisation's willingness to participate in the research project may have potentially been a way for the organisation to search for new tools to aid in their adaptability and longevity.

It may be that reflective systems psychodynamic thinking provided by the research task created the required conditions for the research organisation to accept the harsh reality of the mortality of all living systems, including itself as an organisation system?

Particularly with the added layer of Covid, as a researcher I have the maturity to reflect through involvement in the project and the detachment of my analysis of the research organisation's capacity to hold and manage its projections, as a good-enough organisation maintaining its stamina for its task (Carr 1996; Klein 1985; Winnicott 1987).

I recall the sponsor mentioning in the final session that the organisation needs 'not be afraid to have these conversations' to build their 'survival tool-kit'. The paradox of feeling relentless and exhausted, alongside nourished and hopeful is felt again.

I have provided a narrative of the experiential learning process using Carr's (1996) three levels of Learning for Leadership that I hope were helpful in providing examples of the evolution and value of the learning experience from gaining awareness, to developing new insight, to maturity, involvement and detachment. This leads me to reflect on how these experiences can be applied in practice.

Adding to our "Survival tool-kit"

As I have gone through the process of experiential learning with the emergence of the authentic leadership framework, I am left with some reflections that may be helpful when applying this leadership approach. It requires:

- courage and curiosity to learn about yourself and others
- effort and commitment to continue to delve a bit deeper in its assertive cyclic nature
- trust that you, others and the system will learn to adapt and survive
- tolerance of the paradoxes of ordinary organisational life, and
- openness to the multiple realities of the many experiences that could be occurring in a system at any one time.

This framework is not just for leaders but can be used as an organisation-wide approach to learning and adapting to change.

Concluding remarks

As I reflect back on my exploration and commitment to experiential learning about leadership, I am reminded again of the value of both the individual application of my social work studies and raising my line of sight to the systems-level psychodynamic perspective. I reflect on the emergence of the authentic leadership framework in 2019, which provided a new insight. This was useful in integrating into the exploration of the action research organisation's dynamics in 2020. This sophisticated level of applied learning provided me with the capacity to explore defenses, self-awareness, the intersubjective active assertion and mutual recognition, object relations and the management of projective processes, providing the good-enough containment to maintain drive towards the task of leadership in action (Bion 1970; Jaques 1955; Benjamin 1995; Klein 1985; Winnicott 1987).

I consider Carr's (1996) three levels of learning useful when committing to the process of uncovering the first of awareness of new phenomena, the second, moving from this experience to new insights, and the third, having a major shift in thinking through a sophisticated stance of involvement, detachment and mature reflection (1996). The collaborative action research project through Covid brought me a maturity

to reflect and adapt in ways that I may have not experienced had it occurred at any other time. The narrative in the three examples outlined in this paper required a large amount of courage, perseverance and resilience to maintain my stamina in this learning process. I maintain the value of experiential learning and reflective practice together as critical to building perspective and capacity to think and lead organisations. Through the survival of the self and the recognition of others, through the constant tension of destruction and creation, leading organisational change is possible (Benjamin 1995; Krantz 2001).

A final remark from Carr (1996, p. 47) feels pertinent now that “dysfunctional and unjust organisations can only be transformed by [those] who are capable of and committed to a reflexive process of learning...The catch is that... it appears that very few people approach life with this sort of non-attachment to the fundamental distinctions by which they define themselves”.

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