

Reading and Carrying: a framework for learning about emotion and emotionality in organisational systems as a core aspect of leadership development

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Abstract

This paper outlines a developmental framework for introducing systems psychodynamic concepts in the context of leadership development. The model focuses on two key aspects of the leadership role needed in today's organisations. These are the ability to Read what is less obvious and below the surface in organisational systems, and the ability to manage what is Carried by those in leadership roles. These abilities inform choice of behaviours and intervention by leaders in their organisation systems. We argue for the need for appreciation of the systems psychodynamics within organisations and identify the difficulties in including these aspects in leadership development programmes. This paper provides a case study of a leadership development programme where we use the Reading and Carrying model as a bridge to understanding the emotion/ality that impinges on the leadership role. We discuss the difficulties that learning about emotion in and of the system can bring, by looking at the emotion raised in the learning experience.

Key words

Emotions – learning about emotion in organisations – leadership development – systems psychodynamics – emotions of learning

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Introduction

It is becoming increasingly important for leaders to understand the emotion and emotionality within organisations they lead. In this paper we outline a model that provides a bridge between the more accessible and rational aspects of organisation life and the hidden aspects of organisational dynamics. We provide a case study of how this has been done in a leadership development programme.

There is widespread interest in the leadership role in the post-industrial organisations of the 21st century. Changing organisational forms bring different demands on those in leadership positions. The historical emphasis on understanding leadership through studying the behaviour of leaders is no longer sufficient to deal with the complexity of today's organisational life. The current discussion of distributed and shared leadership recognises that leadership is no longer necessarily the province of those in senior executive positions (Denis, Lamothe, and Langley, 2001, Lambert 2002, Pearce and Conger, 2003, Raelin, 2003). Yet, even given this realisation, the development focus largely remains on the characteristics and behaviour of the leader despite calls for alternative development practices (see for example, King and Rowe, 1999, Kakabadse and Kakabadse, 2002).

Popular views of leadership capture the wish for leaders to be different, to be more able, even magically to erase difficulties, in fact to be the hero of the hour organisationally-and many personal histories of leaders are best sellers. However, in

new organisational forms, a notion of individual heroic endeavour is not the most helpful image of leadership. Leadership rather needs to be viewed as a function of the whole organisational system. This is evidenced by the fact that people may be successful in leadership roles in one organisation and yet not in another. What can be achieved in a leadership role is not just the result of personal characteristics but of what the organisation is collectively capable of working at. Indeed it is possible that an individual taking up a leadership role can only be the leader the organisation allows. This more complex view of leadership brings into focus the notion of taking up a leadership role within a particular organisational system: a systemic perspective on organisations was brought to prominence by Senge (1990). Those taking up leadership roles are part of the system in which they exercise leadership and leadership can only be understood by considering the leader-system dynamics.

The leadership capacity of an organisation involves emotion: after all people are inspired by dreams not plans. Experience in the workplace generates feelings, both positive and negative and, irrespective of whether these are acknowledged or suppressed, they will influence choices in taking up a role. Emotionality, defined by Reber 1995, p247, as 'behaviours that are observable and theoretically linked to the underlying emotion' exists within the organisational system. Leadership roles elicit fantasies that reflect human needs and the drama of human attempts to connect and relate to others. Thus leadership, deciding on what task people should work at and how to go about it is not about resourcing and planning but rather about intervening in the emotions and emotionality of organisation life. Kets de Vries (1991) said in his introductory paper to *Organisations on the Couch*, it is a myth that executives and organisations are rational. This means that emotion and emotionality are significant.

Yet as Carr (1999) says, these are experienced as ‘bad’ whilst rationality is split off as ‘good’. It is therefore hardly surprising that emotion and emotionality are not often the focus of attention, either for those in leadership roles or within leadership development.

In this paper, we outline a developmental model which we believe provides a framework to facilitate development of these less obvious aspects of awareness that are needed by those in leadership roles. This model is a useful framework to introduce those on leadership development events to the hidden, and often unconscious aspects of organisational life. The emotionality within the system is often a difficult aspect to introduce in a leadership development programme, and we offer a case study of a leadership development programme we have been involved with for a number of years, as an example of how to introduce and work with the complexity and paradox of the hidden, beneath the surface life of individuals, groups and organisations in a way that does not invite rejection or resistance of the core concepts.

We recognise that learning about emotion/ality in organisational systems presents challenges for leadership development, and we explore the challenges we face in running this programme. Equally learning about emotion/ality invites emotion as part of the experience of the learning, and we explore that element as well.

Reading and Carrying – two key elements of taking up a leadership role

Our original work that led to the development of this model was focused on understanding skill in working in the political environs of public sector organisations and was disseminated through the predecessor of this journal and elsewhere (Baddeley and James, 1987a, Baddeley and James 1987b, Arroba and James 1988, Arroba and James 1990, Baddeley and James 1991).

The two dimensions that we found to be key were the ability to place a focus on Reading the situation, combined with the ability to manage what is personally being Carried into the situation. Our recent work has highlighted the importance of these two dimensions for those in leadership positions. Leadership positions involve making effective choices in how to act in a context that contains different and difficult to understand viewpoints and approaches.

The dimension of Reading means having the willingness and ability to turn attention outwards to Read the context. We identified two poles to this dimension. At one end lies the ability to clearly focus outwards and grasp the less than obvious aspects of the organisational setting, gather intelligence and act on it appropriately. At the other end, we found behaviour that reflected an unwillingness or inability to focus outwards, or only to Read the situation through a constrained and limited lens. It is the ability to appreciate the need to Read the situation, backed up by skill in doing so, that characterises good Reading capacity.

The dimension of Carrying, managing what is being carried into a situation, means having the ability to tune into the internal world and be aware of what thoughts and feelings are present, understanding the basis for what is being carried, using this

information and making conscious choices about action. Again, we found that there was a distinction between two opposing ends of this dimension. On the one hand a robust, grounded and integrated sense of self being carried into a complex situation: a strong and present sense of self enables managers to act calmly, paying attention to the task rather than being driven off course by their feelings. At the other end of the dimension we found evidence of an ego-defensive approach being carried: the person felt the need to protect their feelings rather than focus on the organisational task. Our research found that the more frequently a person was able to manage what they carried and move away from defensive and gamey behaviour and engage a robust, integrated sense of self, the more likely they could behave effectively in situations involving multiple agenda.

To be able to 'Read' and 'Carry' well requires the manager to become aware of aspects of the organisation that are usually not attended to and even actively avoided because they are perceived have a negative affect for the organisation. Without awareness of difficult emotions that underpin observable behaviour, much organisation behaviour is puzzling; the manager who can't understand why a perfectly good plan is not being executed may have few choices for intervening if s/he doesn't grasp that it is underwater rocks their ship has run into.

Reading and Carrying are dynamic skills. No context remains static and therefore the ability to Read the context needs to be a dynamic process. For example, taking up a new role can highlight the need to understand a new organisational system. Often on first joining an organisation, there is clear recognition of the need to Read the new context but this tends to fade with familiarity. Equally what is being carried varies

from situation to situation. Carrying defensiveness in a situation will have a very different impact on consequent behaviour than Carrying a feeling of confidence. The skill lies in inner attention as events unfurl and reflecting on how the inner state resonates with past experience or is related to the current situation.

The two dimensions of Reading and Carrying are intricately linked: for example, if an initial assessment of the mood of a meeting is hostility to your proposal, this may lead to defensiveness in expectation of attack.

Putting the two dimensions together we posited four behavioural options with emphasis on behaviour resulting from what is Read and what is Carried. The four behavioural options are depicted in Figure 1, in the 2x2 model.

Where unskilled Reading meets lack of self-insight, the 'choice' is frequently ego defensive behaviour as a way of defending the self in situations that one cannot make sense of or feel good in. We called this option 'Inept'.

Where an integrated sense of self resulting from the experience of being either comfortable with one's capability or perception of being on familiar territory meet an unskilled Reading of the environment, the result is Innocent behaviour.

Where skilled Reading meets self-serving and defensive ego needs the resulting behaviour is likely to be controlling and manipulative. We called this Clever behaviour.

Where skilled Reading meets self-insight and willingness to put oneself at the edge of what is familiar, to risk new options because the situation calls for one's highest values to be exercised then the Wise option is chosen.

These four behaviour options of Wise, Clever, Inept and Innocent we elaborated with the images of Owl, Fox, Donkey and Sheep, as shown in Figure 1. These images can be helpful in making the behaviour options more accessible. Using a 2 x 2 model and using accessible images was both a good and a bad move. The model was easily remembered as the 2 x 2 and for the names – but often divorced from its origins the behaviours frequently get referred to as if they were personality types. The authors are frequently emailed to provide the 'questionnaire for diagnosing which animal people are' and have had many offers from trainers who wish to provide us with one that they have devised.

While such instruments could have some value, such as getting people interested in the model, they miss the main findings of our research, that in complex organisational settings, people need the ability to simultaneously understand the world 'out there' and their interior world, make sense of both and choose appropriate behaviour and that we all have the ability to act in all four ways. The strength of the model lies in understanding how each of us can be Wise one minute and Inept the next. The external world we need to Read is in constant flux and the interior world is equally variable and the interface between the two is crucial in making informed choice of action.

(Take in Figure 1 about here)

However, in order to deal skilfully and appropriately with the complexity of today's organisations, it is necessary to consider what needs to be Read and what needs to be managed in Carrying terms.

Reading and Carrying: a systems psychodynamic perspective

Developing the skills of Reading the situation and understanding what is being carried in a situation requires attention to a systemic perspective on organisational life and the unconscious forces at work. An appreciation of the dynamics of the organisation as a system, shifts the emphasis from individual deficit to an awareness of the system as a whole. We share the view of Neumann and Hirschhorn (1999) when discussing the contribution of psychodynamic and organisational theories to psychologically difficult organisational settings, that dynamic approaches often are contrasted with those approaches oriented towards observable and measurable behaviour. Increasing awareness through methods such as 360 degree feedback instruments has been found to be very helpful, and builds on the use of observable and measurable behaviour. However, we believe that being Wise in the difficult organisational settings of today requires a deeper understanding of the dynamics of the system, and thus a systems psychodynamic approach adds to the awareness of what is there to be Read and what may be being carried at a deep, unconscious level.

The work that has been done on leadership from a systems psychodynamic perspective provides a totally different frame of reference for leaders. They acquire a

leadership map that includes the idea that leadership roles are taken up in a context that exerts influence on the leader just as much as they influence the context. An understanding of leadership behaviour as emerging from the interaction of the individual personal characteristics of the leader, the group and the organisation dynamics that he or she enters into on taking up a leadership role can help managers develop a more fine-grained approach to intervening in their organisations.

The ability to be Wise in a difficult situation involves Reading not just the accessible aspects of the situation, be it the context of the organisation or the accessible aspects of the world within the organisation, it requires the ability to Read the inaccessible and hidden aspects of organisational life. As Neumann and Hirschorn (1999) point out 'sources of energy and motivation frequently are inaccessible to the conscious mind of those people involved even though behaviour and emotions are being affected'. As Armstrong (2000) outlined, emotion in and of the system can be seen as a disturbance, something that needs to be contained or managed, or it can be viewed as a source of intelligence to be understood and put to use.

Unconscious emotionality present in the organisational system is not easily accessible because it is a primitive emotional terrain that humans largely feel uncomfortable with and so deal with in ways that prevent us from having to consciously pay attention to. It is based on early developmental issues that are evoked when we engage with others in groups and organisations and relate to our life long journey of individuation, dealing with needs for belonging and acceptance rather than isolation and rejection our desire for space to be ourselves rather than conformity at the expense of self. Anxiety about survival and the role of powerful figures who can withhold or give

what we need in infancy and the family are also present when we become members of organisations as adults. Klein and Bion developed key theories that underpin this work (for example, see Klein, 1959 and Bion, 1961). These undercurrents of envy, competition and rivalry, ambition, aggression and most crucially fear and anxiety are those that drive rational plans and strategies onto underwater hidden rocks. The differences in power and authority between organisation members can evoke primitive authority relations. This can happen between people and their direct line manager or in relation to distant leaders, for example, senior directors with whom there is infrequent personal contact. The primitive anxiety surrounding survival can be experienced in times of re-organisation, mergers, or when promotion and pay are at issue. Competition for recognition and attention from the boss in teams or project groups can evoke sibling rivalry and challenges that carry responsibility and risk, such as customer demands, regulatory inspections and managing change, can give rise to emotional turmoil.

However, to do business and have conversations by the coffee machine we have to prevent all the emotion generated by joining in a social system from overwhelming us. We do this by using defenses such as keeping away from consciousness an emotion such as rage that threatens to be overwhelming ('I never feel angry; except when I very occasionally surprise everyone by losing my temper'). There are also social defenses that are collectively shared ways of containing or preventing emotion overwhelming the system: 'we blame our problems on the accountants/IT people/ the management; if only they were as good as us'. These defenses can get enshrined in structures and practices that enable people to find ways of making working with others psychologically possible, feel less risky and even be enjoyable. The original

studies of social defenses were conducted by Menzies Lyth (see for example, Menzies Lyth, 1970, 1988) and the ways in which anxiety and containment of anxiety play a part is well described by Krantz (1998).

Leaders who don't understand the notion of 'emotional turmoil' and are not able to read this aspect well and work with it, will act in ways that are at best innocent and at worst inept. The task of the leader is to change things and move the organisation forward, and Neumann (1999) highlights the difficulties inherent in the process of organisational change. By bringing about change, the leader is automatically disrupting existing arrangements for emotional peace and as an authority figure is a legitimate emotional target for the ensuing emotions. As leadership is required from more managers, more people have the freedom to make more decisions, use initiative and operate within the organisation's overall strategic vision, rather than do prescribed tasks. This may be a double-edged sword. On the one hand it offers interest, a sense of personal power, excitement and the possibility of a more satisfying working life. On the other hand it means that the individual must utilise their inner sense of inner authority to guide their decisions and choices. The internal authority carried in a situation has all the power of the past, bringing with it learned models from early experiences with authority, such as with parents and teachers. Leaders exercise their inner authority and need to be aware of this aspect of what they carry within them, as Hirschhorn (1997) outlines in his work on leadership in post-modern organisations.

Leaders are also authority figures for others. They are thus invested with others' imagined and projected power and authority, beyond that which goes with their

position. Others will often wish for leaders to wield extraordinary power and thus be capable of making all well in the organisational world. At the same time, there is a hatred of this idea of the power of the leader and so relationships with others when in a leadership role are not straightforward. Leaders disappoint because they can be seen to be fallible and real rather than idealised and distant. Yet leaders need confidence in their capacity to contribute. In relying on their personal authority they must bring more of themselves into the workplace, their ideas, feelings and values. In taking up leadership roles people are thus more personally exposed and vulnerable, as Hirschhorn (1997) has argued. This indeed requires leaders to be psychologically resourceful and to carry a robust and integrated sense of self into their role.

Heifetz and Laurie (1997) capture the essence of the Wise leader who works effectively at their role in the emotional life of the organisation. In their conceptualisation of the leadership role, leaders' capabilities include: identifying adaptive challenges; regulating distress (creating a holding environment, a place for processing thoughts, clarifying assumptions); stopping old initiatives in order to enable new ones; being responsible for direction, protection, orientation, managing conflict and shaping norms; having the emotional capacity to tolerate uncertainty, frustration and pain without getting too anxious him/herself; communicating confidence; counteracting distractions such as scape-goating, projections of negative emotion into other groups that prevent people from getting on with their work; developing collective self confidence; giving voice to all people- whistle blowers, deviants, and creative original voices, normally routinely suppressed. They view leadership as learning rather than having a vision and selling it to people.

There many aspects of what is Carried in a situation that are not accessible. It is helpful to increase awareness of how early authority experiences have impacted on current views of the leadership role and how messages from early life can influence which psychological roles are taken up on behalf of a group, such as being the person arriving to save the day. A lack of awareness of these elements and difficulty in managing them will increase the likelihood of Inept or Clever behaviour.

Wise behaviour is more likely if, in taking up a leadership role, a manager pays attention to what is Read and Carried, bringing to consciousness emotionality of the organisation experience not usually attended to or valued as useful intelligence.

Developing leadership capacity in Reading and Carrying in depth: a case study in introducing systems psychodynamics

As Brown and Starkey (2000) point out in their discussion of the Wise organisation, ‘wisdom is associated with an ability to perceive the broader picture and ‘the connectedness of things’’. Perceiving the connectedness of things that exist beneath the surface is a particular challenge. Creating the conditions for learning about organisation dynamics is difficult; the emotion and emotionality to be studied is largely unconscious. Primitive emotion is actively defended against and perceived as destructive and unwanted, a disturbance, not a source of intelligence, to use Armstrong’s (2000) dichotomy. This does not make it an easy aspect to cover in a leadership development programme.

Creating the learning environment

Executive development is often perceived as a retreat from the harshness of day to day organisational life and 'learning should be fun' has become a by-word in many management development circles, not least because repeat business more frequently relies on 'happy sheets' rather than extensive evaluation of learning and application.

Little of the other work they do with provider institutions such as Business Schools prepares them for the depth of feelings they can be confronted with in experiential work designed to explore these dynamics, nor will the other work support them in making sense of the experience. Much of the other management development activity they will engage in will provide much more definitive answers to their questions and will contain more knowledge sharing and less reflection. Most people attending a university Business School programme expect intellectual challenge, and are not expecting the emotional challenge that working with the deeper unconscious aspects of the organisational system can bring. There is thus an emotional component to this type of learning.

James, Jarrett and Neumann (1998) provide an exploration of the issues involved in introducing Group Relations Events to explore unconscious organisational dynamics for executive MBA students. The case study they outlined identified the difficulty of working in a very different way with the students and some of the issues involved in learning about emotion in organisational systems.

There is also the dynamics of the organisational system of the provider institution to take into account. In the case of the programme we are describing, the history of this

type of work within the provider institution played a major role. Within an organisation that prides itself on research led executive development the emphasis is on cognitive challenge and taking a step away from the norms of the organisation carries a certain risk.

The history of the programme is also important. In this instance, there has been a wish on the part of the client companies to include the emotional aspects of the leadership role. In the early days of the programme the focus was on deeper understanding of the individual leader, but gradually awareness has grown of the importance of the systemic perspective on organisations. It is now clearly stated as an objective of the programme that participants need a deep appreciation of how organisations work.

When introducing systems psychodynamics, the tutor team play a key authority role and are thus part of the system in which learning opportunities are offered. This needs to be borne in mind when planning and delivering a programme that invites reflection on the deeper aspects of organisational life and the leadership role.

Taking up a leadership role means figuring out and specifying how the part of the organisation the leader is responsible for relates to the main task of the organisation. Specifying what the contribution is to that task requires the leader to bring together the people needed to do it and in so doing the leader then needs to address how to manage the relationships thus created so that people can get on with the task rather than be diverted by the emotionality of the situation and organisation dynamics surrounding the task. The leader therefore creates a safe enough space for the team or

department to get on with the task. That mirrors the role of the tutor team on the programme, needing to create a safe enough space to enable the participants to get on with the task of deepening understanding of what needs to be Read and how to manage what is Carried to enhance wise choices, without being distracted by the emotions surrounding this task. Winnicott (1965) described this as a ‘holding environment’.

All these aspects needed to be taken into account as we developed a module to introduce and explore the inaccessible and less obvious aspects of organisational life. We were concerned to find a way of using the notion of the skill of Reading and Carrying as a bridge to increasing understanding of the deeper psychodynamic aspects of the leadership role.

The Learning Design

The LDP (not the name by which clients know it) is a consortium programme run three times a year for a group of member organisations that nominate up to four participants per programme. The participants are normally middle- to senior managers, with an average age around mid to late thirties. The organisations represented cover a wide range of sectors, including financial services, the public sector, IT and manufacturing.

The programme consists of two five day modules and a final follow-up day. The course is aimed at developing leadership potential. The first module is a mixture of inputs around strategic management, economic analysis and organisational culture. Leadership is discussed in terms of a requirement for senior executives and

participants have the opportunity for short individual development discussions with a leading faculty member around information based on psychometric instruments. Here the focus is on observable and measurable behaviour. After an interval of approximately two months, the participants return for the second module.

The second module is where we turn attention to the less accessible aspects of organisational life, both in terms of what needs to be Read and what might be being Carried. For this module three tutors work as a team. This is in contrast to the first module, which is tutored on a lecture-by-lecture basis. Having a constant team throughout the week is an important part of the design. Not only does it add to the safety provided to explore difficult issues, but also, by being with the participants tutors pick up data that may be relevant for understanding what is brought to the experiential work. The experiences of the tutors as part of the system are a rich source of intelligence about the dynamics of the learning organisation created for the week.

There is a banner headline for the week, which is displayed in the lecture room and is introduced at the start of the module. The banner is 'becoming the successful leader I want to be'. At first sight this may appear to hark back to the notion of leadership as purely an individualistic activity. We want, however, at the early stage of the module to achieve three things: engage the participants with the programme; emphasise the centrality of choice in taking up a leadership role; ease gently into the deeper aspects and the systems psychodynamics model. We are aware of a possible contradiction in using such a banner in a module designed to introduce the collective, hidden and unconscious aspects of organisational life, but we want to acknowledge each participant as an actor from, and returning to, their own organisational system and

therefore our aim is to develop awareness within each participant about the emotionality of organisations. We are also keen to move explicitly away from the deficit model of development and to emphasise choice.

The style of the second module is more reflective than the first. As Brown and Starkey (2000) point out, ‘critical self-reflexivity fosters alternative perspectives of self’. Whereas the first module tends to have a structure which is self evident to the participants and is characterised by a number of frameworks which have immediate appeal at the cognitive level, this second module does not have the same apparent structure, but has a declared objective of assisting the participants in looking “underneath the surface” of individuals and organisations.

The experience of the week offers an opportunity to process experience as well as some theory, some experiential work to ground the theory and some reflection time for participants to see how the experience of the week, including the opportunity to process the experiential work, is a parallel of their working environment.

Moving participants from a learning mode in week one that comprises mainly lecture inputs and case studies to a reflective process is difficult. However, we have found the image of ‘above and underneath the surface’ to be one that managers can identify with and that provides a helpful start to the week. An OHP depicting water, with jutting rocks captures their imagination and most volunteer that organisational life requires navigating these types of waters. Thus oriented to the nature of the week we map the focus for each day and introduce the Reading and Carrying framework.

Participants then work on a scenario they have been asked to bring with them of a current issue they are dealing with. They work in small groups, including a tutor, using the Reading/ Carrying framework. They are encouraged to ask each other questions and look for evidence in people's behaviour and organisational patterns that might support their analyses (we do not want 'underneath the surface' to be interpreted as an opportunity for wild surmising).

The following day explicitly focuses on exploring what each person is Carrying. Participants explore personal models of leadership and authority and how these mental models impact on how they take up their roles as leaders. Participants are encouraged to explore different beliefs about taking up leadership roles that they have learned from past authority figures and how these may influence their assumptions about leadership and the choices they make in their leadership role. This is achieved by a series of exercises that invite reflection on current and past experience. By the end of the day participants can begin to see how they shape their leadership but also what projections they might attract from others, their predilection for identification with some projections and the valence they have for some psychological roles in groups.

The third day focuses more explicitly on Reading organisational dynamics. This begins with telling a story reported in James and Arroba (1999, p 67) that vividly demonstrates how some group experiences can be understood from a systems perspective. It shows how the emotional tone of the group needs to be read to make sense of the behaviour observed. Participants discuss and report their analysis of the

story and relate it to their organisation challenges. They are then introduced to some theoretical concepts that will help develop their Reading skills.

We anchor these theoretical concepts through (anonymous) examples of management teams/individuals and organisations to which we have consulted, rather than to extensive psychoanalytical theory. We do aim to give them enough theory for the sceptics to see that we did not dream this up when the programme was designed, for them to have some useful ideas to assist in their Reading of their collective behaviour in the experiential exercise that follows, but not to overwhelm them with a '101 in psychoanalysis'. This is difficult at two levels: the danger is that manager participants do appear to believe that in an hour and a half they should have covered 'all the existing theory'-that indeed it is the tutor's job to have summarised everything they need to know on the topic; the beginnings of the resistance to learning about these issues is emerging. The managers are given indicative material to take away should they wish to follow this up (for example, from Kets de Vries et al, 1991, Obholzer and Roberts, 1994, Hirschhorn, 1997, Gabriel, 1999).

We then offer an inter group exercise. The exercise is designed to look like a business simulation but in fact virtually no information is given about the organisation beyond its name and the sector it operates in. We provide a list of roles in the organisation and participants choose who will undertake which roles. Three groups are established, a Board, a staff representatives group and a group of middle managers. The tutor team carry out a number of roles, acting as shareholder, journalists or customers and thus are explicitly part of the system studied. The format is flexible and the team takes decisions as to how to intervene and in what way as the exercise unfolds. There is a

finishing time given and then attention is turned to processing the experience. Work on the first two days of the week has alerted participants to the area of unconscious and hidden aspects of organisational life. On the third day they are challenged by being placed in an exercise that effectively involves them in creating and dealing with the dynamics of their own organisation. Despite the shortness of the event, about three hours experiential work, there is a wealth of data about the emotional life of the system available.

The Tutors' Roles

During the week the tutors take up many roles. In the early part of the week the tutors play roles that will be familiar to the participants, such as providing inputs and facilitating discussions. During the intergroup exercise the role of the tutors becomes more complex. The tutors are not there, contrary to the hopes and expectations of many of the participants, to provide feedback as to how well or not the exercise was undertaken. Instead, the tutors carefully observe the behaviour of the participants in the intergroup exercise and themselves attempt to Read what might be going on, in terms of the dynamics in the system. Since these can never be known precisely, the tutors then offer their hypotheses about the dynamics in the system, as they saw them, as part of the processing of the exercise. Participants are invited to explore the dynamics of the small groups of which they were a part, and of the whole organisational system. Tutors join with the participants in an exploration of what might be going on, rather than engaging in the more normal feedback process that accompanies a business simulation. The aim is for participants to gain insight into the dynamics of an organisational system and develop their capacity for making sense of the beneath the surface aspect of organisational life, rather than evaluate how good the

organisation they created was. The unfamiliar role the tutors take up at this point is often criticised as it does not fit with participants' expectations of feedback and facilitation. Frustration is often expressed because the tutors are seen to be withholding information. As leaders of the exercise they are often attributed with complete knowledge. It can be an element of safety that at least, surely, the tutors know exactly what is happening. When the tutors share a hypothesis as opposed to giving feedback, this is viewed sometimes as a hostile act on their part. Being able to recognise that Reading organisational dynamics is a difficult and not exact science and living with the ambiguity and uncertainty of that, is part of the learning. However, it is important the tutors stick to this role if participants are to be supported in exploring difficult and unexpected emotional experiences during the exercise and not retreat to more familiar territory.

We offer two examples of this exercise in action taken from two different groups of participants and some conclusions that were drawn.

Example 1: Choosing an unlikely participant as Managing Director

The process of allocating the twelve participants on one particular programme was conducted extremely rapidly. Four of the dominant male personalities made it clear that they wanted to work together and made a strong bid to form the staff representatives group. No one from the remaining eight participants chose to challenge this and the membership of the Board and middle management groups emerged with little discussion.

The Board group elected the only woman amongst the twelve as the Managing Director. As the inter-group experience unfolded, it became clear that she was only able to operate if the staff group gave her permission. The middle management group was ineffectual and was largely bypassed by the Board in involvement in the development of the agreed action plan.

This experience provided the basis for discussion about the roles of women managers in the organisations represented on the programme as a whole. It also provided the opportunity to discuss the issue of conflict avoidance on management development programmes.

The exercise provides the possibility of conflict between the three groups and, indeed, within the groups. In the majority of cases, this conflict is contained or avoided by the group of participants. The dominant staff representative group contained four possible candidates for the position of managing director. A hypothesis for discussion offered by the tutors to explain why they had not chosen to form the Board was that they did not want to compete amongst themselves, preferring rather to control the exercise by giving permission to the “token” managing director.

Example 2: Middle Management – the default group

The role allocation process in this inter-group exercise was somewhat different to that described above. In this case, there were a number of people who quite clearly wanted to take the lead and elected themselves to the Board, again with little challenge from the remainder of the participants. Others wanted to experience “being on the other side of the table” from their normal roles in management and quickly

formed the staff representative group. The middle management group in this case was formed from the group of people who were left behind, and this selection experience was carried through into the rest of the exercise as the middle management group struggled to find an identity or a role within this organisation.

This experience provided the basis for discussion about the need to take up roles within the organisation rather than allow these roles to be defined by other groups or individuals. It also allowed for discussion of the role of the tutors as authority figures in the exercise. The middle management group complained that tutors had not given them enough to learn from and not enough to do. It was the tutors' fault for not setting up the exercise correctly. They were willing to give feedback to the tutors (and indeed did so extensively on their reports back into their organisations) on how to do this better. The exploration of their dependence on the tutors and the opportunity the exercise offered them for exploration how easy it is to be 'empowered' or 'dis-empowered' was hard for some members; one remained convinced to the end that it was the tutors role to give him tasks to do in the exercise, whilst others saw the picture differently.

Pulling the learning together

It is in the process of reflecting on the exercise that we encounter most resistance to learning about emotions and emotionality. Frequently there is denial of what occurred, a wish to allocate blame if the experience was uncomfortable, resentment at the tutor team, and a resistance to acknowledging the anxiety present in the system. The focus of the exercise is on Reading skills in relation to the inter group dynamics and awareness of what individuals were Carrying that impacted on how they took up a

role both as 'organisation' member and learner, and how this relates to their 'preferred organisation roles'. The processing session does highlight the emotion involved in learning about emotionality in the system.

Considerable emotion is generated amongst the participants by the intergroup exercise and requires further debriefing the following day. At this point the debrief is allowed to flow between Reading the dynamics of the organisation as a system created in the intergroup exercise and a personal exploration of what was being Carried into, during of and out of the exercise in terms of personal feelings, thoughts and experiences. Through this reflective process we emphasise the importance of processing the experience and explore the idea of making space for processing workplace experience back in the host organisations. We also draw parallels with how we as a tutor team work with their emotional experience as programme participants to how they can assist their staff to process and make sense of difficult workplace experiences. We also include the role that leaders play in stress management, using a systemic perspective rather than a view that pathologises individual stress. We turn the focus to the interaction between what is Read and what is Carried. In particular this involves reflection on how they take up their leadership roles in their current organisations: what are they personally bringing to the role and what the wider organisational influences may be. This stage of the module is about taking the notion of unconscious and organisation dynamics back into the workplace and away from the here and now events of the programme so the afternoon is spent in small groups in which participants have an opportunity to explore their leadership roles in depth.

The final day of the module attempts to pull the learning together sufficiently for participants to re-enter their workplace the following week with enough sense making for them to operate effectively while keeping the door to learning ajar. Work on careers frames the morning's work. This consistently rates highly in enabling them to link the 'underneath the surface' ideas of the week to a sense of where they are going and to use them in their lives.

The tutors eschew the use of a linear, bullet point action plan for this programme. The week requires a vehicle which is more compatible with the notion of the unconscious mind and which will anchor them to the musings, reflections and dreams they have uncovered as the week progressed. So participants are provided with the means, including magazines, newspapers, paints and pens and nice picture frame, for making a collage that captures what the week has meant to them. They are encouraged to take this away to keep on their desk at work.

Thus the Reading/Carrying framework linked to a systems psychodynamic perspective using cognitive, reflective and experiential sessions, provides a leadership development opportunity encompassing an understanding of emotion, both in the leadership role and in the process of learning for leadership.

Conclusions

Most participants seem to get something from the experience in the programme we have used as an example of introducing systems psychodynamics to a group of senior managers who are unfamiliar with the notion of the beneath the surface life of the

organisation. It does seem to provide some insight into the ways in which powerful emotions impact on 'becoming the successful leader I want to be'.

The feedback to the consortium partners varies from 'this was mind blowing and so relevant' to 'could have been faster and 'not sure this is relevant'. The LDP partners who commission the programme often see this week as the key developmental week for the participants, even though it is the first week with its emphasis on the 'hard stuff' that is the hook for most of the participants. We believe the Reading/Carrying model offers a useful developmental framework for exploring the interaction between the personal and organisational dynamics of the leadership role and developing Wise behaviour as a leader. The tutor role during the programme is varied; lecturer, facilitator, consultant, coach and requires us to be vigilant about our role and the learning methodology for each section of the programme.

The experiential work does not offer the tried and tested, in depth learning opportunity that people have on traditional Group Relations programmes. We have tried to develop an executive development week which includes some experiential work in a format that does not raise so many defenses against learning that the whole concept of unconscious dynamics are rejected. The use of the Reading and Carrying framework as a vehicle for bridging participants' expectations that leadership programme will help them sort out their personal deficits as leaders to the difficulties of studying group and organisational dynamics could be rightly criticised as too simplistic. The artificial divide into what is Carried and what is Read and the interrelatedness of the two skills is clearly problematic if one is intent on providing a tight explanatory model. However, it does provide a visual picture onto which hard to

spot and study dynamics can temporarily be hooked; long enough perhaps for managers to engage with us and reflect on their relevance to their own organisations.

This learning is much more difficult for participants than the facilitative and personal approach taken on many management development programmes. Purely intra personal and interpersonal approaches to understanding leadership are often more appealing and the certainty provided by methods such as 360 feedback can be perceived as more exact and prescriptive, perhaps comforting in this respect even when the news is bad. The pain of discovering one's deficits appears to be acceptable in development activity but experiencing the primitive emotions operating in groups and organisations is more difficult to tolerate and a bridge to this experience needs to be created. We believe the Reading/ Carrying model provides such a bridge and leads the way for leaders to understand emotion and emotionality in organisations.

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Figure 1: The Reading and Carrying model

