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Experiencing uncertainty – on the potential of groups and a group analytic approach for making management education more critical.

Abstract

This article points to the potential of methods derived from group analytic practice for making management education more critical. It draws on the experience of running a professional doctorate for more experienced managers in a university in the UK over a 16 year period. Group analysis is informed by the highly social theories of S.H. Foulkes and draws heavily on psychoanalytic theory as well as sociology. First and foremost, though, it places our interdependence at the heart of the process of inquiry, and suggests that the most potent place for learning about groups, where we spend most of our lives, is in a group. The article prioritises three areas of management practice for which group analytic methods, as adapted for research environment, are most helpful: coping with uncertainty and the feelings of anxiety which this often arouses; thinking about leadership as a relational and negotiated activity, and encouraging reflexivity in managers. The article also points to some of the differences between the idea of the learning community and psychodynamic perspectives more generally and the limitations of group analytic methods in particular, which may pathologise resistance in the workplace.

Key words: uncertainty, groups, group analysis, SH Foulkes, critical management education, learning communities, reflexivity.

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Introduction

Human beings are born into groups and spend most of their waking hours participating in them. Groups thrive on the improvisational, and sometimes unpredictable responsiveness of human bodies caught up in the flow of continuous communication with each other. They can be exciting and stimulating places to be, but are also potentially unsettling: perhaps precisely because they are sites of the novel and spontaneous, with the potential for both sustaining and changing our identities.

This article links these unsettled feeling states to the experience of uncertainty, which is an everyday phenomenon in contemporary organisational life and explores how we might better prepare managers for dealing with it. In doing so it argues for the radical potential of groups to encourage learning. The article explores the contribution methods drawn from group analytic psychotherapy can make to educating managers to be more critical of the ideas which may be presented unproblematically at work, or in the business school. The article will re-explain some of the principles of group analytic theory but will then use a practical example, a professional doctorate at the University of Hertfordshire, which has been running for 16 years, to demonstrate how these principles are taken up to support the workings of a critical research community. The professional doctorate at Hertfordshire Business School, the Doctor of Management (DMan) was founded with an informal

agreement with the Institute of Group Analysis (IGA), and was a forum for the practical development of insights derived from the complexity sciences (Stacey, 2001). The article explains how group therapeutic methods are particularly relevant to the study of managerial practice and the production of knowledge from practice, for practice (Thomas, 2010; Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011) in ways which diversify and make critical, management education (Grey, 2004).

Focusing on the group may be particularly important as conventional methods of management often privilege the individual as the primary unit of management, assessment, development, and control. Particularly in more managerial regimes, performance measures are largely based on individual targets, which can sometimes work against any assumption of interdependence and ensemble performance. Additionally, in organisations there is an increased bias against being unsettled, and against unplanned, potentially unpredictable human exchange, despite an often paradoxical injunction to be creative and innovative.

There is insufficient space in this article to explore the reasons for the privileging of individuals at the expense of the group and for being wary of unplanned exchange, but they are coincidental with the amplification of individualising tendencies in the 20th and 21st Centuries (Elias, 1978, 1991) where cognitive theories predominate. The result of these trends is that it is a very rare event to attend a deliberative meeting at work with no particular end in view. There may also be a reduced understanding and ability to talk about how individual performance is directly constituted by the groups in which people participate. So this raises questions about what happens to the anxiety provoked by uncertainty, including the uncertainty of staying in relation with others in stressful times, and the strong

feelings which emerge at work, a subject still largely undiscussable in contemporary organisations, though it is explored in organisational literature (Fineman, 1993, 1997, 2003, 2006; Gilmore and Anderson, 2011; Salecl, 2004; Simpson and Marshall, 2010; Vince, 2010, 2014). To what degree are managers becoming deskilled in their abilities to participate in groups and does this lead to feelings of isolation and atomisation?

The structure of this paper proceeds as follows. I contextualise the contribution that group analysis offers to management education by exploring briefly the work of other scholars who have written about the important yet relatively neglected role of paying attention to working in groups. In doing so I try to work with distinctions between learning communities (Heron, 1974; Pedler, 1981), critical, participative and experiential learning which often refers to the idea of learning communities (Perriton, 2007; Reynolds & Trehan 2003; Reynolds, 2009), the psychodynamic literature concerned with organisations (Hirschhorn, 1988, 1997; Gabriel, 1991, 1995, 1998, 2009; Gabriel and Griffiths, 2001; Kets de Vries, 1980, 1991; Kets de Vries and Miller, 1985; Menzies-Lyth, 1990; Vince, 2010, 2011, 2014) and a group analytic perspective. I then go on to remind readers of the theoretical roots of group analysis, explain how it is taken up on the DMan and draw distinctions in practice between group analysis in an educational as opposed to a therapeutic context. In the discussion I return to the distinctions between learning communities and group analysis. I then highlight three areas of management education: coping with uncertainty and the anxiety which this often provokes, leadership and reflexivity, which I think group analytic methods particularly elucidate. This particular focus, and the distinctions between group analytic methods and the theory of the learning community, is part of the unique contribution that this article hopes to make to

scholarship. Finally, I set out some of the limitations of group analytic method as a resource for critical management educators.

Learning communities, psychodynamic and group analytic perspectives

Experiential methods in management education are considered helpful because they approximate the mess and ambiguity of everyday organisational life, and encourage critical reflection (Antonacopoulou, 2006, 2010; Cunliffe et al., 2002; Cunliffe and Easterby-Smith, 2004; Grey, 2004; Reynolds, 2009; Willmott, 1997). However, there are a variety of schools of thought in the traditions of management education which pay attention to groups and I now briefly try to differentiate them.

Designing learning communities – self-development, power, hierarchy

Kurt Lewin (1947, 1951) and Carl Rogers (1969) are both important progenitors of theories to promote learning for individuals and groups. indeed, Lewin influenced the founder of group analysis, SH Foulkes (see below). Rogers was an early advocate of person-centred learning which placed the individual and their needs at the centre of the learning experience, and particularly emphasised creating non-threatening learning environments. In a similar vein, Pedler (1981) argues that management educators have an obligation to design learning communities which are neither just educational nor therapeutic, but developmental. What he means by development is 'helping self and helping others via purposeful work in the world' (1981: 72). Management educators create the conditions for self-development on the basis of emphasising the value of community, encouraging open sharing, and encouraging comradeship; but the learning community is firstly predicated on self-development (Pedler

and Boydell, 1981). Tosey (1999) critically reviews John Heron's work at the University of Surrey, and argues that that learning communities need to steer between the twin poles of naïve humanism and the 'stark intellectualism of critical theory' (1999: 409). Many contributors to Pedler and Boydell's edited volume organise learning communities with explicit emancipatory intent informed by humanistic thinking, and in the spirit of Rogers. That is to say helping the individual realise their true potential, and with an ideal of more equal relations between educators and learners. This is not to say that creating such conditions is unproblematic.

Critical development of the idea of the 'learning community'

The idea of the learning community is then developed in the rich and diverse literature on critical reflective pedagogy, and scholars continue to contest how to develop a community of peers who question power relationships and draw on experiential learning (Boud et al., 1985). Each perspective is more or less explicit about its emancipatory intent and scholars are often concerned with what this means for the design and evaluation of a management programme. This literature is more often philosophical and sociological than psychodynamic. For example, Sambrook and Stewart (2008) discuss how to facilitate critical reflection on a DBA, which involves students keeping a learning journal and undertaking Brookfields' (1988) four reflexive exercises. Meanwhile, Ferreday et al. (2006) take up Judith Butler (1990), Bakhtin (1986) and Fairclough (2003) to understand how dialogue shapes identity in a group taking an MA supported by computer mediated communication. Reynolds and Trehan (2003) question the extent to which the idea of the learning community, which might privilege consensus and perpetuate existing power hierarchies, needs not to suppress 'the difference which makes a difference', and Reynolds (2009) argues that experiential learning has until

recently been under-theorised and over-psychologised. Rigg and Trehan (2008) discuss the difficulties which arise in a work-based management development programme involving clients, managers and educators where critical reflection on power relations can cause disruption in the workplace. This is a similar insight explored by Gilmore and Andersen (2012) in a professional standards context, and Boud et al., 2009. All of these examples privilege critical reflection for individual learners and the role which power and hierarchies interact with course design and evaluation. It puts the onus on educators to design curricula, which provoke critical reflection about power and politics.

Psychodynamic perspectives on learning – emotions, anxiety, the unconscious

Psychodynamic and psychoanalytic perspectives are concerned with the ways in which repressed ideas and desires inhibit mental functioning and may create perverse behaviour in organisations, including resistance to learning and change (Antonacopoulou and Gabriel, 2001; Armstrong, 1991, 2005; Hirschhorn, 1988, 1997; Gabriel, 1991, 1995, 1998, 2009; Gabriel and Griffiths, 2001; Kets de Vries, 1980, 1991; Kets de Vries and Miller, 1985; Menzies-Lyth, 1990; Vince, 2010, 2011, 2014).

As an example of psychoanalytic ideas in practice, the Tavistock Institute has a long history of organisational consultancy and learning drawing on Freud and Bion's (1961) heritage (Trist and Murray, 1990). Leicester Conferences have been run by the Tavistock Institute since 1957 and are large group events, lasting for two weeks, which attempt to study human interaction in real time and are joined by analysts and organizational consultants. Groups meet to undertake tasks set by the consultants and resistance to their authority may be interpreted as a defence against anxiety. One way of understanding the role of educators in

this case is to refuse to engage in a discussion of power and hierarchy, but to work with the anxiety that staying in relation with others in a group provokes. There is no commitment to creating non-threatening learning environments: quite the contrary.

The Tavistock tradition and psychodynamic perspectives more generally, often have no strong emancipatory intent for the group as whole. Indeed, Hinshelwood (2007) argues that the Tavistock tradition is imbued with Freud's suspicions of groups, and is informed by Bion's (1961) work at the Northfield Clinic during WWII, where the individual is assumed to be at war with himself and the group: the group tends towards oppression and is likely to provoke primitive responses in individuals, known in Bion's terms as 'basic assumptions'. Analysis takes place with the symptoms of the group understood as a whole with interpretations principally offered by Tavistock consultants, which can create the same dependent responses that consultants are there to alleviate according to Brown (2000). Healthy development in psychanalytic terms is considered to be a move towards more fully realising one's own individual autonomy.

Psychodynamic scholars take an interest in anxiety, emotions and the unconscious but this is not to imply that they are uninterested in power or wider social concerns. Among psychodynamic scholars, Vince has consistently linked emotions, power, politics, anxiety and management education together to consider, for example, use of space in management education (2011), or how learning groups might foster inaction (2008) as much as action. More generally in the psychodynamic literature, however, power may be deemphasised in favour of insights gained into the ways in which learning is inhibited by anxiety, emotion and the functioning of the unconscious for the individual.

Group Analytic perspectives in organisational literature

Group analytic methods are adduced by management scholars who have become group therapists, and group analysts who have found their way into organisational consultancy. As an example of the former, Nichol (1998) argues that a basic group analytic training and experiential groups (see below) are helpful in helping managers come to terms with emotions in the workplace and in the learning environment. As an example of the latter Wilke (2014) regards his task as one of organisational therapist and anthropologist focusing in particular on organisations facing the trauma of constant change. A similar focus is taken by Wilke's colleagues in a volume edited by Hopper (2012). In both volumes group analysis is offered as a palliative for the trauma experienced by individuals and groups in organizations. Although group analysts are often critical of the conditions which contribute to what they see as organisational trauma, their interventions are often aimed at helping groups better to cope with the circumstances in which they find themselves: they are not necessarily critical of managerialism per se. Where psychoanalytic insights can depathologise anxiety and conflict, there may also be a tendency to psychologise legitimate workplace resistance and subversion, which links with the concerns of adherents of the learning community.

I now consider group analytic ideas in more depth

Group analysis – theoretical underpinnings

Group analysis was developed in the UK by SH Foulkes, a German Jewish refugee from Nazi Germany, and was an attempt better to understand what happens to human beings in groups. As a survivor of the tyrannical experience of groups at their worst, his life project

became to develop more productive ways of working with our interdependencies. Influenced principally and primarily by Freud and psychoanalysis (Foulkes, 1990: 22), Foulkes was also informed by the Frankfurt school of sociology, Gestalt therapy (Perls et al., 1952), Kurt Lewin's field theory (1951) the neurobiology of Kurt Goldstein (1939) and a lifelong (but problematic) friendship with the sociologist Norbert Elias (1991, 2000). According to Foulkes there are three strands of influence from this collection of progenitors. From Goldstein, and latterly from Elias, is the idea that whatever we take to be the 'whole', it is not reducible to studying the parts taken in isolation. The focus of attention, then, is on the forces of dynamic interaction where social life is never in equilibrium. The second theme of influence is of psychoanalysis itself, with its particular interest in the workings of the unconscious, and the defensiveness, conflicts and transference which takes place in groups. These manifest themselves as repetitive patterns in individual and group behaviour and often prevent human beings from understanding one another, and themselves. And the third, following the Frankfurt school and the sociology of Elias, is sociological, that first and foremost human beings are members of groups: they are social through and through. Foulkes understood group psychotherapy as an interdisciplinary undertaking, and in combining psychiatry and sociology, contributes to an understanding of both the individual and the group (1990: 253). He held that mental life is an expression of biological, social, cultural and economic forces and thus tried to understand what he termed the 'whole situation' in the locus of the group.

So group analytic psychotherapy takes both individuals and the group as the primary objects of study and assumes that in any group of 8 to 10 people the whole of society is present. We are each of us and in our own way 'deviations from the norm' of the kinds of psychological strengths and disturbances that one could find in society at large. Foulkes' idea was that in

any analytic group these disturbances would cancel each other out. So the group, and not the therapist or conductor¹, should be used as the principle therapeutic resource. The object of study is the changing pattern of relationships between individual group members and their struggles over acceptance and rejection, inclusion and exclusion, recognition and misrecognition, which Foulkes considered took place in the network of interrelationships which he termed the 'matrix' (Foulkes, 1975). The task is to render these patterns more visible through communication, to make the unsayable sayable and to give voice to often hidden currents of relating which permeate a group. The idea is to achieve greater spontaneity and flexibility and for members to discover new ways of relating to others, and thus to themselves. The conductor's task is to pay attention to the here and now, but also to relationships in the past, which reflects membership of groups outside the current group. The primary working method is to make sense of what is going on through interpretation, and assumes that mental processes do not simply take place 'inside' a person's head, but are transpersonal phenomena. Understanding what is going on for one member of the group is likely to have significance for everyone present, and if brought to light, could help ease communication and understanding.

Group therapy takes place with participants sitting in a circle so that everyone is visible to everyone else so that there is nothing to screen off or distract one another. It proceeds on the basis of free-floating discussion: there is no set agenda, but rather participants are encouraged to discuss whatever comes to mind. In this way there is nowhere to get to, nor is the group preoccupied with problem-solving separate from finding their purpose. And then

¹ In group analysis the therapist is called the conductor to do justice to the idea that her role is to orchestrate and facilitate the most helpful way for members of the group to communicate.

in turn interpretations of what is happening become the subject of further interpretation as the conversation in the group takes on a life of its own. The focus is on both manifest and the unconscious content. Everyone in the group has the potential for gaining deeper insight into how they come across to others and are obliged to act and react in conditions of uncertainty. The encounter with otherness in a group means that the patterns of private dialogue, which we might term consciousness or mind, and which can often become stuck or repetitive, are challenged in a group context by others who have been socialised differently. An analogy that Foulkes uses (1957/83) is that the group is a hall of mirrors in which participants come to see themselves reflected, and in this sense come to understand themselves more as an object to themselves. I return to this idea in the discussion on reflexivity further below. In doing so they become more fully a social being by seeing themselves in and through the group.

In different situations group members are eased, sometimes jolted, out of their taken-for-granted interpretations of the world and their role in it, and are obliged to make different meaning of something which has caused them distress. Their understanding grows that the way they are in the world is tied to a whole nexus of relationships which have developed over time, by coming visible in the group therapeutic matrix. As the group continues and members learn to orient themselves more to taking the attitude of the group as a whole to themselves, they are likely to be less caught up in their own particular neuroses and anxieties. Visible and active engagement with others touches them in a more profound way than just appealing to intellect but arises because of the intense feelings provoked by staying in relation, and with the possibility that emerges of renarrating their story and making different sense of it. The work of everyone participating in the group is to make themselves better understood one to another, and to themselves, and finding that the boundaries of one's personality are much

more fluid than they had previously imagined. Learned defensiveness can translate into a better ability to cope with uncertainty and imperfection and the anxiety which often accompanies it.

Group analysis, then, assumes highly social beings who respond bodily to one another and influence each other in substantial ways in a group setting. The main currency of group therapy is communication, but this is taken to mean talk, absence of talk and the broad repertoire of human gestures. Group analysis aims to make group members more aware, better at noticing and more skilful in their interactions with others.

The professional doctorate programme: drawing on group analytic methods

The DMan programme at Hertfordshire Business School is run as research group, draws on the traditions of the IGA, and is in constant churn as researchers join and leave. Faculty members are the consistent members of the group. The requirement for completing the doctorate is to attend four four-day residential units a year every year, so 16 days' face-to-face study per annum. With an average student group size of 15 or 16, researchers are divided into smaller groups, called learning sets, each one of which is convened by a faculty member. The programme has all the conventional aspects of a research programme such as seminars, and opportunities for students to present their work, but it also draws on group analytic methods in particular ways. The residential setting allows for everyone to get to know each other in different contexts, at work and at leisure. Throughout the student's time on the programme during each residential weekend on 3 occasions the group sits in what the IGA would call a median experiential group. The term 'experiential group' is used in group analytic practice to distinguish a group run along group analytic lines but without the explicit

purpose of therapy, although there are often therapeutic outcomes. This article focuses on the experiential group, and below I discuss how the experiential group is distinguished from therapy.

As with a therapeutic group, the experiential group lasts for an hour and half with no task but to talk about what is and has been happening between group members. There is no agenda and no-one in charge of the group. This lack of an appointed individual conductor is a major difference from IGA-run groups. This is not to say that different members of the group, such as the faculty members, are not perceived to be greater authority figures than others. The group meets with no particular end in view except to talk about what group members have on their minds. In group analytic terms the principal aim is to take the experience of being together seriously, and to explore the different interpretations amongst participants of what they think is currently important for them and for the life of the group. In one of his later books on group psychotherapeutic method Foulkes (Foulkes and Anthony, 1957/83) discussed whether there is anything unique about a psychotherapeutic group, as opposed to any other group and he concluded that there was not. A therapeutic group is much more oriented towards transference, however, where the conductor is the object of transference experiences of group members, and for that reason is unlikely to disclose much of a personal nature. This is not the case in the experiential group on the professional doctorate: faculty members are as likely to disclose something about themselves as every other member of the group, particularly as during the weekend there are lots of opportunities for social interaction.

Topics of conversation are likely to include recent arrivals or departures, or themes which have emerged in the learning sets or during the weekend which have group-wide significance. Or there may be something going on for one of the researchers in their place of work which is affecting their involvement in the research community, and which they want to explore with others. There is no compulsion to develop a consensus of what becomes the subject matter, rather the intention is to draw out variety and difference and to notice the complexity of life's 'blooming, buzzing confusion' to quote William James (1911/1996: 50).

Unlike in a therapeutic setting where the focus is mostly on uncovering unconscious processes, in this group the idea is also to make links between the patterns of conversation which arise with similar experiences in the workplace. A typical example of how incidents in the group are used as the basis for reflection and links is when new students join the research community. Usually a disciplining process begins when new students speak into the group. Older members of the group, particularly if they are feeling threatened by a new arrival, may point out that this is not the way that 'we' talk about things in this community. Other members of the group may then draw attention to the jockeying for position and the assumption of a completed 'we'. Yet another member of the group might then make the link to organisational life where there is likely to be constant rivalry for status and and/or turn-taking. In other words, the emphasis is as much sociological, involving discussions of politics, as psychological where participants are encouraged to recognise patterns of anxiety as well as recognition and misrecognition (Honneth, 1996, 2012) inclusion and exclusion (Elias, 1994) and the negotiation of power which permeate organisations. There is an assumption, then, based in both group analytic thinking and process sociology (Elias, 1991, 1939/2000) that there are repeating patterns of behaviour and feeling states which arise in all group contexts

because we are social beings, but which play out differently in each context. Topics of conversation grow and fade during any one experiential meeting, or may last the whole weekend, or even several weekends in different manifestations if the subject under discussion is intractable. As in most organisations, themes may recur even though most of the participants in the group have changed which suggests some generalizable tendencies of behaviour which occur in groups and which have been the subject of both psychoanalytic, sociological and anthropological study.

This process of noticing, and talking about what is happening between participants is understood as paying attention to themes which are organising the experience of being together. This is the skill which we draw most attention to when encouraging students to think about the method they are using as researchers in organisations. In most organisations these themes are more often left unspoken, and the intention with the experiential group run in the tradition of group analysis is to practise speaking them out loud as a means of developing skill in doing so. It is also an exercise in reflection and reflexivity, of noticing oneself and one's reactions and bringing this in relation to what is happening for others. I mentioned before that the experiential group does not have therapy as its principal aim, but nonetheless it sometimes has therapeutic outcomes. For example, researchers who may not start out self-aware about how they are experienced by others become more so with time and develop a maturity in noticing patterns of behaviour, both their own and other people's which are called out in the group. Participants are able to develop a greater reflexive ability over time: they become more practised at noticing their habitual ways of being in relation to others because they catch themselves and/or they have their habitual patterns pointed out to them by other members of the group.

Discussion: relating group analytic methods to themes in critical management education

There is a substantial discussion in the scholarly literature about how to make management education more critical (Antonacopolou, 2010; Ford et al., 2010; Grey, 2004; Statler, 2014). In this article I have drawn attention again to the potential for group analytic methods in achieving this, and for calling into question some of the taken for granted concepts that are taken up unproblematically in organisations. This may be a particularly important function for professional doctorate students studying part time. It may also enable managers better to access the resources of the group in problematizing their organizational predicaments. Firstly, though, I return to the discussion about the difference between the idea of a learning community and the offer of group analysis.

Learning communities, psychodynamics and group analysis – some differences

Differences between the learning community tradition, psychodynamic approaches and the group analytic tradition turn on the degree to which questions of power, emotions and the unconscious are considered, the degree of emancipatory intent on the part of the educators expressed in course design, and how far the group is viewed as an impediment to, or support for, individual flourishing.

I have argued that the concept of the learning community puts development of the individual first and foremost, then considers how a developed self can contribute to the group identity towards more egalitarian relationships. It proceeds with explicit emancipatory intent first for the individual, then the group. Critical development of these ideas discusses the extent to which the learning community may idealize groups thus preventing exploration of important

themes of power and difference. One of the central themes of the literature is on methods which educators might deploy to uncover power and politics.

Psychodynamic methods, meanwhile, inherit to a degree Freud's suspicion of groups, still privilege the individual over the group, and sometimes create dependencies between learners and educators to explore the phenomenon of leadership and anxiety.

In contrast, group analysis privileges the paradox of the individual in the group, and argues that, given the right facilitation, the group can be the individual participant's best therapist. Interpretations can also be offered by other group members, which leads to an implicit understanding of the democratising potential of group processes. The individual and the group are not considered to be naturally in opposition, but rather are two aspects of the same social phenomenon. Interpretations of the group as a whole are used sparingly and to identify emerging patterns of interaction, thus deemphasising the authority of the group facilitator, or conductor. The group discusses what participants consider of most importance to them and to the functioning of the group which may or may not include the question of power.

I began the paper by arguing that group analytic methods support the exploration of uncertainty, leadership and reflexivity, and continue the discussion below. In making claims for the helpfulness of experiential groups I do so acknowledging that enhancing students' ability is incremental, discontinuous and a long-term undertaking. An average student might spend at least 63 hours in an experiential group during their time on the programme, and in a whole variety of other groups on the programme which encourage reflection and discussion.

Experiencing organisational uncertainty

The experiential group run broadly along group analytic lines is a live experiment in coping with uncertainty. No one knows exactly what will emerge as a theme, not even members of faculty. For example, on one occasion a conflict between students in one of the smaller learning sets erupted into the very final plenary of the residential weekend with no opportunity to work it through before the end of the weekend. Neither the doctoral supervisor concerned, nor the faculty more generally, were prepared for this to happen and had to improvise and cope along with everyone else.

Uncertainty may be most keenly felt by new students who sometimes display anxiety at the 'lack of structure' of the meeting and may turn to the authority figures, the members of faculty, to take control of the meeting. It is a repeating pattern that some new members of the group may observe that we could be running the group much more 'efficiently and effectively' if we chose to, and that it takes a long time to 'get to the point'. Each of these observations allows for further inquiry into what we think it might mean to run a meeting 'effectively', what it means for a meeting to be structured and who decides on the 'point'. It permits an exploration of how all human communication is structured to the extent that people mostly take turns, respond to, or ignore what has just been said, recognise and misrecognise each other (Honneth, 1995), and are bound more or less by politeness (Holmes and Stubbe, 2015), relevance and the rules of English grammar.

It is participants' emotional response to what is happening in the group which is most directly connected with the experience of uncertainty and may be explained by Foulkes' concept of

resonance (1977: 298). The phenomenon which resonance seeks to explain is where areas of human experience held in common elicit both a particular and a general response in individuals and groups: in this respect it has the quality of a paradox (Mowles, 2015). For example, an active member of the research community left suddenly and without giving an adequate explanation of why he had done so, and had not negotiated his leaving directly with the group. The next community meeting (the first at the next residential) discussed his departure but it evoked different responses. Some expressed sadness and surprise, others pointed to details of behaviour of the person who left which they claimed gave an indication that the person meant to leave all along, others expressed relief.

In contemporary organizations there sometime appear to be few resources for people to cope with uncertainty, which may leave them open to feelings of isolation unable to access the resources of the wider group. There is also a dependent tendency in contemporary discourse to look for answers from a charismatic and visionary leader.

The experience of leadership

In the critical tradition there is now broad acceptance that whatever we mean by leadership, it is a situated, social, relational and dialogic practice (Alvesson and Spicer, 2012; Cunliffe and Eriksen, 2011; Ford and Harding, 2007; Shotter and Tsoukas, 2014). Sitting in an experiential group provides lived experience of the participative and social nature of leadership as it arises as an emergent pattern in a group. Each group member is able to act into a situation and leadership ebbs and flows across the participants. What distinguishes a mature experiential group is that a larger proportion of its members is capable of identifying and addressing themes of importance to the group and of giving expression to them. For

example, on one occasion during a pause, a more experienced researcher made an observation about what was going on, which provoked a response from another student that this was the kind of observation that a member of faculty would usually make. In these circumstances the role of faculty is simply to get out of the way: this is one of the characteristics of group analytic method which distinguishes it from the Tavistock tradition in terms of dependence upon the authority of group 'leader'. Foulkes argued that the term 'leader' had become overloaded with fascist connotations, and so the group conductor should refrain from 'leading'. From a Freudian perspective leadership has always been tied up with the myth of the father of the primal horde (Freud, 1921), and marks the transition from group to individual psychology. In psychoanalytic terms, healthy development is a movement from dependence to autonomy, freeing oneself from dependence on the group. In group analysis freedom is the realisation of interdependence,

There may be a struggle over who is leading group process, but because group analytic methods de-pathologise conflict this is understood by group members as being part of the process of negotiating leadership. It need not be resolved as it is increasingly in organisations, with appeals to authoritarian legitimacy or charisma, or by creating dependency on faculty members. When fantasies about leadership arise in the group we try gently to identify and puncture them together. This mitigates what might be considered some of the more infantilising tendencies of contemporary managerialist discourse where it is sometimes assumed that leaders and managers have some privileged insight into what matters to a group. The ethos of the group becomes more tolerant over time, even when people disclose their sometimes negative feelings towards other members of the group, which would not normally be tolerated in organisational settings. It's a training in paying attention to their role

in forming relationships with others and how the exercise of authority calls out strong emotions in people, which are part and parcel of the working with power and leadership in organisations.

The experience of reflexivity

A variety of scholars have explored practical ways of encouraging reflexivity amongst students of management, which might involve working with texts (Alvesson et al., 2008), encouraging undergraduates with limited experience with structured dialogue (Hibbert, 2012), or using drama with professionals in a health context (Pässilä et al., 2015). The experiential group of the research community brings everyone face to face with each other in real time to experience themselves in relation to others.

I explored above the ways in which group analytic theory understands the here-and-now encounter between participants in an experiential group. It enables mirroring, provides the opportunity for noticing repeated patterns of behaviour of individuals and the group as a whole, and it sometimes provokes transference. By transference I mean the way in which a current relationship evokes memories of a past relationship and thus may call out repeating patterns of behaviour. For example, one of my students had a problematic relationship with his father when he was a child, and found his father over-critical of his academic achievements. In our relationship his resistance to my suggestions was played out endlessly, especially in the experiential group and was something we began to talk about as a block to his learning. I mentioned that group members are also concerned to make links between what happens in the group and what can happen in organizations, the rivalries, disagreements, different interpretations of events, or strong feelings linked people leaving or

arriving. These points of organizational reference have the effect of deemphasising the therapeutic tenor of the group and points instead to the practice implications through reflection and reflexivity. Students are constantly prompted to think about the implications of what we are talking about for them and their practice, simply by participating in the group. The proof of the reflexive pudding is not necessarily the incidents which happen in the experiential group as such, but how the experience of participating in the group prompts greater self-awareness in relation to others, and contributes to the production of a reflexive thesis, which is the aim of coming on this particular professional doctorate. Students are required to demonstrate both a contribution to knowledge and to practice, and to describe how their practice has changed as a result of paying attention to it over a number of years. This requires enhanced reflexive ability.

Conclusions

This article has re-examined the potential of drawing on group analytic methods as a way of learning in the business school, as well as encouraging greater criticality amongst students and faculty alike. Group analytic methods privilege group experience, which is the majority working experience for the overwhelming majority of employees, despite the fact that we live in times when priority is given to the individual. Emphasising group process is yet another way of drawing attention to the importance of relationships and interdependencies, and in doing so it draws on a body of literature which has at its core the idea of the highly social self. I have given as an example the experience of a doctoral programme at Hertfordshire Business School, which takes up group analytic methods in a research context, and where students are working with ideas derived from the complexity sciences understood in social terms (Stacey et al., 2000). It does not do so in a strict therapeutic sense, but combines insights from group

analytic literature with broader intellectual traditions such as sociology, philosophy, social anthropology and organizational theory. On this programme, where students are encouraged to make a contribution to practice from their practice, the crucible of the experiential group offers important material for them to reflect on and make links with their everyday practice and become reflexive about it. They are also encouraged to notice how the experience of leadership arises as an emergent phenomenon in which they participate, and to take account of their direct experience of uncertainty and the feelings of anxiety which this is likely to provoke. The intention of working in this way with research students is to encourage greater skill at paying attention to oneself in relation to others, to depathologise conflict and anxiety, and to find a vocabulary for being able to talk about all of these things. The experiential group is a social method of drawing attention to the social. Where it differs from the idea of the learning community is that we, as faculty, spend very little time discussing what it means to be a community, we do not privilege emancipation, and we discourage potential students from joining if they emphasise self-development as their principal reason for coming. I am not denying that there is discussion of what it means to belong to the group, that people become to a degree emancipated, or that they do not develop themselves: these, however, are secondary concerns.

There are a number of limitations to the use of group analytic methods.

The first is that to make responsible use of experiential groups as I portray them here requires some degree of group analytic training on the part of some faculty members. On the faculty we have two fully trained group analysts, one who is partly trained, and two other very experienced members of staff. Secondly, the programme attracts an average proportion

of students who have experienced psychological distress. The experiential group can be a setting where this distress is reactivated, but is not the right place to offer treatment. The experiential group setting often seems to have therapeutic effects on students, however. Thirdly, sometimes enduring problems arise in the group which we can work through patiently because this is a research community which will continue together over a number of years, although the precise membership of the group is changing. Questions left unresolved can simply be taken up again next time we meet. Fourthly, there is a tendency in psychodynamic traditions to treat resistance as a defence against anxiety. In an organisational context resistance may also be a legitimate political response to managerial control: it is important not to over-psychologise politics. Lastly, the experiential group is a useful method for the kinds of students the programme attracts, more experienced managers who have a lot of practice to draw on, and for the kind of research they are doing, developing a contribution both to knowledge and practice. The intention is for them to become scholar-practitioners.

In general, though, methods derived from the group analytic tradition have a lot to offer business schools as they search for ways of helping students become reflexive about their practice and become critical about the theories which are widely offered as explanations of contemporary organizational life. They have the potential for creating more skilful managers who may be more insightful in groups and about groups, and who may have more resources for working against more general individualising tendencies which can produce feelings of atomisation and helplessness.

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