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Leaders in mental health care and education

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BOOK CHAPTER

The Tavistock and Portman NHS
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14

Reflections:
Leadership Formation

This book set out to promote critical and curious thinking about leadership, with the aim of supporting improved leadership practice. Reflecting on this, it has become clear that making the link between theory and practice is not easy through the medium of a book. As I wrote, I realized that in order to do justice to the theoretical discussion, practical examples would have to be minimal. I make no apology for this, as my first concern was to promote critical thinking and as the anonymous reviewer of this book helpfully pointed out, it is the reader and any programme leaders/lecturers who are best placed to make the links to practice, drawing on personal experience and situating the discussion within their relative contexts. My hope is that this book has seeded ideas and questions, which will grow in the classroom, but more importantly, will find fuller meaning and come to life when the reader is engaged in the practice of leadership at work.

Leadership is a vast subject which presents any author with a multitude of options when addressing it. After establishing the ground rules for a critical approach to leadership, and setting out the book's critical agenda: Emancipation, Looking Awry, Systemic Praxis and Depth Analysis, I journeyed into some key areas of power and diversity and along the way attempted to critique some of the main debates in Leadership. Chapter 5 on asymmetrical leadership set out my belief that leadership should neither be discussed as the sole property of an individual, nor should the agency of the individual leader be derided or dismissed. Leadership has many facets, but this does not mean that the agency of leaders and leadership should be deconstructed and theorized out of existence.

Chapter 5 clearly identifies seven aspects of leadership in one social movement:

1   Intellectual leadership
2   Unconscious leadership
3   Corporate leadership
4   Dispersed leadership
5   Individual leadership
6   Social movement leadership
7   Symbolic leadership.

This offers a transferable example which can be tested and applied to your organization. When at work, look for the obvious leadership, e.g. the CEO and others

with formal positional leadership, and then ask yourself, how are they taking up their leadership? Is it through intellectual leadership or perhaps symbolic leadership? Where else can leadership can be found? Is there dispersed and unconscious leadership taking place? Is the organization part of a social movement which is taking a lead in social change? What really makes the organization tick? Where are the less obvious leaders and leadership groups? Are there other leadership aspects you can see, not found in the example given?

Practise and train yourself to be a participant-observer at work; this is both interesting but also practical, and is an important high level leadership capability. When working, take moments to ask, where is the leadership? Who has influence, who defers to whom? Who takes a lead, and on what authority do they draw? What groups are powerful, who is marginalized? How can I take up an ethical leadership position in this meeting?

Leadership is not symmetrical but attempts to standardize it are seductive and common.

The book then explored the leadership discourses which account for the main underlying (unconscious) and normative assumptions that are held about leadership. These are vitally important as they define the boundaries and unspoken expectations as to how leadership is enacted on a daily basis, how different actors perceive it, and how it is responded to. The discourses underpin how we think about leadership, they define our expectations, they determine on what premise leaders are selected, and how leadership development is planned. Discourses are not rigid or set in stone, and they are not exclusive to each other. Observing which discourse dominates, how they clash, how they work well in different parts of an organization, is the skill of an aware leader. Discourse analysis is too precious to be confined only to the university classroom, but should be practised within the work setting by practitioners, leaders and followers (of which we are usually both).

The three discourses emerged from my doctoral research into leadership. I didn't set out to find these or any discourses, I set out to write about leadership and the Quaker movement. Nor did I set out to make links with religious fundamentalism; this too emerged from the literature and jumped out at me as the theoretical connections also matched my experience of corporate and organizational life. It was through using the critical lenses set out in this book, which alerted me to these new resources which can help us to grasp and understand leadership.

In my personal experience of being a leader, teaching leadership, developing leaders and developing myself, being able to *look awry*, think *systemically*, or use *depth analysis* are not tedious tasks to undertake and learn; they are jewels! Different worlds are discovered within existing worlds when unconscious processes are engaged with. When we look from a completely different perspective and when new links are made, the connectedness of the world is revealed. A critical approach increases the potential for leaders to co-create with others the social conditions which lay the foundations for emancipatory work environments.

Critical theory and leadership: working assumptions

To briefly summarize, a critical leadership approach:

1 Leadership exists within all forms of organization, whether this is overtly or covertly recognized. It is therefore important to understand how leadership works in practice. The task is to look beyond and beneath the norms and assumptions espoused about leadership in popular culture and the main-stream management literature.

2 Mainstream leadership assumptions and discourses reproduce the organizational power structures that already exist. To address this, critical theorists pay particular attention to the systemic and structural aspects of leadership that privilege some and marginalize others. There is a tendency for organizations to drift blindly and unknowingly towards seductive but dangerous totalizing cultures. Understanding and revealing the role leadership plays within social processes can help prevent this from occurring.

3 There is no leadership without followership and participation. There is no leadership without power, influence and authority. Individual and collective autonomy and liberty therefore rely on organizations with non-authoritarian leadership approaches. It is possible and necessary to take up leadership authority without being authoritarian. It is a utopian error to try and eliminate power relations. Critical theory attempts to make transparent and address (rather than eradicate) the relations between leadership and followership, authority and power.

4 Contemporary workplace organizations are increasingly important sites of social activity and community, replacing traditional communal structures such as the Church. What happens in the workplace has a reflexive relationship with the wider environment. Understanding and improving the dynamics of leadership in the workplace is therefore essential to society in general.

In spite of the rise in critical and post-modern critiques of leadership, and the emergence of the Eco-leadership discourse, the mainstream leadership band-wagon rolls on peddling its wares of new leadership models, and competency frameworks. These are very seductive; like a child's safety blanket, they offer com-fort and reassurance, but aren't much use in the real world. I had to restrain myself from the seduction of writing a conclusion with tidy models and frame-works in order to provide a neat closure and leave the reader (and myself) with a feeling of false comfort.

To understand leadership in practice, really is to *look awry*, at leadership and at oneself, and to keep looking awry. Taking up our agency, our individual and col-lective power and our authority appropriately in leadership and in participative roles, and working collaboratively towards emancipative ethical ends, is a liber-ating and rewarding journey.

So instead of finishing with a neat definitive leadership summary, I would like to acknowledge that there is no final word on leadership, 'no golden bullet', no seven-stage framework and no set of leadership competencies that are universal. A valid question asked of critical theorists is, how then do we develop leaders? This would take another book on leadership development to do this question justice, but I would like to end the book by suggesting that:

1 Emancipatory leadership is developed through the application of a critical approach to leadership practice, which is the task for each one of us.

2   My reflections on this book have led me to muse that a process of Leadership Formation should be constructed to support the emergence of tomorrow's leadership and the Eco-leadership discourse.

Leadership formation

I hope these thoughts provoke an engaged response which adds to the discussion on how organizations can become creative, ethical, progressive and emancipatory. To achieve this, they need a radical and dynamic leadership, to help breathe life and form into the new emergent Eco-leadership discourse. Radicalism, however, is not always found where it is expected. G.K. Chesterton in his 1908 critique of modernity, in his book *Orthodoxy,* observed that, 'I did try to found a heresy of my own; and when I had put the last touches to it, I discovered that it was orthodoxy … I did try to be 10 minutes ahead of the truth. And found I was eighteen hundred years behind it. (Chesterton, [1908] 2004: 4)

Burrell argues for a 'retro-organization', that organizational theory needs rejuvenating by looking not only at modern organizational forms but also at those with longer histories:

In recognizing the centrality of the Enlightenment to the modern world, this book argues that it is in need of rejuvenation through the medium of dawn-picked extracts of the pre-modern period in European thought and seeks in the pre-scientific era ideas and themes of relevance for today. (Burrell, 1997: 5–6)

I agree, and in recent years I too have found radical thinking in tradition and orthodoxy. In this light, I will turn to a radical tradition which dates back more than 1,700 years. Chapter 13 stated that the Eco-leadership discourse is underpinned by connectivity, leadership spirit and ethics. The phrase 'Leadership Development' too quickly resonates with the normative approaches of developing an individual's competencies and behaviours, based on functional and rational ideology. This immediately disconnects and disengages leadership from the wider ecology; systemic thinking, leadership spirit and ethics, focusing on micro-development rather than macro-development. Individual leadership development is not incompatible with a systemic approach, but too often is treated as such, hence I turn to the idea of Leadership Formation.

Leadership Formation emanates directly from the religious idea of spiritual formation, and I turn to the Christian monastic tradition that has developed over the past 1,700 years since the early Desert Fathers. Sustainability is key to the Eco-leader discourse and this monastic tradition has proven to be sustainable; the Benedictine monastic tradition itself dates back over 1,400 years (Merton, 1966).

Having recently stayed in a Camaldolese (Benedictine) Hermitage in Big Sur, California, I can verify to the power of this community, their leadership spirit, and the paradoxical radicalism entwined with orthodox tradition which is embedded in their religious practice. Spiritual formation within a monastery is obviously not directly transferable to secular organizations but it does provide a further resource, a sustainable case study that can stimulate and support how we think about leadership development.

The idea of spiritual formation is straightforward; the monastic tradition does not place an emphasis on the monks' spiritual life being learnt through teaching, training or personal development. To undergo formation as a monk is not to undergo a series of separate developmental acts, but is a holistic experience which arises from living in the community. It is an ongoing process of formation, and each monk is continually formed by, and also contributes to, the living tradition and formation of the community. Likewise, I would suggest that to become a leader, and to develop leadership within an organization, will also be better achieved through a process of collective and individual formation rather than an ad hoc set of developmental opportunities and experiences. Leadership development suffers hugely due to the inability to hold the whole organization and wider environment in mind, to take a holistic view creating a consistent context and learning process which supports leadership.

The monastic communities have mastered and tailored the ability to create successful and sustainable contexts in which the lives of their monks are formed. A novitiate monk chooses to join a monastic community having discerned a certain charism (a God-given gift) and takes a vow to follow the Monastic Rule of the particular order they join. The Monastic setting, the Rule and the community, overseen by an Abbott, provide a Paternal Container (Western, 2005). A Paternal Container is a safe containing space that is a prerequisite for 'developmental or formative' activity to take place.

This work is drawn from psychoanalytic theory, particularly from the Tavistock tradition that applies object relation's theory to organizational dynamics. Maternal containment is a well-known concept in this tradition (Bion, 1961) but when applying this theory to practice while studying the Tavistock Centre, I found that maternal containment alone was problematic when used to bring about organizational change. I proposed and tested a new framework drawing on paternal and maternal metaphors (Western, 2005) to support developmental activity. Box 14.1 outlines what each stance represents.

Box 14.1   Paternal and maternal stances

Paternal stance	Maternal stance
External	Internal
Reality	Fantasy – innovation, creativity
Structure	Free floating
Time boundaries	Timelessness
Authority	Attachment-influence
Order	Thinking space
The fragmented world	Oneness
Diversity	Unity
Triad and beyond	Dyad
Collaboration – crossing boundaries	'Groupishness' acting within boundaries

The Object Relations tradition of psychoanalysis was an important shift in thinking that included the impact of human relations on infant and adult psychological development, while also acknowledging the innate and biological drives identified by Freud. However, the 'mamocentric' relationship between mother and infant (the relation to the breast) became the key focus and maternal attachment theory heavily influenced their organizational theories. Maternal containment provided a conforting emotional spaces that enabled thinking to occur; however, this was problematic as it took people into reflective spaces that could become regressive unless managed within a structure. In psychotherapy, this works as it is structured by the couch, the safe space, the clear roles and the precise 50-minute hour, i.e. time boundaries. In organizational life, however, maternal containment failed to link creative and reflective thinking to external reality. Turning to Jacques Lacan's work (a prominent French psychoanalyst) on the paternal metaphor, I realized that together with maternal containment they provided a psychological framework that could be used for developmental activity in organizations.

> 'The Law of the Father', therefore, refers to psychical internal organisation not a patriarchal, iron fist Law. Lacan is absolutely clear that the 'Father' and the power of the father are symbolic:
>
> 'The Father is not a real object so what is he?…The Father is a metaphor [Lacan 1958]'
>
> Using Lacan's term the 'Parternal Metaphor' or the 'Name-of-the-Father' (Nom-du-Père), it is the 'Father' as signifier and not the real father I am referring to. (Western, 2005: 266)

The Paternal Metaphor can be appropriated to create a safe structured space that is necessary for maternal reverie to take place. Maternal reverie is the emotionally stable environment a mother/primary carer creates to enable an infant to learn and to think (Bion, 1962). After maternal reverie and thinking have taken place the paternal stance breaks into this space and introduces the external world, a wider systemic perspective, the reality principle and action. In developmental terms, the 'father' enters the idealized unity of the infant–mother bond. This enables the infant to realize that they are independent from their mother, and that others exist in the world separately from their mother. The infant can both observe others interacting (mother and father) and also experience being oberved (I am a person separate from mother and father) hence they begin to relate to the outside world.

Translated to organizational thinking, the paternal metaphor represents the external, structure, differentiation and reality, while the maternal metaphor represents the internal, unity, oneness, creativity, ideas and play. The paternal metaphor creates a containing structure and space, a place where the maternal metaphor takes over enabling the emotional space for play, creativity and thinking to occur. The paternal metaphor then breaks up this unified bond (mother–infant) to turn their creativity into an outward-facing activity in the 'real world'. This framework is the basis for all creative and developmental activity and is vital for effective leadership practice.

Too much a paternal stance creates an authoritarian culture, which focuses on action, structure and becomes rigid, there is no space for reflection and adaptive thinking. This underpinned the patriarchal business structures and leadership of the twentieth century. Too much a maternal stance creates an inward-looking organization, where the in-group are idealized and the outside world is denigrated and refused. Unity is prized at the expense of eliminating any difference or external threat to this idealized unity. A good example of an organization with too much of a maternal stance would be a utopian community that becomes cultish, the perfected community and identifies all external influences as evil or threatening. It is no coincidence that Hitler referred to Germany as 'the motherland', idealizing the unity and perfection of the German/Aryan race with disastrous impact.

These stances are not gender-determined; men and women take up either and/or both stances. However, how much of these archetypal psychic structures are biologically determined or socially constructed around gender is hotly debated. This frame work is the basis for developmental and thinking activity that is translated into social action (Figure 14.1).
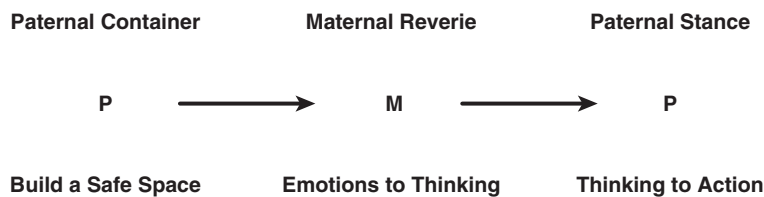
Paternal Container	**Maternal Reverie**	**Paternal Stance**
P ⟶	**M** ⟶	**P**
Build a Safe Space	**Emotions to Thinking**	**Thinking to Action**

Figure 14.1   Learning development framework

Within the physical, emotional, and in this case spiritual container of the monnstery, the monk is supported and encouraged to form the 'monk within' alongside others undergoing the same formation process. The monk's life is shaped and formed through partaking in daily spiritual practices, for example, prayer, work, reading the scriptures, and vitally important is the liturgy (which is the form and structure of the religious service and practice). It is the whole rather than any of the parts of this process which forms both the novitiate monk and the community. The monks call this holistic experience *'the life'*. In addition to this process there is spiritual direction, Thomas Merton explains:

> Spiritual direction does not consist merely in giving advice. The man who has only an advisor does not really have a director in the fullest sense. Since the spiritual life does not consist in having and thinking, but in being and doing, a director who only gives ideas has not begun to form the one he directs. (1966: 7)

The Spiritual director is a guide, a mentor, a 'loving father' in the monastic tradition. Their role is to be receptive and to support the monk in finding their path, not to teach that path, nor to develop the person, but to observe, reflect and guide the new monk through the formation process. The formation process is a

communal process, in which an individual paradoxically sacrifices their individuality to the will of the rule, the abbot, and the community, in order to gain their individuality fully.

So how does spiritual formation inform leadership formation?

Leaders are also formed through the context and 'community' in which they work. Just as a monk cannot exist without a monastic tradition or a supportive community, leaders also require a context and a community (albeit a temporary work-based community). Community and the social context form the monk, and so it is with leaders. The intensity is different and the desired end result is different but I am suggesting that the process is very similar. Leadership is not a learnt profession or trade or a taught set of skills, leadership is much more complex and goes deeper. Leadership is not just the property of the individual, and yet individuals are vital to leadership; whereas the monastic community has refined its formation process to minute detail: the layout of the monastery, the daily routine, the clear lines of authority, periods of study leave, the amount of solitary time mixed with community prayer and physical work. The context and process in which leaders are formed are very hit-and-miss affairs, both for the individual and the organization.

Therefore, a radical change of perception is required. Leadership formation suggests that leaders and leadership are 'formed' within a context and a process at the workplace, through the organization, its culture, systems and processes. The problem is that this formation process is largely ad hoc and unrecognized. I am suggesting that the process of leadership formation takes precedence over the notion of leadership development, and that contemporary leaders urgently focus on how they can support leadership formation through their organizational culture, structures and processes.

Leadership formation relates to a holistic process, working at a collective idea of leadership rather than focus on the development of individual leaders. This will take place in 'the life' of their particular workplace community.

A process of formation is needed whereby individuals and teams under guidance, a mentor or coach [1] would take some responsibility for their own formation, and the organization would share this responsibility.

As well as a holistic vision, a radical inclusivity is also required. The religious term charism refers to an individual's unique gifts, and also to an organization's gift to the world, so that the Fransciscan charism will differ from the Benedictine charism, and individuals will have their own particular charism. This idea of charism should replace the focus on charisma if we are truly to attain dispersed leadership in organizations. Charisma is limited to an elite few who have 'special qualities'. Charism relates to the special qualities each of us has, and which, if tapped, make all of us potential leaders. Successful organizations must create a context and processes for the holistic formation of all-potential rather than high potential leaders.

Creativity is at the heart of this approach, releasing creativity is a parallel process to releasing leadership talent. Richard Florida whose influential work on creativity and urban development, emphasizes the need to be inclusive:

> **Creativity defies race, gender and ethnicity. It knows no race, it knows no ethnicity, it knows no gender, it knows no age, it knows no income-level, it knows nothing about appearance, it knows nothing about sexual orientation. Every single human being is creative, and we don't know where that creativity will come from. (Florida, 2003: 28)**

Florida continues saying how creativity comes from the street as well as the university, and the business incubator. Entrepreneurs drop out of college, 'creativity comes from everywhere and anywhere', 'We have to have conditions that mobilize that energy. Ecosystems that allow us to tap and harness the energy of everyone, not just the top talent' (ibid. 3: 28). It is the current leadership task to create the ecosystem that supports leadership formation throughout an organization, it is the same ecosystem that will also support creativity.

Creating the ecosystem and the process: the spatial leader

Spatial leadership is somewhat counter-intuitive, the leadership attempts to create the conditions that enable future direction, dispersed leadership and new innovations to emerge from all parts of the organization. They do not think of the organization as a static enterprise, with clear boundaries but as a spatial network that is fluid. The leadership take on the role of organizational architect, thinking spatially about how connections are to be made, how clusters of innovation might take place, how diverse parts of the organization might meet to exploit difference and potential new innovations. It also includes the design of buildings, locations, structures and processes.

These physical and psychic spaces become 'laboratories of experience' and allow a learning organization to develop, for creativity to flourish and leadership to emerge. These spaces also act as containers for anxiety, and as sites of community and of cultural audit. They become internalized into organizational culture. They are formal and informal, regular and irregular, virtual and real.

In the new Scottish Parliament, the architect Enric Miralles understood this process and designed Contemplation Pods attached to the Scottish MPs' offices, the idea being to create a physical thinking space (Figure 14.2). This physical space is observable on the outside of the building, so they are both practical and symbolic. Hopefully these spaces become internalized and create thinking spaces within us, reminding us for the need to stop, to reflect, to muse, to consider, to drift and to contemplate. They represent a symbolic and secular monastic cell.

Leadership Formation is too important to leave to chance, therefore I have identified three key principles:

1 Leadership Formation must be holistic and embedded in organizational culture.
2 Leadership Formation requires both an informal and a formal process.

3 Individuals, teams and organisations need *a form*, containing (paternal) structures and reflective (maternal) spaces, for leadership formation to occur, i.e. to discover and develop their specific leadership 'charism'.

Figure 14.2   Contemplation Pods, Scottish Parliament Building

Leadership formation is not something that can be prescribed outside of a local context, each organization will have a unique process. The formal process is likely to include mentoring/coaching support, reviews, training and development opportunities, peer and team formation activities, opportunities for looking awry, i.e. stepping out of context, opportunities to support others (this reduces dependency and encourages leadership) senior leaders monitoring and sharing progress and challenges.

Leaders of organizations looking to implement a leadership formation process can ask these questions:

- How can we create the conditions, and contexts to enable informal leadership formation to occur?
- Where are the spaces in our organization for (non)thinking and creativity?
- Where are the contexts and networks to enable communication to occur across silos?
- Where are the spatial clusters to enable healthy competition, collaboration and new innovation to occur?
- How can leadership formation be engaged with local communities of practice?
- How can cross-disciplinary and cross-fertilization of ideas and sharing of experience and knowledge be encouraged?
- How do individuals and teams support leaders who are not given positional power?

- Are we alert to the potential for leadership to flourish in the most unexpected places?
- Do we have processes in place which supports leadership formation?
- Do we have mentors and current leaders available to support new leaders and leadership initiatives?
- How do we value and encourage dispersed leadership?
- How are leadership spirit and ethical leadership behaviour encouraged in our organization?

Leadership Formation steps back from the grandiosity and the hubris of the Messiah discourse, which aims at the transformation of organizations and followers. Transformation will be a by-product of Leadership Formation; seeking transformation before formation is premature, it reflects society's preoccupations with immediate gratification. You cannot buy leadership from a quick course, or popular manual. Leadership exists all around us, but so much of it presently goes unnoticed and is uncherished, at the expense of organizational success and social well-being. It takes time, the right conditions and the right support to nurture the 'leader within'. The leader within oneself, and the leadership within the organization, both need nurturing and sustaining. Leadership Formation will reveal many manifestations of leadership that are currently hidden, if we are open to new forms of leadership, like creativity, it will surprise us.

Today's leaders need to urgently address the question of how to prepare the way for the next generation of leaders; a way that enables leaders to engage ethically, with the whole ecosystem, and with leadership spirit.

Note

1 Providing mentoring and coaching doesn't have to be an expensive layout. Utilizing peer-coaching, and mentoring from within the organization helps build a coaching community and coaching culture which supports the wider process of leadership formation. To bring in an external view, to support looking awry, it is good practice to use networks and collaborate with partner organizations to get cross-fertilization of ideas and experience. Many coaching and mentoring schemes fail as unregulated coaches act in an ad hoc fashion and nearly all coach training focuses on an individual's performance with some exceptions. Coaching and mentoring schemes to support leadership formation require a systemic approach to be taken, and this means educating, training and supervising the mentors/coaches. Coaches and mentors replace the idea of the monastic 'spiritual directors' and they should work in a similar non-directive manner.