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Leadership development: ~~containment~~ enough

Jo Chaffer

Initiative for Leadership and Sustainability (IFLAS)

Thesis for Doctor of Philosophy

Lancaster University, UK

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This thesis is my own work and not published in any other place

I confirm I am happy for Lancaster University to store and provide access to this thesis in line with their data security, data protection and access policies

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Abstract

How can we do leadership better, for any place, for whatever we need leadership to do there?

In this thesis I propose that the ongoing ability to perceive, reflex on, choose and act to get safe-enough, problematized-enough to make confident-enough decisions on the leadership practice needed is a key practice to practise. This is doing ~~containment~~. Practising involves paying critical attention to place, practices, power, pace, position, performance, processes, purpose for our people (the Ps). It involves getting comfortable-enough sitting into discomfort. Practise, as explored in the Development section, necessitates seeking guides, resources, models and other 'stuff' and making critical agentic choices to purpose this 'for' doing development (of self, of others). *Enough* is key to this.

I draw on voices from multiple academic fields *and also* from other philosophical, cultural, practice-based ways of knowing, being and becoming, particularly the work of Nagarjuna. These voices form a notional community of consensus-enough with justification-enough to support the theory-in-use of ~~containment~~. This is explored in four studies: the first two studies with partner firms in Nepal to substantiate ~~containment~~-in-practice; the second two studies, in India and the UK, build the theory-in-use to a framework for interventions supporting leadership development. These studies initially followed a Constructivist Grounded Theory Methodology (CGTM) then moved towards a more post-qualitative approach to method.

~~Containment~~ is proposed within constructivist, situated knowledges and a Middle Way approach. As such the researcher's voice, position and socio-cultural place and those of the

Frontispiece

research participants are explored along with their influences on the inquiry, its development and impacts.

The thesis concludes with a call for a renaissance in criticality within groups, organisations and the public sphere, activated by leadership as a counter to the too-safe consensus that feels not-safe-enough. Attention to Place and to Practise is the key.

Jo Chaffer - bio



For the last decade plus, Jo has run a successful global portfolio of consultancy, development and research roles working across private, public and third sectors. With an in-depth knowledge of higher education (HE), she works with HEIs, HE agencies and Ministries internationally supporting and enabling leadership and organisational development, HE national strategy (knowledge exchange, research) and researcher professional development. She's a qualified and experienced coach, facilitator, trainer/Master Trainer specializing in group psycho-dynamics. Having lived and worked in South Asia for nearly a decade, Jo has an expertise in cultural bridging, bringing new perspectives and supporting collaboration, learning and partnership building across sectors and countries. Beyond the worlds of professional and organisational development Jo creates and leads trips for trekkers, climbers and cyclists in the Himalaya and other mountainous and wild places.

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Read me (a topo)

Imagine you are standing at the base of a massive, snowy mountain. The mountain is remote, mysterious, complex and dangerously magnificent.

You bring with you a lifetime of skills and experience on big mountains. And a lifetime of all the other stuff that shapes and makes us. You have chosen to reach this point. Now there are more choices to make.

Read the mountain, read the weather, read your physical and emotional self – use all of this and more to make a choice. Pick a line, take a route, go nowhere, go home. Seek out a way that is as yet completely unknown, invisible, uncertain; follow the ropes already fixed on the mountain; use a guide; be the guide; climb alone; climb with friends; not climb at all, just stay in your tent and chill ... and continue to make these decisions as the routes unfold.

What do you need to bring with you? What are you prepared to leave behind? What do you need to commit? What is safe enough and also challenging enough?

The invitation for you is to notice what you notice then pick a line through. Choose your route. The start and finish are clearly marked. How you get there (if you get there) is up to you.

1R

How to read this thesis – practical choices

If you're reading this in physical format, as an actual thing to hold and handle, you'll have already noticed that this is not your standard PhD single-volume bound thesis. If you are reading the digital version you will have noticed the folder contains multiple files (the sections) all labelled '2'. You may choose to read these in any order.

You could read them all, or just a few. If you are wearing an 'examiner' hat I would ask you to please read them all. Read in any order, if you are ready for that step into uncertainty. Or you may choose to follow the 'fixed lines' (see Figure RM1) and enjoy the ease of having the way mapped out for you, of following.

The 'fixed lines' are in effect to follow a traditional order of play of chapters to which the booklets roughly approximate to i.e. introduction, methodology, findings etc.

These are signposted, the route way-marked.

Different voices – where and how

I have brought in both voices from academia and other realms to support, explore and challenge some of the core themes and arguments presented. Many are from outside the Western sphere, some are verbal, some in different media. I have tried to hold in my attention the various 'academic codes that decide' (Tuck & Yang, 2014) what and whose stories are told, to hold these

'codes' up to scrutiny and not be bound by them: tried to refute the linguistic hierarchy. Thus, whilst I have read and critically reflected upon many academic research papers, I have tried to give the voices in these papers no more importance than written words from other (non-academic) sources. I have included voices sourced from spoken words (from conversations). I have also included voices that were not voices at all, but ideas, knowledge and ways of being sourced from non-verbal sources. This rich variety of voices has all informed the development of the research process; the inquiry itself; and the evolution of understanding and practice into something different (and potentially useful). I have aimed to treat all these voices and be critically attentive to the power held in their medium of expression. I do, however, accept there may be a material difference between written, spoken and non-verbal sources. Following constructivism on a journey towards the 'posts', if we are constructing the world around us as we experience it (creating materiality), and then attempting to express this then does the expression itself become a material reality, a thing, and the medium of expression part of this 'thingness'?¹ Buddhists may offer that this is a false binary and the imperative has always been to collapse the binaries into one another.

References and links are attached to each section for ease of access, to enable the reader to follow up on specific points of interest. There is also a full Bibliography for the entire thesis.

How to read this thesis – critical choices

This thesis is presented to you both as a narrative inquiry into doing leadership development and also as a provocation, to choose to inquire into, and perhaps even do, some development of yourself in your own leadership as you make active choices about how, what, when and with what intentionality to read.

2R

As with seeking to do leadership better, I ask you to remain as curious, committed and critical as you are able as you choose your lines through. Notice where you start: your tiredness and also energy; what you are holding on to and also ready to loosen slightly; what may be holding you down and also what may be holding you steady enough. And as you move through each pitch keep noticing what changes, what shifts, what gets stuck and what frees up in your emotional-intellectual-wholehearted state – what choices you are explicitly and implicitly making in the dance with the text on the page. It's an invitation to an *and/both* position-process of both critical reading of the words and ideas held within; and a critical perception of yourself in interplay with the words.

I have endeavoured to write as clearly and succinctly as possible to aid critical reading and also offer prompts to keep questioning what might be happening during the 'doing of the reading', during *your* construction of (a) narrative. Such prompts to question, to make/break sense are sourced in reflections on relevant perspectives from around the world.

Text in *purple italics* are my reflexions on the reflections, ideas and journey within and of the PhD. Text underlain by pale *blue background* are the words of others reported at length. In the Case Studies I have used *green italics* to highlight the voice of the key participant, Lisa.

¹ (after St Pierre, 2013, p.651 questioning "Do we collapse language into materiality? Has it always already been collapsed in materiality?")

There is a map (Figure RM1): a visual representation of this thesis and its different elements. The map is here to help you feel your way into the encounter and ‘evoke multisensory and embodied experiences of the empirical material’ (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015 drawing on Kimberley Powell’s mapping work of 2010).

Why this format, why these choices?

It would be easier and perhaps less challenging for the reader to follow the traditional PhD structure. However, I have chosen this ‘harder’² path with good reason. Below are the headlines of my rationale:

This is a multi-disciplinary, multi-epistemological inquiry. To restrain it within the confines of the one-size-fits-all structure inherited from the natural and applied sciences, those grand-daddies of the patriarchy/ academy, seemed to do disservice to the other ways of knowing and being woven throughout. Western linear thinking is only one approach, and despite its seeming intellectual hegemony, a minority by numbers. As such the non-linear format option attempts to resolve, or at least bring to attention, some of the settler-colonialist beliefs inherent in being a part of the academy. In offering linear and non-linear ways of reading I aim to model, to live, the *and-both* philosophy underpinning this inquiry. It also reflects my highly non-linear understanding of space and time: I simply don’t understand or perceive the world in lines, it makes no sense to me. Hence in order to make sense of the effort and discoveries of this PhD I need to locate them spatially as knowledge episodes floating free of time, connected through a web of themes and experiences.

3R

A second major theme that has surfaced through the inquiry is that of exploding assumptions, untethering from unhelpful frameworks that may, in their distortions, be limiting practises of development and of leadership. The prompt to notice the writing-reading framework, to be critically mindful of what this does, and the opportunity to then re-frame (or not) is a reflection of this theme.

Thirdly the separate-connected format is intended to offer a more democratic, more open space-place for reader agency and empowered choice. The necessary writerly authority is maintained in the positions and provocations of the content. Adding to this the confidence to exchange some of the directorial power-over for power-with (Starhawk, 2011) in the co-construction of the narrative journey. It’s a nod to democracy within the writership-readership paradigm. And a request for your commitment: to step-up and step-in.

On a practical note, this work must be useful. As a practitioner, as a researcher, this must be accessible for other people to engage with and to decide to use or not. Bite sized chunks may make this less formidable to pick up and chew through. Bite sized, differently flavoured chunks also cater for different readership tastes and interests. I’m very conscious of the preciousness of you, the reader’s, time and attention: I don’t wish to be complicit in wasting that. Similarly, nor do I wish to get less than maximum return on investment of the sponsors’ money and trust in me to make this inquiry happen and for it to have impact. I hope that the chapter-a-day option creates a more reader-friendly format that will at least afford the *possibility* of wider impact beyond the narrow confines of the academy.

² Buddhism asks us to consider the harder path when faced with choices

Finally, to the PhD examiners specifically, there is precedent. Marg Sellers created a rhizomic map of her words, ideas and other representations offering readers to choose ‘paths’ (unstable, dynamic routeways) through her thesis (2009) (Honan & Bright 2016).

Why the invitation to critical read and also critically reflect?

I’ve approached the thesis (and thus my practise) from the idea that my world view is largely constructivist – I understand that I am constructing my realities in the moment, that there is no objective truth out there, to be revealed if only I dig hard enough. As with the other ‘whys’ part of the writership offer to the readership is an invitation to try out the practice this thesis explores in doing leadership and its development. Noticing, shifting perspectives and noticing what happens to our understanding of how the world is, how we can choose to construct understanding differently. Hence the invitation to maintain or, more likely, to dance between two readerly positions: that of critical reader and also critical observer of yourself-in-relation-with-the-words.

How much of you and your current energy state is leaking across the bridge of intersubjectivity to shape the perspectives on the page? Is this a unique self-other construct? Is your experience of the text as ‘other, a thing to be analysed and useful (akin to Buber’s I-It) or do you experience the ideas as relational, as transformational (I-Thou)? Is your experience of reading what Belenky et al. (1986) referred to as separated knowing (adversarial, positivist in origin) or connected (seeking empathy and common understanding)?

4R

You might wish to question whether reading this in the ‘wherever you are sat in the here and now’ ness is reshaping your ‘you-ness’ as a malleable entity construct if your cultural origins are Eastern agrarian and your world view is built on the idea of substances (after Confucius). In Mahayana Buddhist terms this might be the noticing of dependent origination (described in the twelve limbs, specifically of the dependence of feelings (Limb 7) upon contact (Limb 6) with matter which is dependent upon the sense fields (Limb 5) which in turn arises in our sense of self (Limb 4 -name and form).

Noticing your understanding of self in the reading, offers insights and therefore choices. It is an invitation into one of the key practices and also foundational suppositions of this thesis.

Finally

My values, my personal philosophy for being alive, is to keep living life differently. If I hadn’t at least tried to do this differently, in service of better, I would be failing myself.

Keep questioning everything!

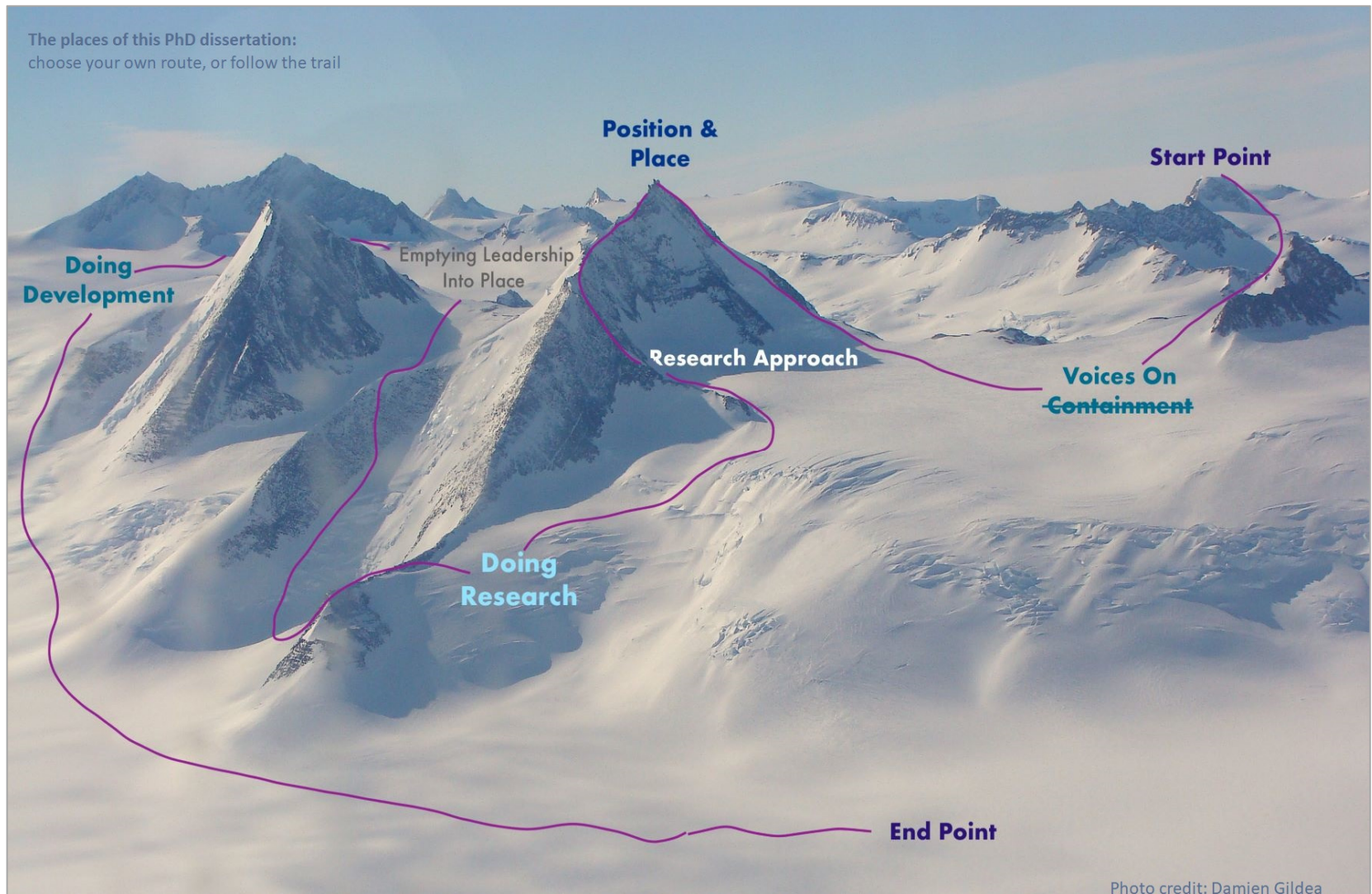
NOTE: there are many words in this thesis that your spellchecker won’t like, in any language. These are deliberately used to capture ideas more fully, simply and occasionally more lyrically, than the English language has as yet evolved for. They created themselves for this purpose only. It is what it is.

LEGEND: Key terms and ideas to pay attention to in your navigation

<i>And also – and/both</i>	not either-or, work in the fuzzy space in between – it is messier, and holds opportunity; moving away from binaries and rhetoric towards vibrant continuum
<i>Enough</i>	post-fix to the state-processes of safe (enough), problematized (enough); confident (enough) – it keeps the states alive and dynamic, and affords space for and/both other
<i>Verbs (not nouns)</i>	of leadership (doing); of developing; of (un) becoming; of practise not practice – verbs of action and inaction allow dynamic change and possibility; be alert to reification – to getting stuck, tethered in assumptions
<i>Un-becoming</i>	the same philosophical process as ‘becoming’ but not “changing to” or “moving towards” (after Heraclitus) rather dissolving the implied directionality (and purposefulness) of ‘to and ‘towards’, instead seeking less certainty, less solidity: becoming through de-accumulating, letting go of...impermanence and detachment (after Buddha)
<i>Seeking</i>	to try through searching and questioning; a driver; an intentionality
<i>Critical attention</i>	staying actively alive to what is happening and not happening within and around us; questioning this and how we know this
<i>Leadership</i>	practises, crafts; all things to all people, empty of meaning and yet compelling. It may disappear as you read
<i>Development</i>	processes and practises we actively and passive may engage in to become, to be ‘better’ in whatever form is meaningful
<i>Practise – practice</i>	deliberate switching between the verb form meaning doing, growing, stretching oneself and one’s art; and the noun of the art or craft as it is deployed as part of one’s repertoire

5R

Read Me – Instructions for use



6R

Figure RM 1. This map indicates the Sections of this PhD and their relative locations. Start at the Start Point. End at the End Point. Choose your own route to and between these two places, choose your own Pace, choose to go alone or with, but be sure to spend time in all the Section-locations on the way.

Section Guide

(Word count for each Section given in blue)

0. Read Me

How to read this paper and why it is the way it is (2420 excluding References)

In addition, there are two separate documents:

Figure list: A full list of all visual aids and figures throughout the entire dissertation

Bibliography – a combined list of all materials cited

1. The Start Point

Serves to introduce the main themes and approach of the inquiry and to set these in the wider context. It introduces the inquiry questions and places possible contributions. It is the first bookend and should be read, as the name suggests, at the start. (5540)

The next sections can be read in any order hence are all numbered 2.

2. Voices on ~~Containment~~

Serves to bring attention to other voices, both practitioner and scholar, in practices and research that contributes to the idea of ~~containment~~ and seats it critically amongst various fields from around the world. (7290)

7R

2. Position and Place

Serves to situate the position of the researcher and the research participants and to share the rationale for emphasising the importance of position and place in the co-construction of the inquiry. (7490)

2. Research Approach: Strategy, Design and evolution

Serves to introduce and provide a rationale for the methodology, the 'how' of the inquiry (8386)

2. Doing Research: the Cases

Serves to introduce the primary research as a series of four short studies. The first two aim to understand whether ~~containment~~ as a concept and theory-in-practice has validity. The second two bring doing containment into use and ask if it has value in service of doing leadership development

The Case of CoAA (Study One) (10,413)

The Case of CoBB (Study Two) (7725)

The Case of Team GROW (Study Three) (3117)

The Case of the Toxic Team (Study Four) (7401)

2. Emptying Leadership into Place

Serves to unpack assumptions around leadership in order to identify how doing leadership development may be developed (4753)

2. Doing development

Serves to unpack ideas around developing people in order to identify how doing leadership development may be developed (6436)

3. The End Point

Serves to weave together the key themes, learnings and explorations from all of the above in order to conclude the inquiry satisfactorily. This should be read, as the name suggests, at the end. (4932)

4. Epilogue

(2650)

References are provided at the end of each Section

Word Count (excluding references) 76,407 plus 2650

Dhanyabaad: gratitude and acknowledgements

Big thanks and enormous gratitude to the thoughtfulness, kindness, compassion, nudging and quiet exasperation of everyone who has been there for me in this madness for the last four years.

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And my favourite human bean, Damien.

Thank you to IFLAS – the University of Cumbria for sponsoring me through this. This support has been invaluable. Without your generosity this inquiry would have been impossible.

References– READ ME

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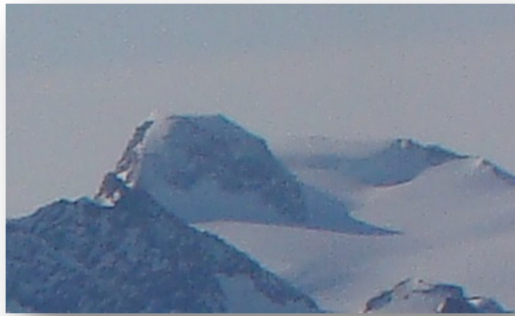
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Start Point

The Start Point sets the scene for the rest of journey to the End Point. Soak this up before contemplating the rest of the reading. It will help in the sense-breaking and making of the thesis journey.

In this section I introduce the area of inquiry (~~containment~~); how this came to be (a summary of the journey to reach this point – academic, practice and personal) and in so doing unpack some of the key terms that may otherwise be troublesome. This section performs as the rationale (why this inquiry, why this area of focus and not others, why this approach) and lays out my ambitions for a contribution to academia and to leadership development practise.



The area of inquiry: ~~containment~~

Containment: the critical crafting of a practise of leadership (a verb..... not a *thing*); a dance around becoming:

- confident and committed enough
- critically attentive and questioning enough
- safe enough

..... to continuously seek, choose and do the leadership needed with the people and place we are of*; to question this 'doing' (practise-craft-art) and to seek again;

Implicit in the *how* of doing of all of this, is to be fully, critically connected-into the here and now; alive with not-knowing; seeking to and letting go of the filters and assumptions that unhelpfully tether us

The proposition is that *doing containment* is a pre-condition for doing leadership: without some artistry in *doing containment*, whatever leadership we are doing is unlikely to be *enough* or for *long-enough* (*sustainable*)

(*in the web of what-came-before and of the what-elseness of place and space)

~~Containment~~-is problematic... and that's OK

This box is where I am with ~~containment~~ at the start of writing (2020)

The ideas in this box, e.g. of verbs not things, of becoming, are unpacked and explored throughout this thesis. If this box has created questions, keep them alive and use them....

2S

~~Containment~~ has become the word to hang the inquiry focus around. As a word it is contentious and problematic. Both of these aspects are useful – they keep us challenging and questioning the premise – they keep it alive. Keeping questioning, being fully alive are a fundamental precept of this volume.

Hence the decision to stay with this difficult word as title and focus. And the decision to add the *sous rature* (the funny line). Heidegger¹ called this placing the word 'under erasure' to articulate the problematique inherent in the word.

Origins of the term

Containment as a term originates in psychology and psychotherapeutic practise. In this context it refers to the safety, the safe transpersonal space that the client(s) and therapist operate in. In

¹ Of note: Heidegger also intended the *sous rature* to represent *both* presence *and* absence in the text. Thus the *sous rature* also keeps in the mind an underpinning approach of this study: the dialectic *and/both* positions found for example, in the Tao, the Vedic tradition, Jain' Syādvāda¹, Nagarjuna's middle way (all of which also guide us to question everything, even their own existence) *and also* Western epistemologies.

this context the responsibility for containing lies with the therapist. In this context it is (mostly) a noun.

Where I started with ~~Containment~~

Many years of global practice in leadership and other developments lead me to believe that what happens with people in groups, with leadership in groups and to a large extent within organisations, is reliant on **safety** – how safe people feel psychologically, emotionally, with power structures and flows. Safe enough allows them to relax, to participate, to engage, to have a voice, to feel a sense of belonging, to perform, to have criticality. They may not choose to do or be any of the above but feelings of safety allow those choices to be made. [What constitutes feelings of safety (or not) is explored in depth further in the Voices on ~~Containment~~ section.]

There is something else about safety – the other end of the continuum. In my practice I also noticed the transformative ‘big steps’ formed through the transpersonal space of groups ‘in flow’; the physicality of the energised force-field of sitting across the boundaries of comfort/discomfort; of holding alive and accountable, direction and purpose; felt and carried the physical-emotional intensity of ‘holding’ the space. This is something else. It’s the movement, vitality, critical attentiveness, questioning spirit of people-together that stops the collective group-think, wakens us from sluggishness, sparks innovation and reduces ‘othering’.

Thus, ~~containment~~ holds the idea of a leadership practice being about **safe-enough** to not feel overwhelmed or threatened (by each other, by some *thing* other) to a place of frozen inertia; **and also** to be **problematized-enough** to keep questioning, keep moving into, keep alive the purpose of the people in that time and place. It holds the idea of doing leadership as both noticeable action and (less noticeable) reflective inaction (after Simpson et al., 2002).

3S

A capture of the idea that happened somewhere in a small room on a rainy day in the Lake District (UK), somewhere in the middle of the inquiry, some time ago

~~Containment?~~ Sufficiently confident and courageous to be open, to be fully connected, alive with not-knowing. Vulnerability. Being with and of the people and place, present in what has come before and in the ‘what else’ across and beyond our eco-system. Energised enough for momentum. Mature enough for holding, for reflexive (in)action. Purposeful, present and steadying. A perspective on doing leadership?

Figure S1: early ideas on ~~containment~~

Contentious because...

~~Containment~~ is contentious as a word because the idea of containing and containment implies boxing in, walls and boundaries; an inhibition of freedom.

Contentious to some who might say the idea of safety is a delusion and the idea that others can provide that idea is equally problematic.

Thus, as a linguistic device for this inquiry, which has at its core the liberation of leadership as a thing, it is challenging. And challenging is ideal, and in itself potentially liberatory. However, if a more useful word emerges then ~~containment~~ could and probably should disappear.

These continuous conversational challenges, particularly to the ‘containing’ notion jolted me into the visualisation, the conceptual understanding of doing ~~containment~~ that I have deployed throughout the latter part of this inquiry (see Figure S2). This concept is akin to a thicket of vines and tendrils, growing, thickening, weaving together to form an ever-denser mass, a web (Ingold, 2011) as safety increases; that is, it is the relationships between people, between place and environment, that form the safe-enough aspect of ~~containment~~.



Figure S2: visualising ~~containment~~

45

With this metaphor in mind it is possible to imagine how an overly dense web or mesh may be stifling and ultimately destructive to the leadership situation. As we will go on to explore, one of the key influences on performance in the participant groups was feeling of ‘*too safe*’ – they were simply too comfortably held in the organisation / team to feel the need to work beyond the bare minimum.

Equally, it is possible to imagine how safety can feel *not-enough* if the relationships (threads) are thin, brittle or simply too few. In this situation people may feel overwhelmed, under-threat or simply too isolated.

People in senior positions (notional leaders-through-authority) may be on the inside of the dense thicket (part of the too-safeness) or on the outside (other). Either position may restrict (or enhance) their practice and impact of leadership actions, even those undertaken with authoritative power.

Staying with the thicket metaphor and extending this to problematisation (the ability to keep questioning and keep the challenge / opportunity at hand alive) we can imagine the web tendrils buzzing with a sort of static electricity. Too much static and the risk of shock, of sparking small explosions becomes very likely – people may feel everything is ambiguous, too uncertain – that nothing (including each other) is stable or reliable enough to work with, potentially leading to high levels of anxiety, or complete switch off. Similarly if the degree of critical attention is very low, the current almost imperceptible, the group may slide into various negative states such as drifting, sluggishness, removal or potentially resistance and subversion.

Not a competency nor a diagnostic, but a theory-in-use

Containment is presented here as a critical, relational and also foundational art or practice of leadership, something that is a pre-conditional practice to the noticing, reflecting, choosing and acting of doing leadership from moment to moment. It is something we are doing, something active, alive – a web of actions. A verb.

Inquiring into **containment** is therefore a mechanism for inquiring into the doing of leadership. I'm introducing the idea of **containment** as something dynamic and part of a continuum of intertwined practices used to encourage a different understanding of what may be happening (in doing leadership) in order to enable practitioners to do leadership better. This positioning of **containment** equates closely with Harrison's (2016, p.83) description of a theory-in-use: "models of situations and relations that an actor develops in his or her mind and uses to guide their practice". So where abstracting containment to a category is helpful, I'll use the category 'theory-in-use'.

Containment, I suggest, may act as a gateway into understanding more about the doing of leadership and is also presented as an active agent for its development.

Containment is not presented as a competency, a thing to be tick-listed in selected individuals, to be sought, trained for or in any way considered a discrete measurable. This would play into the proposition posited in the heroics, and in fact in much of leadership discourse, that leading and leadership can be subdivided into neatly separate parts such as individual competencies, an "epistemological and methodological reductionism" (Harrison, 2016 p84), possibly a hangover from the natural sciences. **Containment** is proposed as a relational (not individual) construct of the 'comprehensive integrative' variety rather than the 'particularist and reductionist' type (Harrison, *ibid*).

Accordingly **containment** is not presented as a binary, an either-or, something you do or don't do. This would intimate a reductionist, positivist epistemology. Instead, I invite you to perceive it as a continuum or mesh; a complex of interweaving processes and flavours, something more or less visible, more or less active, more or less skilful.

To reflect on one's own practice or that of others through the **containment** lens should not be understood as a diagnosis. Diagnostics hold so many notions which are, I suggest, antithetical to complexity and constructivism. Diagnosis holds inherent notions of binaries that seek out the negative and imply moral judgements over these ('good or bad' 'wrong, broken, failed'). It holds notions of the power of the diagnoser over the diagnosed – to condemn or to fix. It is often exposing (of vulnerabilities) and prescriptive (an unquestionable truth), both of which erode **containment**.

Containment in use – and useful?

So if we are not deploying **containment** as a 'model of' or diagnostic, what is the point? How might it be operating (if at all)? And therefore, how might this study be of any use?

Firstly, doing **containment** is likely tacit (rather than explicit), running as an intuitive process, perhaps a type of heuristic, in the messy and un-entangle-able stuff of doing leadership. Running

in the background it may surface as an outcome or process perhaps occasionally happening in a seemingly serendipitous, spontaneous form. As a form of tacit knowing it is likely that it is out of, or just on the edges of our experience of ourselves-in-the-world, part of our 'subsidiary awareness' (Polanyi 1962, in Harrison *ibid*) or pre-conscious awareness. At some level we are aware it is happening but it is not in our focus. Polanyi would have it that as soon as the stuff of 'subsidiary awareness' gains our full attention, our focal awareness, the process or tacit knowing-how-to collapses – he gives the example of a pianist “shifting his attention from the piece he is playing to the observation of what he is doing with his fingers” (p56 *ibid*).

However, I suggest that with some careful 'fishing' (Ringer, 2002) this tacit process can be gently brought to the surface for examination, germination and further crafting by intentional, attentive practitioners and artisans of leadership and its development. And then lowered again.

This practice of raising and lowering (emotional currencies, power flows etc) into and out of awareness may be familiar to facilitators. It is part of the step-in, step-down dance described by Starhawk, (2011) and others.

The usefulness of inquiring into ~~containment~~ as practice and/or as theory-in-use comes, I suggest, from the dynamic ability to move from being-in-practice to critical-inquiry-into-practice, to ask 'what is happening, what would be happening differently, what we would like to have happen' to find new choices, then to step back again to allowing those choices to come to fruition.

65

This dynamic de-focus/ re-focus is where the opportunity to notice better, to practise and to evolve ~~containment~~ as something we do in leadership development.

The above notes should provide sufficient exploration of the substantive area to be able to move through the rest of the Sections.

The exploration is continued in Voices on ~~Containment~~ with regard to ideas, mythologies, practices and philosophies that have informed the development of ~~containment~~ as concept.

The Case Studies Section details how the work with various participants / co-researchers shifts the concept towards a theoretical framework and its application.

The End Point brings up to the moment the exploration as I bring together the reflections, analysis and inputs from the research and subsequent application of the theoretical framework to wrap up my current understanding, the impacts, contribution and possible further explorations.

The inquiry in a nutshell: what, where, when, who

2016-17: The research followed a Constructivist Grounded Theory Methodology (CGTM) initially with two firms, located in Kathmandu (Nepal).

The first firm, a Multi-National Enterprise (MNE) of around 10,000+ employees granted access to its central teams and leadership layers based from its Headquarters. The methods used involved semi-structured interviews with individuals and work-teams mostly in English, some in Nepalese; observations and recordings of team meetings, of the day-to-day doing of business in the various office spaces and several facilitated sessions of reflection-on-findings towards next step, 'action'. This firm is part of a wider billion dollar turnover Group I have been working with for several years, that is now third generation family owned and run (all male).

The second firm, is a young start-up of around 35 employees, also based in Kathmandu, set up by two young male entrepreneurs with investment backing from a group of friends / networked professionals. We ran a similar set of methods and experiences with this firm.

In between the two studies reflections with and solo, generated a working model, some ideas to be further explored and deepened. By now I have abandoned CGTM and the rigidity of the pseudo 'qualitative' in favour of a post-qualitative approach, seeking Right View, Right Way (from Mahayana Buddhist philosophy).

2017 and on: This 'theoretical framework' breathes life into practise through targeted and explicit interventions with teams within a South Asian and a UK organisation, both in non-commercial sectors, both with female leadership. I have also woven the emerging theory-in-use and practises into my global consultancy practise working with leadership development, and with humanitarian organisations in crisis. Similarly it-I have been noticed at-play and surfaced in my own leadership and awoken and evolved in conversations and reflexive retreat. This is the 'doing-being' of the research activities: the kernel in a nutshell.

75

The Start Point section continues from here, by putting ~~containment~~ in its place, that is, by showing where it came from, where it sits in relation to leadership development, and specifically what this study hopes to contribute in its exploration of ~~containment~~ as theory-in-use in multiple places around the planet.

The journey to ~~containment~~: how and why this inquiry landed here

A summary of the journey to reach this point – academic, practice and personal

Putting the person in the picture: my chosen lines

Social construction - constructivism – the interconnectedness of everything

From positivist beginnings in the natural sciences I have been evolving in big and small step changes towards a constructivist position. Authors such as Latour (1987) opened my eyes to re-positioning science as a belief system rather than the revelation of unquestionable truths; Friere (1970) captured the political, power dimensions of knowing and later Gergen's (2013) pragmatic social construction made sense without disappearing into absurdity. The shift moves beyond this towards a questioning of Western epistemologies and ontology (a cultural constructivism?) gained through decades of lived anthropological 'study' of other places I've been 'at home' in (Chaffer, 2016). In Buddhism one might say this is an acceptance of three of the four noble seals of Dharma: interconnectedness, impermanence and particularly that all contaminated emotions are suffering (we falsely divide the world into subject and objects and "then continually grasp for things we think are separate from [ourselves](#)" (O'Brien, 2017).

The notion of a world divided into binaries is in itself quite strange. My understanding is relational and contextualised. In my world objectivity is just a perspective on and from the same interconnected, interdependent whole: subject-object (*vis a vis* Buber's I-Thou², Taoism yin-yang) and, more fully, the transpersonal subject-object relationship and trans-environmental relationship of us-in-environment-and-time.

This is perhaps a pluralist epistemology and sometimes, when I'm feeling overwhelmed by the gendered, colonialist hegemony of academia as a self-perceived universal way, verges on Feyerabend's epistemological anarchism (Feyerabend, 1993).

The PhD route to ~~containment~~ – taking the harder path

At the start of the PhD I became, to some degree, obsessed with trying to understand what leadership meant. What is it? Driven by feelings of foolishness that I really couldn't grasp or articulate one of the core areas of my study I spent many months reading, critiquing, discussing everything I could on leadership, leaders and leading. I trawled historical papers, attempted to capture and comprehend all of the many leadership collocations (strong, sustainable, relational, servant, critical - the list is almost endless), learned a lot about different ideas, about different case studies, theorised about leader identities and even came up with my own working definition³ (Chaffer, 2016, [blog](#)) but was never fully satisfied. I was not alone. The question still reverberates around academia (for example, International Studying Leadership conference, Dec 2016) and the lack of 'an' answer is apparently a major contributor to the failure of Leadership Development Programmes (LDP) (Kaiser & Curphy, 2013).

Leadership seemed to be all things to all people. Everything from the near-deity like Heroes of the Great Man tribe (pick any of the 'how to be a great leader' books, HBR /Forbes-style articles,

² <http://www.iep.utm.edu/buber/>

³ Leadership as agency (empowered, encultured decision making and action) with recognition (from self, from others)

TED talks etc. *a la* Walsh, Sinek, Jobs, Kotter, North's erstwhile '*authentiques*⁴ and even Sandberg's masculinised leaders) where leadership is contained in one all-mighty leader, to leaderships as practice (e.g. Raelin, 2016), process (e.g. Tourish et al 2014), as fundamentally about power and control (e.g. Alevesson, Collinson, multiple publications), a social construct (e.g. Grint, 2005) or merely an 'empty signifier' of language that has little grounding in 'reality' (Kelly, 2014 in Kempster 2016).

I had a sneaky suspicion that academia was just talking to itself about itself, creating "unrelenting triviality" (Tourish, 2015 p137-8). Specifically that the two Western leadership fields⁵ were as co-dependent as light and shade. A growing uneasiness that the ontology of dissecting, categorising and decontextualizing in pursuit of 'knowledge' is a poor fit for what seemed to be an inherently relational, context-situated entity. Were the social sciences *acting up* to meet big brother natural sciences expectations, and in so doing, missing the trick?

So if leadership wasn't a thing that could be surgically opened and its innards examined for elusive code-bearing helical answers by clever academics, how *could* it be understood? Could it be understood, defined at all?

Stepping out of the frame – seeing the whole picture

I needed a change in perspective.

I returned to my roots and found insight in evolutionary leadership theories. Theories and practice from psychology-psychodynamics also added depth and challenge. Finally going beyond Western thinking and delving into both etic and emic investigations into aboriginal, indigenous peoples and leadership; and semi-immersion with various Asian theologies. These three different lenses enabled a step back from the intimacy of the leadership discourse within largely organisationally anchored fields.

Seduction

In a microcosm of processes running in the wider academic, professional worlds I realised I had also been seduced by the glamour of the leadership and had unwittingly bought in to a competitive, mass myth-creation process: find the 'answer' to leadership, find the 'answer' to ... life? Had I also become a victim of the Fundamental/ Leadership Attribution Error (Hackman, 2002), placing leaders and leadership *at cause* for life's highs and lows? Had I also fallen headlong into this LAE trap despite having been outside of the West and its reductive, particulate-seeking biases for so long (Nesbitt, 2003)?

Maybe leadership wasn't a thing that could be swallowed Alice-in-Wonderland-like to transform mere mortals to super-humans, good or bad?

⁴ Reference to Marcel Pagnol's Jean de Florette who goes to the countryside in search of 'authenticity' ('Je suis venu ici pour cultiver l'authentique') only to be cheated by his local collaborators in their lust for money and land. The duplicity hinges on a play on words as they indeed cultivate their 'authentiques' (carnations) and Jean dies. I reference this as a metaphor for the double standards and double meanings around 'authenticity' and 'authentic leadership'

⁵ Mainstream leadership and Critical Leadership Studies

Maybe it wasn't a 'thing' at all.

Perhaps I was asking the wrong question. Joe Raelin's (2016 and multiple other papers) ideas about Leadership-as-Practice had a whiff of opportunity about them: leadership as actions, things we do.

Not a noun, but a verb.

Unpacking leadership

Richard Little (2019) went on to articulate this one breezy summer day as *doing-leadership*.

This idea, caught my attention. I've since applied it in practice, in doing development, in speaking about, forming approaches to and in doing leadership myself. *Doing leadership* is the cornerstone of my practice and of the position in this thesis.

If we think about *doing leadership*, then leadership is anything that is required in the place and with the people, of the time and context in which we sit. The question is actually, "with what verbs are we replacing the fairly useless, but compelling term 'leadership', at any one point in time?" (Little, 2019) and further to keep on replacing it as time, need, energy, everything changes. Keep asking self and others what they need, want, expect from you doing leadership. Keep unpacking, keep questioning.

Use the unpacking to blow assumptions out of the water and enable the doing of leadership to be dialogic, to be democratic, to be liberated from the heroes, demons, romantics and critics: from the encasement of expectation.

10S

Doing leadership – developing leadership: ethics, reality

Leadership as something we do locates us in a much more ethical position from which to approach the developing of leadership. I am deeply uncomfortable with the notions posited by many leadership development programmes that purport to be transformational of individuals. I have no right, nor do I believe I have the magical powers, to work with other people's values, beliefs, identity or purpose i.e. at a level that could trigger transformations. There are boundaries. This is not psychotherapy, not a spiritual intervention nor a black art.

Working with practices, enabling people to develop their artisanship in noticing, calibrating, choosing the practice needed; supporting the crafting of those practices feels much more tangible and realistic as a proposition. It crosses fewer ethical boundaries and could potentially be done with integrity.

No soul snatching required.

There is more on the doing leadership and its place in this inquiry in Emptying Leadership Into Place.

[Of all the leadership practices in all the world.... why ~~containment~~](#)

Taking leadership as something we (note the plural) do and that the nature of that doing shifts and modifies, actively and tacitly; taking leadership as something we wish to better, be developed in our doing of it, then we may need to unpack and understand what is called for in

how we are doing what we are doing. I suggest we need to bring this into the conscious realm in order to finesse our awareness; bring our inquiry into our practice.

The proposition here is that an active awareness of doing ~~containment~~, peering into safety, into questioning and the confidence with which we do those things in relation to the world-we-are-of-and-in as individuals, as groups, as organisations, as movements and communities, that noticing ~~containment~~ is a valid and useful theory-in-practice with which to notice, to understand and also to do leadership.

To notice, to question ~~containment~~ requires developing a set of critical reflexive tools and practices. Getting a field sense of how safe, how alive, how confident, how committed we are and being able to re-calibrate, re-tune as the situation shifts, these tools and practices are also helpful to work out what sort of leadership we might be better doing at any one particular time and place.

~~Containment~~ brought to the surface as theory-in-practice, honed and then dropped back out of focus as tacit know-how, might also help those doing leadership be better able to wield their crafts, to improvise, adapt and perform, effectively and efficiently.

Tim Ingold (2011) paints a beautiful and liberating picture of the artisan carpenter, who through many years of training, practising, crafting and honing, has developed his woodturning to a tacit, embodied craftsmanship. As he saws through the gnarled wood hitting knots and furls, his whole body adapts, the saw an extension of arm-mind making micro adjusts with no extra expenditure of energy. No stress or anxiety.

11S

This is how I perceive the process of doing ~~containment~~ - an artisanship in the craft of ~~containment~~, the artisan able to tacitly, calmly and gracefully move through whatever is demanded, micro-adjusting safe/alive, confidence, commitment to establish the atmosphere, the enabling place-space, for doing leadership: for choosing the tools and techniques most appropriate for the leadership that is required there and then.

It's about paying attention to the ocean, to the winds and air and where these meet in the ocean-air place within which the various 'ships' of leading, following and more sail, as well as the captains and crew or the ships themselves.

That's the philosophical premise.

Doing what matters

And more importantly, I chose ~~containment~~ because some things have to matter: some things are important, personally, professionally; some things we have to show up for –make a choice to ask hard questions and then do it.

If: everything and anything can be construed as leadership

Then: choose what matters most

If: Leadership is socially (temporally, contextually) constructed and located

Then: Leadership, doing leadership, doing leadership development cannot be done in isolation⁶. Implicit in any doing of leadership is therefore the attention to, quality, durability and performativity of relationships (with self, with others, with the world beyond 'us').

Paying attention to and building craftsmanship, expertise in the building, nurturing and breaking of these relationships is stuff that **matters** to me.

Being 'other'; being part of something; part of tribe, of my people, sense of belonging – these are power full currencies, with the longest of histories. **These matter**. They have served in the evolutionary shaping of human kind, of groups for around two hundred thousand years. It could be said they were / are fundamental to survival in all of its nuances – as we are keenly aware today, our physical survival is as much dependent on our emotional, intellectual and spiritual survival as the face masks, gloves and washing of hands.

Sense of safety through the relational world is at the heart of this.

Equally, the ability to endure, to keep motivated and purposeful-enough, to maintain a degree of confidence in challenging (and abundant) times where ongoing uncertainty has also been part and parcel of this survival, and, I would argue, a fundamental of leading oneself and others through such times.

Working with strengths: In my practice of doing leadership development, of doing leading, of working with groups and organisations on their 'stuff' in multiple places around the world it has become clear to me that one of the key practices I bring is the ability to work into the group space; to notice, name and hold power flows; to get a 'read' on sense of safety, to weave it and enable others to do the same. Similarly, I have the resilience to keep pushing, keep doing the step up-step back dance of maintaining movement, moving fast and slow. This craft seems to matter to the people I am with and to me. ~~Containment~~ as a practice, as a theory-in-use matters to me, maybe wrongly, maybe rightly, but it has a foothold. I recognise the bias and potentially the self-indulgence of deep-diving into a line of inquiry that I believe I already hold some expertise at. There is the potential that this could just be a *me* thing and of no use to the rest of the world or the academy. However, several factors have led me to go ahead:

- Having some expertise already is a good starting point and an advantage in the field work of the research – my skills and ability to notice, to read and sense make have a solid foundation and are enabling in the practice of doing research with groups, with leadership in different scenarios
- It is intrinsically interesting to me – this has enabled me to stay motivated and focused
- Through building knowledge and understanding I am also building capabilities and practice that I can usefully deploy in service not just of the research groups (as action research) but in my career as practitioner, making this meaningful and viable

⁶ Noting that some aspects of doing leadership will likely appear to be enacted solo, the individual is still interconnected emotionally, intellectually, encultured, enmeshed in present and pasts. Their 'I' is a dynamic social construction.

- The various bodies of literature from around the world bring supporting perspectives and knowledge to the notion that what I am calling ~~containment~~ has, under many different guises, meaning and use.

These are explored in the Voices on ~~Containment~~ Section.

A note on the practice of unpacking in doing leadership development

I notice that a great deal of my practise is about unpacking big words: the words we use, portentously sometimes pretentiously; the words that mask all of our unknowings, uncertainties; the words that have plenty of space in them for multiple understandings and therefore misunderstandings; words that carry my expectations and yours like overstuffed, flimsy shopping bags. Unpacking these words with people, particularly in togetherness, can be terribly uncomfortable causing all sorts of wriggling and spikery. It demands showing-up, exposure, truthing – vulnerability. It can bring many elephants to attention; sets off assumptions like linguistic IEDs causing all sorts of shock waves. Having emptied the bags, detonated the explosives and brought to light assumptions there is a clear space for more open, honest and democratic conversations. There is an opportunity to re-pack the big words with collaboratively crafted meanings. We have big words then that have impact *and also* bring clarity and confidence when used.

The route of this PhD has illuminated unpacking as one of my core practises. It helps in generating ~~containment~~ and doing it too. More on this later.

13S

Positioning the study – metaphorical and actual

I'm taken with Haraway's radical capturing of feminist knowledge as resisting 'fixation' and being "insatiably curious about the webs of different positioning" (p590. Haraway, 1988). Her ideas on the need for the voices in the fray to have and name a position from which to make contribution to the 'power-sensitive conversation' creating radical knowledge, creating science itself, resonate well. They echo ideas from Maori around leadership (Pfeifer, 2006) as the process of weaving together (raritanga). There's something also in the 'partial voice', the incompleteness of the position, that segues with the problematisation aspects of doing leadership, of ~~containment~~.

It seems pertinent then to actively avoid the 'unmarked' position of the 'dominators' (Haraway, *ibid*) and try to know and name the position my partial voice speaks from, contributes from.

I chose to locate the research inquiry into ~~containment~~ in South Asia, initially amongst people of Nepal I have come to know over many years.

The rationale for this locating flowed from the points described above. More significantly it also stemmed from my semi-nomadic, relatively un-tethered geographical, cultural and practitioner-academic position which, I gather from peers in many walks of life, is relatively unique. Having lived and practised outside of the UK for so many years, becoming semi-immersed in other cultures I would describe my position as both a sense of *seeing-enough*, from the years spent *in*

South Asia, balanced with a sense of *unfiltered-enough* (with eyes-wide open) from sitting comfortably-uncomfortably *on* the boundaries of cultures (South Asian – UK). It's a place I feel at home and also am reminded, often on a daily basis, that it is not my home.

My experience and, ultimately the positioning that emanates from this, may provide both a location-based perspective (with-of and also outside-on) and also a felt perspective (being other and also part-of) of the process. I wished to make use of these perspectives, to have them contribute to and inform the research process.

Being in Nepal, researching *with* Nepali, also **mattered**.

Having a voice – meta-studies of research outputs from the organisational studies, health sciences, social sciences and beyond have chronicled the impacts of publication bias on understanding, on discourse and the impacts of research on society at large for decades (for example: Callaham et al 2002, Harrison et al 2014, Vermeulen 2012...). One such bias is the preference of the journal industry for leadership, particularly organisational leadership research carried out in North America (Bendell, 2016). In my world, having a voice matters. Fairness matters. I hoped, in some small way, that a contribution based from Asia, using my white North European privilege and temporary 'membership' of academic elite, might add to the redressing of this imbalance, and contribute to raising the visibility of settler-colonialist bias a little further too (Tuck & Wang, 2014).

Challenge-support: Entering the research process with participants working mostly in Nepalese, of which I have some intermediate ability, and Hindi (limited) has challenged me to work deeper in non-verbal modes – to sense into, calibrate into and notice differently and better. I have had to up my game as a practitioner and researcher bringing critical scrutiny and attentiveness and work hard to remove or reduce filters and biases in read and understanding.

Equally basing the research in Nepal allows me to work at my best. I am happier in Nepal than most other places, and able to access creative, communicative and critical thinking and being better here and to focus more. This can only have a positive effect on the research process.

And/both - West/rest: This ~~containment~~ practice seemed to slither across too many 'fields' of study to properly situate or gather much more than a glancing voice: the more obvious contenders of Leadership Studies, Critical Leadership Studies, Philosophy, Psychodynamics, Organisational Development, Anthropology, Evolutionary Psychodynamics, Sociology, Psychology and the like had much to offer but each also felt like traps that would constrain the inquiry in a too-few-dimensioned paradigm strait-jacket. I needed the partial voices of the many not the unknown position of the one. The categorisation, division and sub-division of the academic world with its jostling power politics seemed to be an anathema to what is essentially the intangible, slippery and indivisible stuff of who/how-we-are-with-each other and the world. Hence it seemed appropriate to work within a network-based, relational cultural context, such as that of Nepal; to work in a different paradigm. It also seemed important to seek out voices from this, and other philosophy-cultures from across the planet. Hence I have looked to Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism, various indigenous peoples and others for ways of knowing

and being⁷, for knowledge, practice and philosophies of a more integrated, holistic and integrative perspective to inform, challenge and grow the inquiry.

I have not found any comfortable location for this study in the Western fields: perhaps, like leadership, like development it locates in the 'in-betweens', on the fuzzy boundaries. Maybe some ambitious bunch will create a place that may one day claim it, a post-Critical Leadership Studies or Radical Embodied Critical Development or some such. *Its* location doesn't seem important. A field name-badge would more likely be a hindrance, an unhelpful tether.

What may be different as a result of this inquiry: contribution and impact

What I hoped for as I journeyed through this inquiry are unique and useful impacts and contributions in the following areas.

- A better understanding of the dynamic interplay of safety and problematisation in creating the conditions for doing leadership better (or not)
- Tools, techniques and insights (theory-in-use / theoretical framework) to enable practitioners and inquirers to do ~~containment~~ better, and (hence) do leadership better
- Some in-roads to articulating leadership in practice and development more holistically, more substantially-substantively through the and/both blending of multiple perspectives, specifically weaving Western academic, practitioner and 'non-Western' perspectives
- Contribution to understandings of group dynamics, of doing leadership, relational and power flows in different cultural contexts
- Understanding of development processes and opportunities for evolving and supporting leadership in multiple contexts
- In depth examples of doing leadership and its development in two Nepalese firms contributing more widely to the literature and practice on South Asian organisational and social knowledge and practice base.

Finally

Having created a rationale for the research project, the first question is to understand whether doing ~~containment~~ is something that happens, or could be described as happening in the world beyond writing and thinking. And if it is, is it useful?

Does it help us do leadership better?

Does it help us do developing leadership better?

⁷ Which cannot be referenced as epistemologies or ontologies as these terms imply knowing and being they are bound by the structures, frameworks and division of the Greek rhetorical tradition.

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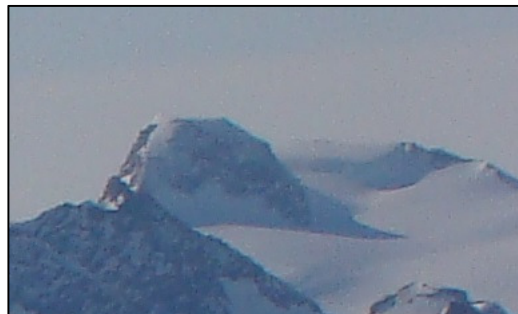
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17S

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Doing Development

The purpose of this section is to explore the options for doing development, specifically with adult people doing leadership in order to create possible avenues for developing ~~containment~~ as a leadership practice.

The focus is on doing development, on the practice and practising of it: a critical reflexion on twenty plus years of doing developmental work with people in different settings around the world (including myself); and on other people's experience of and development of critical perspectives on doing development – theories, models, awakenings.

The exploration uses (some of) the P lenses (see Doing Research) to structure some of the bigger questions: What is development for (why) and for whom? Where is development? How, how much, how fast and how do we know? When and with what?

The final part is a proposal, a plea, to doing leadership development differently.



1D

The context

Adult learning is a huge field of practice and theory. Within this leadership development is a highly contested and high spend field – between USD \$3.6bn and \$14bn annually pre pandemic, depending on your source (Training Industry review, 2019; Gurdjan et al, 2014).

These fields form the backdrop to this Section. This is not a *review of* but a *reflection on*.

Etymology: development

Development is a big ambiguous term. What are its origins and within this the initial meanings? Etymonline (2020) tell us 'development' begins life in the middle of the 18th century carrying the sense of "a gradual unfolding, a full working out or disclosure of the details of something;" – it's about emergence, revealing. Over the next few decades the meaning shifts to include a sense of enlargement: "the internal process of expanding and growing". At this point 'development' is still immobile. However, by the end of the Industrial revolution it has become about deliberate, directional progress "advancement through progressive stages", about movement. Move forward to the turn of the 20th century and the idea of "economic advancement" is embedded (value-added). In the English language the idea of stillness, of deepening has been augmented by and perhaps even overtaken by a different type of enriching gained through motion.

Hold this thought.

Purpose: What is development for? What drives us? Who chooses this?

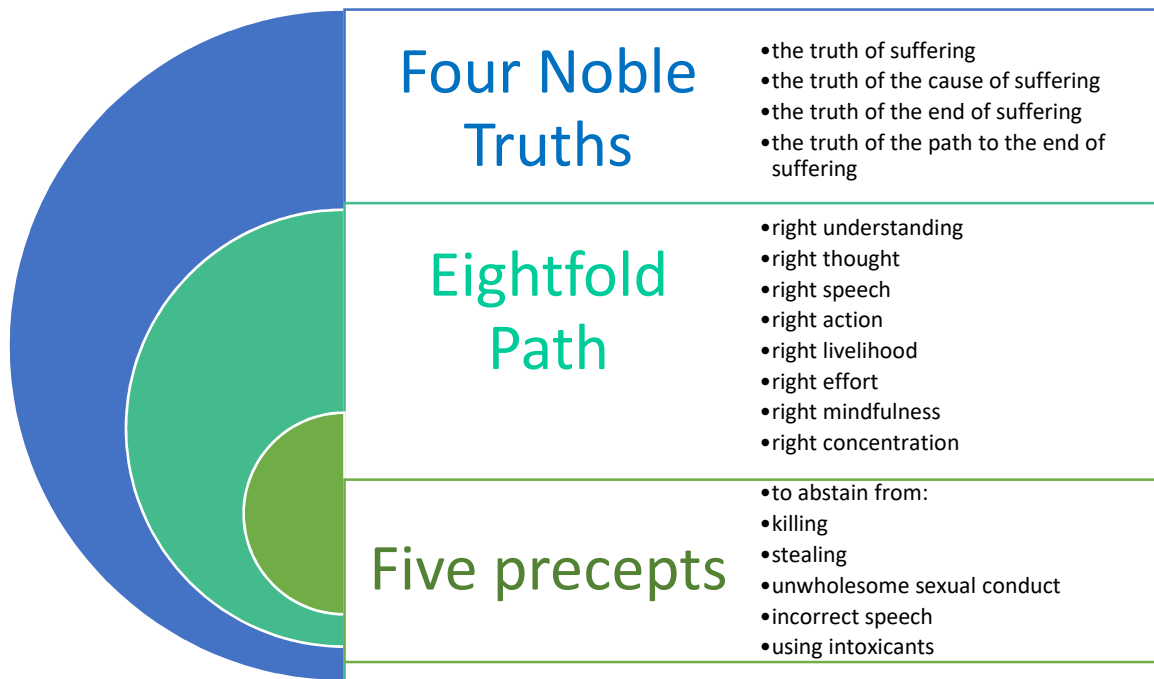
Before delving into the stuff of adult development in the Western context, a framing against two other world philosophies may be helpful in establishing a context, different perspectives and possibly illuminating some assumptions.

Whilst this Section is not a discussion on adult development per se, it is useful to note that it is only since Erickson's work in the 1960s that Western notions of adulthood have been thought of in stages with even the possibility of development. Prior to Erickson Christianity had adults on a journey of accepting or resisting God (Rose, 2004), but not of their own development (spiritual, emotional or otherwise) and theories on childhood development, introduced by Freud and others in the early nineteenth century, stopped on reaching adulthood. Relative to childhood development, the Western study of growth in adults is still relatively slim.

Has the absence of theological direction played a part in the largely unchecked development of developing adults *for* usefulness, towards fulfilling the utilitarian ethic (a journey of accepting or resisting the forces of capitalism)?

Compare the Christian/ Western position to the thorough and well-resourced direction from Buddhism. The purpose, for those who so choose to enter development, is of release from samsara, the realm of suffering (dhukha) for themselves and therefore for all sentient beings. There are multiple guidances and guides to those who choose the pathway towards enlightenment, the simplest advice being to replace unwholesome tendencies with wholesome ones. The purpose for developing oneself is clear and compelling. The path is hard, requires consistent practise and is supported. The choice is yours (see Figure D1).

In Buddhist philosophy those who wish to develop should follow the eightfold path and must adhere to the five precepts (Johansen & Gopalakrishna, 2006). There are four guidances on the responsibilities of teacher and learner which are broadly towards independent criticality of learning seeking to learn from ‘teachings not the teacher’ and to question everything. To this end the Buddha is believed to have said “*You must examine my words to their very depths, then test what I say as you would test gold, and having so tested and proven the validity and truth of what I say for yourselves, only then should you accept it*” (Tehrune, 1999, p. 128).



3D

Figure D1: some of the core precepts of Buddhism

In contrast to Buddhism, a Hindu, at least in theory, has no choice but to develop and grow: “his ideal life cycle” (Kakar, 1968, p.129) to self-realization is pre-determined by (individual) *dharma*. The purpose is clear, the pathway there for you to discover and there are many rituals and orthodoxies to uphold. (See figure D2). Adult development, at least for males of the three higher castes, is a must.

The split-self of the West: In modern Western society we seem to have dual purposes for developing as adults: the purpose of becoming more useful, for creating more value for society and ourselves (professional development); and the purpose of developing self as an individual, until recently a happy indulgence for those with time and money. More lately it has become a booming industry (LaRosa, 2018) at least in part, *for* commodifying and coding #brand-you. (Ref: the initially relentless push to ‘make lockdown useful’? ‘If you can’t be productive then impress us, entertain us!’) This slight schizophrenia seems to be resolving as #brandyou becomes

Dharma is unknown to us, but is influenced by *desa* (place); *kala* (time period- culture); *srama* (work, practice- stage of life) and *guna* (attributes – personhood) through many life-cycles. The stages (*asrama*) are development in that they are contingent on maturation, spiritual growth and disciplined practise. They are *brahmacharya* (the child growing into youth, learning the skills for his future role through “unquestioning devotion to the *guru*’s person” Kakar, *ibid*, p.132); *garhasthya*, the stage of flowering and enjoyment re material (*arta*) and sensual-sexual (*kama*) gratification; *vanaprastha* – “a gradual (inner) withdrawal without a loosening of responsibility” (p.133 becoming a teacher of *dharma*, preparing for the next stage; in *sannyasa* man renounces all possessions, the surrender of I and mine leading to *moksa*, freedom from ignorance (realisation). *Dharma* should be followed by modelling the lives of men who have achieved self-realization, seeking a teacher (*guru*) and applying our own understanding. Some sects believe a person can choose one life stage to inhabit once they have completed *brahmacharya*.

Figure D2: the Hindu asrama – development stages

incorporated into #brandprofessional at least in the leadership development realm as firms demand, and LDPs offer transformation to, ever-more deity-like leader beings (Chaffer, 2016).

4D

Shifting HE purpose: Higher Education (HE), a foundation stone in many adult development journeys, is also undergoing a shift in purpose globally, most markedly in the English-speaking nations. HE is transitioning from being (at least in part) *for* whole person growth, *for* developing critical members of society to being largely *for* employability, *for* the development of productive members of economies¹.

Purpose and pace: as the world of work changes ever more rapidly so, we are told, does the demand for skills, knowledge and capability development². Professional development, including leadership development (Petrie, 2014) is getting shorter and faster concerning both enhancing one’s technical skills and also for ‘soft skills’ by which we mean attributes such as self-awareness, creativity, cultural-intelligence, competencies. The latter, I have argued previously (2017), usually take many years to evolve and whilst their evolution may be encouraged in participants of, for example, a half-day training programme I am absolutely certain it cannot be magically ‘gifted’ to these folk, no matter how shiny the marketing claims. The pressure for ‘at pace’ may be high, but the outcomes not always helpful, and in many cases a certified distraction from the actual long, slow and less shiny work required. Noticing pace and knowing what is appropriate is, I would say, a critical aspect of development. Pitches (2018), referencing Tapscott (2009) notes this in his critique of MOOC based-learning “*If ‘speed is normal’, then equally important is knowing when and how to slow down*” (p16, 2018).

¹ Universities UK 2019 report showing large increases in STEM and applied sciences; Australian [policy shift](#) away from funding arts and humanities to subsidise vocational subject areas

² <https://trainingindustry.com/magazine/nov-dec-2019/trends-2020-the-broadening-role-of-ld/> ; <https://www.blanchardaustralia.com.au/resources/blog-articles/2020-hr-and-ld-trends-12-expert-predictions>; https://comptiacdn.azureedge.net/webcontent/docs/default-source/research-reports/comptia-it-workforce-and-learning-trends-2020.pdf?sfvrsn=68a13c23_4

Doing it slowly: There seem to be very few instances of long-term, slow-burn, outcome free professional development. The practise of consistent, rather un-heroic, invisible doing of development, of getting into relationship with ourselves, with self-in-world is rarely sanctioned in the professional spheres. The few permissible pathways of this sort I have noted are in spiritual leadership (monks, imans etc); in the psych- world of therapists, -ologists, etc and to some degree, in the arts. Even here the slow pace sits alongside the rather more visible, technical skills of these professions. We expect these professionals to have and act from a maturity, a groundedness – in fact we would probably not trust them with our precious souls, our selves without this. In our daily lives, in politics, in celebrities even, we look for character, for personalities that have blossomed and become. Yet, as Wendell Berry noted we are spending millions on educating (and developing) people who are fit for societal and economic productivity, but “not a dime or a thought on character” (Berry, 1990 p.26).

What is happening? I suspect a second schism in the modern approach to development, a schism between what we seek as individuals and what works ‘best’ for societies.

Let’s talk about **social control and development**.

In 2016 I wrote about normalisation forces on the outputs of leadership development, the “mainstreaming of ‘hero’ types and narcissists into the leader identity and the subsequent shifting towards an ever masculinised, hero-type leader ideal”. Now, in 2020, it seems this ‘social control’ (after Foucault in Lawlor et al., 2014) has extended to development processes more widely: to the mainstreaming of the quick, hard, shallow way of doing development. Thus, now we see the normalisation of both outputs and process outliers towards the hyper-productive, hyper-performative, socially ‘fit’ developpee processed through fast, focused, homogenising development. Both are supportive of the growth of rational organisations and rational societies. Both outputs and process, have as a by-product, a tendency towards consensus.

5D

Your purpose, our power: questioning the paradigm

As an example of what I believe is so right and yet so wrong in the dominant, organisational, commodified space of adult (and leadership) development I’ll focus in on Mezirow (1997) and transformational learning. Mezirow was a rationalist, firmly rooted in Habermasian thinking and also influenced by Paolo Freire, in pursuit of educational liberation. Libertarianists might applaud Mezirow’s assertion that an individual learning to think “as an autonomous and responsible agent is essential for full citizenship in democracy” (1997). However when democracy is then understood to be a consensus-shaped, economic project where autonomous thinkers are actually required *for the workforce* (p7) liberation, and this is then followed by a short linguistic and political slide to the more dutiful “autonomous, responsible thinkers” (Mezirow, *ibid* – my emphasis), we realise liberation is not the intention at all. Responsible to whom, for what? Whilst discourse is to be encouraged it should be directed towards “a universal, rational consensus” (p.9).

Mezirow speaks elegantly of the need to perceive and question one’s assumptions and the assumptions of others in pursuit of liberation from our frames of reference, a purpose with which I wholeheartedly agree. However, this is set within a framework where educators are benign and with full control from positional authority over the *tabula rasa* learners (p10). This is

a decision framework that John Heron (1999) would categorise as Hierarchical, what Starhawk (2011) might judge Power-Over, and, in my view, as part of a wider picture that Freire (1972) might actually consider oppression.

In transformational learning, it seems development is *for* autonomy, independence and authenticity, but *to a point*. There *is* space for criticality, but not too much. Use critique for consensus.

Critical becomes consensus: what I contest is how far rationalism and consensus seeking has gone in shaping the adult development/learning agenda. The current hollow, but necessary and well-meaning shift to doing development online feels like the ultimate extrapolation of this rationalist, functionalist, homogenising trend, bound as it is to the ‘for the common / your own good’ moral levers. We have (or had) a chance to stop and think, to ask ‘what are we doing?’; ‘what are we doing this for?’; ‘is what we are doing development or are we just going through the motions of ‘doing development’ in order to not rock the boats, to maintain the feeling of normality, to feel the safety of our habits?’ . We are using a criticality veneer to support consensus.

Perhaps most worrying is the effect of fast, furious and unthinking development on discourse and dialogue. These often feel nullified: either consensus-washed or just circumvented as we consciously avoid the inevitable conflict of engaging from our ever-deepening binaries, the extremes that seem to infect every facet of the (*nicht so offen*) public sphere.

On purpose in leadership development

6D

Whilst there are of course some very human, creative, purposeful examples of doing leadership development out there (e.g. Gunnlaugson, 2011; Boje et al, 2015; Kempster et al, 2017; Flinn, 2019), a scan of the sector shows the vast majority of leadership development programmes on offer are, mostly operating as instrumentalist, caricaturist and normative *leader* learning. These leader-builders come under the guise of hundreds of different labels e.g. transformational, collaborative leadership development (Ardichvili et al, 2016; Petrie, 2014; Day, 2014). When much of leadership development is really leader development (Day, 2014) – a programme *for* the (rapid) shaping of individuals into a pre-specified leader-shape (Gagnon & Collinson, 2014), I fear ‘leaders’ should actually be called ‘followers’: of norms, of the organisational and societal ideals.

What does leader and /or leadership development achieve? Does it work? Are we creating organisational-political-social superheroes? Are places and people transformed; hubs of collaborative, sustainable, more authentic and distributed, empowered change? According to many reports (e.g. Kaiser & Curphy, 2013; McKinsey 2014) and media claims (innumerable websites) most leadership development programs fail in some way or another. As explored elsewhere (see Emptying Leadership), something is wrong. Many things in fact.

More globally perhaps the idea of leadership itself has failed (Little, 2019). Within leadership development it seems the expectation of what ‘better’ or ‘good’ leadership looks and feels like has failed in its alignment, articulation and delivery. The crux, I would say is a philosophical and also deeply pragmatic problem: ‘What is leadership, and ergo leadership development, for?’ (following Berry’s (1990) inquiry: ‘What are people for?’).

Doing Development

In the current, modern-world scenario it seems the most ubiquitous answer is: to produce hyper-performative, hyper-productive, beautifully brilliant individuals, performing and producing for an ever-growing, ever-richer lifestyle-firm-state.

Is this all an unavoidable result of the underlying politico-social agenda of modernity or is there still a place and pace for doing leadership development differently, *for* leadership?

Reflections from now: I realise I am both angry and slightly sickened writing this piece. Feeling disillusioned, disenfranchised and so, so disappointed in what ... in myself for being part of this 'industry', this perpetual motion machine. The thinking and idealism I started out with feels crushed – gone is the humanity of Dewey and Rogers, the fight of Freire and even the over-simplistic circles of Kolb. Maybe I'm looking back to days of experiential learning practise and constructivism-lived-in-learning in hills, in airy bright rooms and creaking old halls with the proverbial rose-tints on. There is something about the walks and talks on rainy fells, the ink-stained hands and scuffed knees of flipchart etchings on dried-mud floors; the dhaal stains and whirring fans of sticky dining rooms where arm-whirling professors extol the virtues of 'agile' I'm nostalgic for the Places of doing development and Pace that wasn't jack-hammering generative exploration into soundbites and links. I feel the loss or at least the change in Place and Pace and their impact on Practice (and ultimately Performance). It is just not possible to practice, to do development experientially, collaboratively, exploratively in a compressed and accelerated, urbanised and Zoom-ified place-pace. It becomes, I become performative. What happens to performance – to making a difference, to change, to 'expanding and growing'? It is squeezed out. There is no Place or time for this. Whatever is this doing development for? Is it even doing development or is it just playing the game, getting the click, getting the money? I realised some time ago how utterly 'done' with 'training' I am and its political agenda of pushing the change on to individuals stuck within broken and outdated systems and structures. 'Be the change!' 'lead the change!' 'Release the leader within!' means it's all on you now, because changing the system is too bloody hard to even think about.

I realise I need to bring my practise, my purpose for doing development back to places and paces where doing development is possible, that themselves do the development.

Time to change: In my own practice world at least, it is time for a paradigm shift in approaches to development, a rethinking of what development is *for* and how we go about achieving, about practising this. I seek a re-balancing back towards criticality, providing “an arena where differences can be confronted” (Mouffe, 1998, no page), a place and pace where healthy conflict and contestation “with a deep respect and concern for the other” (Chambers, 2001 - net article) can be supported in pursuit of generous thinking, generative discourse and *for* development, maturing and growth *per se*.

The transformative folks wished to challenge assumptions. Looking back at what has been achieved on this pathway, and what has not, I suggest we continue this challenge and *also go* deeper and further in noticing, critically exploring and perhaps challenging the underlying frameworks of assumptions.

A first step on this pathway is holding critical questions alight and alive. In my work this means:

- Problematising purpose, practice and the habits that bind us;

Doing Development

- Wondering what has happened to Place and how we re-find it, re-locate;
- Asking who sets the Pace and why;
- Querying the carrot-stickiness of Performance in development and
- Considering how we bring back People in exchange for 'fungibles'.....

These are explored below as different approaches to practice and theories-in-practice.

Why: leadership development for... leadership for:

Underpinning my practice and inquiry is the belief that leadership development is for encouraging, challenging and supporting the flourishing of leadership practises that are for critique in and beyond the Frankfurt school theoretical frame i.e. development is in pursuit of the liberation of leadership as a force for good in the world; emancipation, towards an end to suffering for all things.

Different people doing leadership differently, doing their own dances of 'enough', into, with the world (and its people) around them likely all have different aims and ideas: therefore development should support their ability to do leadership in the way, of the place and at the pace that is 'fit' for them in that situation.

To achieve this I believe there are several core practices to practise: how we pay attention (notice); choose; act and continuously reflex. My proposition is that leadership development is therefore, at least in part, *for* supporting the practise of these practices.

8D

How: shaking the paradigm - Radical Embodied Cognition and the emptiness of causation

I'd like to consider two very different schools of thought on how we approach doing development differently. Both challenge us in the 'how' and 'with what'.

Proponents of radical embodied cognitive sciences (RECS) encourage us to think differently about how we think. They like to challenge assumptions about the most embedded frameworks. RECS perspectives "suggest how we learn and develop our expertise is shaped, constrained and enacted through exploration and interaction with our physical environment" (Malinin, 2019, p1).

RECS rejects computational metaphors and specifically the linear computational model of cognition – [perception, then cognition, then action (Hurley, 2002)] and proposes that cognition is "best understood as a dynamical system involving brain, body and world" (Thompson and Varela, 2001, p.418). That is, the mind is located in the brain and body and environment. RECS brings back Place.

The interconnected nature of cognition, of mind is understood in four ways (4Es):

- *Embodied*: removes the duality of mind-body by recognising their co-evolution and describing them within a single body schema (sensory-motor system) that "functions without explicit awareness, structures our interactions with the world and shapes our mind at a fundamental level" (Gallagher, 2015, p.141)
- *Embedded*: how we shape and are shaped by place in "a system of relationships and interactions situated within a socio-material environment" (Malinin, *ibid* p.3). This echoes Ingold's (2011) description of artisans building their craft, their situated practice.
- *Enactive*: a type of *autopoiesis* – we make sense of the world by our actions in it. Yaneva (2009) describes an artist 'thinking-in-practice'.

- *Extended*: where thinking happens with and through external artefacts. For example, as I think-write my laptop is part of my thinking mind.

The RECS position aligns closely with the Buddhist epistemologies I have discussed throughout this thesis in terms of interconnectedness and dependent origination of all things, including thought and knowledge. Specifically, it challenges the notion of separate, external causes that ‘do something’, that flick a neuronal switch to create a response. This idea is explored further below.

4Es and leadership development: If we accept the RECS premises and meld these with earlier observations and reflections on the importance of Place in doing leadership, specifically in the practice of ~~containment~~ as leadership in-with-of place, then doing leadership development demands attention to whole body, embodied experience. It demands paying attention to the interactions and relationships with other people, physically and / or emotionally present. It demands paying attention to relationships with the ‘everything-else’ of where we are; to development place-spaces; and to movement in and through those places. To so much more than the knowledge, skills, reflection, action loop. To moving beyond the linear, circles of experiential learning. To thinking about reflexion-in-action; to enacting embodied metaphors and other confluences of previously separated ideas.

What might this look, feel and be like if we approach development of individuals, groups, communities and beyond in this way?

Metaphors of mind – letting go of limiting frames of reference

Consider what the computer metaphor for mind does. It is almost impossible to think of any aspect of brain functioning without invoking the language of computation e.g. inputs, outputs, plasticity, processing, memory. Chemero (2011) notes it wasn’t always like this and also isn’t like this in other cultures. For example, pre computation in the Industrial Revolution period we had machine metaphors, prior to this Greeks believed our temperament was regulated by humors. I suggest our current conceptualisation of *what* we are developing (mind-self) and *how*, is profoundly affected by our conceptualisation of our intellectual-selves. If our ‘I’ is hard- and software-like, then performative, ‘instrumental’ improvement makes absolute sense. It feeds the trope of fungible beings servicing the endless upgrade of the human project, where faster = better, smarter = value-add, processing = doing.

What if we think differently about how we think? How does that change developing, learning and doing?

RECS and Models: from representations to useful tools

Sanches de Oliveira et al. (2019) challenge us to think differently about models per se, not just our model of mind. They propose a shift from ‘models of’ (representational), to ‘models for’. “Understanding models as “models for” naturally motivates thinking about models as tools that are used by someone to do something in some context.” (my emphasis, 2019, p.6). The authors call this idea of “building tools that help us deal with possible futures” (ibid, p.2) and alternative situations, artifactualism. ‘Models for’ rather than ‘models of’ is, they say, rooted in the work of James (1907) and Vygotsky (1978) (both in Sanches de Oliveira et al, 2019)

“For artifactualists, abstraction and idealization need not be seen as processes of misrepresentation; moreover, falling short from complete and accurate representation of some target (given some definition of representation) need not be seen as a shortcoming. If models are “models for”—for certain uses and for certain

users—then any process that makes the model more useful and more usable will, by definition, make it a better model: and this is so even if, on some or other account of representation, these processes are properly described as making the model less representationally accurate.” (p.7 ibid)

What happens if we take a similar approach to the relation between doing leadership development and models (or stimuli of any sort)? If we use a ‘models of’ approach we may take Bill George’s very popular books on Authentic Leadership (2007) and, as I have done and others standing in the Critical Leadership Field, critique this as a misrepresentation, an incomplete ‘model of’. Similarly, with any of the academic treatises on power, sustainability; or Emotional Intelligence, TRUST equations; in fact *any* of the other models out there in the vast emptiness of leadership development. However, if we take a ‘model for’ doing leadership (development) then the vast emptiness potentially becomes a vast abundance.

I’ve been noodling around this idea of ‘any stimulus will do’ since a rather grumpy academic in a leadership programme offered a provocation along the lines of ‘I love airport Leadership guru books. They make me think’. Whilst he may have been speaking cynically, he was right. If we take the ‘models for’ approach, then *anything* can be ‘stimulus for’.

There is a solid metaphysical case for describing the causal powers of things without them needing to have any intended ‘for’ inherently within, designed into them. That case is raised by Nagarjuna and is the foundation of his treatise on emptiness and dependent origination, the causal process.

10D

The central tenet of Madhyamaka Buddhism is that all things are empty of inherent nature, of essence.

The question Nagarjuna wrestles with and in his core work, The Fundamental Stanzas, is how things ‘come to be’ the causal process. Specifically, he negates the idea that things (causes) have “specific causal powers” with which they bring about their effects – this would imply that events or states have essence, and part of their essence is their power (Garfield, 1994).

1:1 “neither are entities self-caused nor do they come to be through the power of other entities.” (Chapter 1, the Fundamental Stanzas on The Middle Way – Nagarjuna)

Instead Nagarjuna proposes that “causal relations simply amount to explanatory useful regularities” (p.222, ibid) and uses the term “condition” “an event, state or process that can be appealed to in explaining another event, state or process” without imagining things have an internal ‘essence’ containing an “occult” power. Nagarjuna proposes four such conditions. Garfield (ibid) helps us make sense of these conditions with a simple example (p.223):

“Suppose that you ask, “Why are the lights on?” I might reply as follows: (1) Because I flicked the switch. I have appealed to an efficient condition. Or (2) because the wires are in good working order, the bulbs haven’t burned out, and the electricity is flowing. These are supporting conditions. Or (3) the light is the emission of photons each of which is emitted in response to the bombardment of an atom by an electron, and so forth. I have appealed to a chain of immediate conditions. Or (4) so that we can see. This is the dominant condition. Any of these would be a perfectly good answer to the “Why?” question. But note that none of them makes reference to any causal powers or necessitation.”

To link this back to RECS and my cynical leadership client, following Nagarjuna there is no 'development essence' inherently within the models, actions, programmes, books, gurus or other materials from which we seek to activate our development: they contain no causative power, nor do they not have power. If the causal relation, in this case the power to stimulate development, is in our explanation, within whichever condition type we prefer to use, then it is within our power to ascribe a causal relation to any object, state or process and its effect on our (or someone else's) development. It is how we choose to perceive; how we choose to encounter and shape the 'for' in the 'what is this for' the object. We can choose the dominant condition.

Pick any artefact and ascribe it 'for development'. The skill of the developpee (and developer) then, is in choosing to 'give cause to' something and in *crafting the relationship* with that thing. For example, I might pick up a copy of HBR: if I ask 'Why read this?' I can answer, because I chose to (efficient); because my eyesight is 20/20, the text is attractively laid out and clear (supporting); because I have it in my hands in front of my eyes, it is close enough and I have an urge to read something (immediate) or so that I can develop my leadership potential (dominant condition).

If I choose the dominant condition 'for' my development, then it is up to me to critically assess how best to approach this, how to create the 'for', how to shape the relationship with the HBR. I may choose to read it all and think; discuss with friends; test and try some of the ideas; translate it to Russian; speak it out loud – there are a multitude of 'how, what, where, when, how long, how much, with whom etc' of relational ways I can explore in making this HBR 'for' leadership development.

11D

Part of the art of doing development is therefore in the *noticing* of the 'everything else', the clumsy tools; the *critical selection* of the 'other' and the *shaping of the relationship* with this to craft the optimal 'for' for me, my team, my developpees etc. It is the relationship of the tool with the user, the skill of the user in finding good use for that tool, rather than the perfection of the tool itself as crafted by the toolmaker. Borrowing an Ingold (2011) metaphor, a blunt and imperfect saw will make it tricky to cut perfectly planed wood even for an artisan carpenter. However, if the carpenter uses her artisanship to identify what makes a saw 'fit for use' and what doesn't, she will have improved her craft. She may even be able to persuade the toolmaker to improve his too.

In summary:

It's time to re-capture and articulate the Purpose of doing leadership development as a project for humanity, for whole people, and for all-the-other-things-that-are-not-productive (in addition to 'for' productivity and performance).

The sense of loss I feel for Place in doing leadership development is substantiated by the RECS 4Es approach, by Tim Ingold's (ibid) exploration of situated practice and my previous exploration of place in doing leadership. Place has a place in the 'coming to know', of developing.

Doing Development

Place, the location of doing development, is in the relationships between developer and everything-else of mind-body-world. The exploring of these relationships, the shaping of them is key to doing development.

Everything potentially has a place in doing development, even the clumsiest of artefacts can become a tool, if we have a critical understanding of where we are going, the 'what for' of development, and also the skill to do the 'how', to transform the inert (to us) artefact into the development stimuli. To give the 'what' 'for'.

If we look to the origins of (the term) 'development' and to other epistemologies there are different models we can adopt, adapt and evolve for doing development in our situation. Development doesn't need to be directional, journeying or at pace; a followership of the edicts of society, of 'others'. It could also be agentic and maybe even enjoyable.

To leadership development practice – a proposal for ~~containment~~

A position:

མི་ རྒྱུ་ རྒྱུ་ རྒྱུ་ Doing development is located in exploring the relations between developer and world.

མི་ རྒྱུ་ རྒྱུ་ རྒྱུ་ Doing leadership is located in the relations between leadership and world.

མི་ རྒྱུ་ རྒྱུ་ རྒྱུ་ Doing ~~containment~~ is the art of dynamically balancing the pushes and pulls of self-others-world to create safe-enough, confident-enough, problematized-enough (and many other 'enoughs' besides) arenas for doing leadership *for* 'good'. Doing ~~containment~~ is a core practice of doing leadership.

མི་ རྒྱུ་ རྒྱུ་ རྒྱུ་ Doing ~~containment~~ requires continuous awareness of, attention to, and wise choices of actions for doing leadership to the best we can, in the here and now (on a loop). Doing ~~containment~~ therefore requires an artisan ability to be in and dynamically explore relationships with self-other-world. To do ~~containment~~ is also located in relations. It demands doing relations well.

མི་ རྒྱུ་ རྒྱུ་ རྒྱུ་ རྒྱུ་ Doing leadership development is therefore located in relations. At its core it is about the art of exploring the relations we are in with self-other-world and growing wisdom-enough to make these 'for' doing leadership, for doing ~~containment~~ (and also choosing when to stop, what to reject).

What are the skills, abilities, the stuff we need for exploring relationships?

What does this mean for practice?

Consistency - practices to practise

As Neil Ralphs notes in his (2016) paper, leadership development requires practising to grow practice. As with developing expertise and artisanship in other walks of life, there are few short cuts. Instead there are long hours and consistency (Tarchin Philips, 2018): the every-day discipline of paying attention and of doing the work. I suggest we approach doing leadership development with the 'what is it you are prepared to endure or give up?' question, rather than 'what is your goal?'.

How does discipline and consistency interlink with the worlds of leadership development programmes, airport books, and website wonders? I suggest the discipline is in the constant alertness to opportunities, to positioning these artefacts as 'for' leadership development. It's about maintaining a safe-enough, confident-enough, critically-alert-enough position to scoop these up or reject them as needed. It's also about working to have personal ~~containment~~ and to be able to extend this to do leadership development and do leadership in-relation-with wider worlds, with greater influence and impact.

Any stimuli will do – you drive

The stimuli are all there, all around, all connected. Doing development is up to you: using your agency, making choices, crafting your own journey. This may be a journey of heroes *a la* Campbell (1949) involving leaving to quest, decisive crises, action and a home to come back to transformed, generous and wise - the masculinised, movement-oriented monomyth. Or it may perhaps be an equally discomfiting inner journey of critical reflexion and being 'in mysteries' (Simpson *et al*, 2002) – a sitting in to, coming-to-know.

It may be an unfurling.

Or something else.

Our Purpose may be crystal clear providing direction, a 'where to', and sense of growth. Equally, it may be fuzzy, unclear and frustratingly unknown. However, to commit to doing the stuff of development will require some setting of intention. Some will – willingness.

13D

The Places we are 'of', in-relation-with, think-with and through, will inform, shape and also be shaped by our being, doing and meaning-making. Paying attention to Place and what it-we (I-Thou) does is both developing and shaping our development.

Messiness: doing development will inevitably be messy as we freeze-unfreeze, become-unbecome, sense-make and break, circle, stall, fail, forget and go back again. Keeping moving, dynamic and of-different-places affords opportunities for the unplanned, serendipitous, shake-it-up moments of big steps amongst the dance of a thousand small steps. We may never fully grasp the slippery, elusive, diffuse knowing of 'doing development' in-the-moment, and perhaps only with protracted effort, with practise, notice its happening from a future place looking back. As Law suggests (2004), our knowing may be messy and not fit acknowledged methods of capture. I would extend this idea, and note the irrepressible messiness of attempting to orchestrate, let alone plan, ones' own or others' development through an un-mappable and unstable world-to-come.

Structure, props and guides: this development gig may sound like a solo-process, but it is not and cannot be, if the process of development is the process of exploring relations. We are only one part of the relation. There are many other relational parts, in theory, a messy infinity. Our limitation is the extent to which we are able, or wish to perceive them.

Acknowledging our messiness, fallibility and forgetfulness it would be wise to include guides in our relations; to have resources and props around us; to borrow a little of the concepts of rituals, stages and other supporting structures from other philosophies.

My Hindu friend, now in his third *asrama*, has his guru-ji, (teacher) and has “been beloved by him for the last 18 years” (Neupane, 2020). Gurus, as such, come in all shapes and sizes – critical friends and family, peers, coaches, mentors and the like. I suggest we both acknowledge our existing important, consistent, shaping relationships and their role *for* our development, and also seek new people with whom to explore new, critical, safe, confident relations with *for* development too.

The people in all but one of this inquiry’s Case Studies had sought out and acknowledged these key figures: with a few small steps towards a more critical, structured and perhaps formalised relationship-intention; in some cases also actions towards better sense of safety, these ongoing relations could provide a nourishing, challenging source *for* development.

Buddhism has an eightfold path, Hinduism a plethora of rituals and rites for passage. In supporting-challenging the doing of leadership development we might benefit from setting some markers of movement: signposts, features that stop us getting too lost, challenge us to reflect and reconsider; support us to know when to keep going and when to take a rest. Establishing our own markers, the lines in sand with the help of our critical guides as we start and move in-along our development practise of practice could provide simple-enough firm-enough structures to the journey.

There are models and resources for development in so many fields and practices. Some are even very close in spirit and concept to the ~~containment~~-dance, for example: the nurture-structure ‘highway’ model for developmental parenting (Clarke & Dawson, 1998); and the case for recognising ‘in situ’ learning in the teaching professions (Evans, 2019)). The skill for authoring our own, ongoing leadership development is in noticing, creating and exploring (expanding, reducing, adapting) relations with these models to become tools for development.

Therefore, a core and very tangible process for supporting leadership development is the building of a foundational set of skills: noticing (critical attentiveness, curious inquiry) – critical reflection – sitting in to a position – being in mysteries – agency-ability to act – step up/ step into / step down – assumption cracking. And the discipline and criticality to keep practising and questioning these crafts with 4E cognition....

A metaphor for doing leadership development; for doing leadership; doing ~~containment~~

Imagine the novice kayaker: as she learns her craft she creates splashes, over-steers to the left; pulls too hard on the right; fails to read the small eddy ahead, misses the sun sparkling on the waterIf you watched her from above she would appear to zig and zag erratically across the lake surface in a wild, untamed dance.

As she practises the stroke of the paddle; practises reading the water-waves-wind; attunes to the presence of boats-swimmers-birds-fish and learns to read their ‘how-where’. She can pause and float, change direction, change pace. She becomes artisan in cognising, in her craft. She may appear, from the God position above, to move in a straight, smooth line, not dancing at all. However, if we lose the God position and choose partial positions closer, lower, in front or behind we notice she is not still at all, not smooth, still wiggling, but with more finesse, smaller, tighter, more fluid strokes – still dancing attentively.

Doing Development

Zooming out again we may also notice she is one of a myriad of kayakers bumping, colliding and perhaps eventually attentively synchronising their dances, wakes and currents in an alive-to, of-water, of-air, of-each-other limning.

Figure D3: a metaphor for doing leadership development

Summary

Doing development *for* leadership and hence for ~~containment~~ needs purpose-enough; commitment-enough; practise of practices; support and challenge through critical guides and guidances.

Everything and anything can be a tool for doing development; our practice is to practise growing the skills to explore the relations with the self-body-world to make good-enough choices and use our agency to use these tools wisely.

There are further explorations of the 'where', 'how to' and 'what for' of doing development throughout the Sections of this thesis.

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Doing Research: the Cases

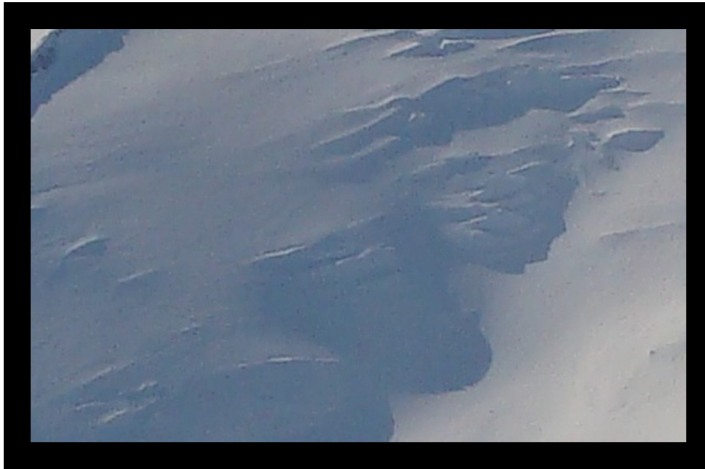
This Section contains the four studies of the primary research.

They should be read in sequence as one Section.

- | | |
|---|-------------------------------|
| 2.1 The Case of CoAA – seeking containment (Study One) | page 2C -26C |
| 2.2 The Case of CoBB – (Study Two) | page 28C -44C |
| 2.3 The Case of Team GROW (Study Three) | page 45C -51C |
| 2.4 The Case of the Toxic Team (Study Four) | page 53C -70C |

1C





The Case of Co AA – seeking containment (Study One)

2.1 The Case of CoAA – seeking ~~containment~~ (Study One)

Introduction and Context

This Study describes what happened doing research with CoAA, what emerged and what this may mean in relation to doing ~~containment~~ and doing leadership.

In summary: the intervention with CoAA was the first real time, embodied activity of the inquiry with participants: the primary research. The intervention drew from a Constructivist Grounded Theory Methodology (CGTM) for its strategy and tactics (explored fully in Research Project Approach Section).

Other Sections to find more details on Where, Where this Case Study sits, Why and How:

For a full process map of the real-time inquiry activities please see the Research Project Approach Section. In here you will also find a short summary of the organisation (repeated below for ease) and the rationale for choosing this organisation at this time and with this strategy. That Section focuses on the Why and the How of the real-time inquiry. The Position and Place Section describes and explores the Where of the inquiry, locating the participants (and researcher) in the socio-economic, political situation of 2017-18 and the surrounding cultural narratives.

3C

The **Study** below focuses on the ‘Whats’: what happened, what emerged, what this means (meant at the point of departure from the intervention and means now in the context of the wider inquiry).

The aim of the intervention: to observe what was happening in CoAA – how it was to be there; how people work together; how leadership was being practised; and to notice if ~~containment~~ was an aspect of this.

Assumptions on entering this intervention

The assumptions I was under:

- ~~containment~~ is probably a helpful practice for ‘good’ leadership;
- I’d be able to perceive it, or at least the safety and problematisation aspects (and maybe others would too);
- that it was OK (ethically, morally) to make the intervention and that in some way the process was ‘for good’, especially when wrapped in amongst tangible organisational and leadership development activities;
- that I would be ‘OK’ in the process too;
- that being different (Western) was both helpful and unhelpful and that I could use the privilege of being from outside on the inside to aid the inquiry (and the firm).

I did not assume participants would willingly engage or see the usefulness of the inquiry without some more ‘business-like’ free consultancy and / or a directive from the boss. I assumed that my presence, the activities would cause at the very least a ripple in the skein of business-as-normal

and potentially waves and eddies i.e. research bias was inevitable and needed to be kept explicit.

Finally, despite years of doing contract research at large and small scale I was rather freaked out by the ‘proper academic research’ requirements, mysterious discourse and expectations of the academy. My assumption was that whatever I was doing was wrong (not ‘proper research’), that I better fake it anyway and expect to be caught out eventually.

Summary of the Who and Why of CoAA:

(reproduced from the Research Project Strategy Section)

The first participant firm (CoAA) is a Multi-National Enterprise (MNE) of around 10,000+ employees who granted access to its central teams and leadership layers based from its Headquarters in Kathmandu (Nepal). This firm is part of a wider \$1bn turnover Group I have been working with for several years. It is a third generation family-owned and run business (all male, all Indian origin, Nepali nationals) with an increasingly successful growth and profitability trajectory globally.

Why this firm? Pragmatics: I had trust, deep access and knew them enough to ‘read’ situations, but not too closely that I felt compromised. Because of the size of the firm I could vary the scale and scope of intervention if needed.

Academically: to work within a different cultural context that should, by nature of its difference, hold up to scrutiny assumptions from the West that may / may not be helpful.

4C

[Some context on the structure, relationships and business of CoAA](#)

CoAA Business: As noted CoAA is primarily a distributor of Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) in Nepal. It distributes some of the globe’s biggest brands plus many associated only with South & SE Asia. Most of the products are imported by land from India, some are manufactured in country under local franchise agreements to the multinational owners and some are local brands. The business has been growing very rapidly, capitalising on the exponential growth in the middle-classes and urbanisation since the end of the civil war. Goods are distributed across the entire length of the country. Previously, using a just-in-time warehousing system, post-earthquake, using more local storage. The goods go to retailers to sell to the public. These retailers range from modern-style supermarkets (a booming segment) to tens of thousands of tiny huts and stalls. To cater for this end of the market CoAA sought the creation of micro-sized packs of well-known brands so making their consumption affordable for the majority of the populace. As is typical in S Asia, CoAA employees work directly in the stores to look after the supply, storage and presentation of their own brand lines.

CoAA structure: CoAA staff are organised into business verticals each of which focuses on one or more brand families. Each vertical is led by a Business Head (BH). The verticals (brand teams) are separate and siloed within the CoAA headquarters in Kathmandu. Thus staff doing exactly the same type of job for brand X, Y and Z have very limited connection and, in fact, the BHs actively

compete, instilling competitive tactics and practices into how 'their' teams work too. Competition is based on sales targets, volumes and other performance numbers. The majority of CoAA staff work outside ('in the market') managing relationships with retailers, and in warehousing, sales and logistics. Sales teams regularly come in to the HQ office for meetings. BH and managers often go out 'to the market' to keep up to date with Point Of Sale services, meet retailers and check on staff performance.

In addition to and outside of the verticals are a small HR team and a growing IT team, who at the time of inquiry, were engaged in a large scale programme of digitising sales systems and warehousing. HR had been a largely operational level team focused on managing the relatively high volume of staff turnover, sourcing staff from agencies (most staff are not directly employed by CoAA) and managing frequent, minor, internal disputes. A new HR lead hoped to systemise people management by creating documents for staff handbooks, performance management, on-boarding and other protocols. He also aspired for HR to have a role in strategy. HR was not taken seriously by most Business Heads and treated with suspicion by many staff.

CoAA HQ – the place: a very modern, bright suite of offices in a high rise building in central Kathmandu, occupying several floors. Most staff were housed in a central open office in rows of cubicles. Some teams sat together, others were scattered. The Business Heads had larger cubicles at one end of the open room. One side of the cubicle area is lined with glass walled offices, used for meetings. The Directors have a suite of large, comfortable offices on a separate floor near to an ornate boardroom and the Group's administration team. There is also a large self-service staff canteen, roof garden and Directors' restaurant.

5C

CoAA strategy and current focus: there is an ongoing and accelerating drive for growth, through capture of new markets as they open up (e.g. the shift from traditional Nepali foods to Western brands for breakfasts; new taste for wine...), aggressive dominance of sectors already occupied and ongoing struggle with grey market operators (illegal imports of brands over the porous Indian border) and mafia.

CoAA People: who is CoAA and who is not is a surprisingly tricky question that no one, not even HR, could answer. The reason being the over-riding use of staff contracted through and by manpower agencies, the layers of hierarchy between and within HQ staff, staff in the market, warehousing etc. For the purpose of this inquiry I consider all staff present in the HQ as CoAA, including all 'visiting' staff. The sense of identity, of being part of CoAA, and the commensurate pride, glamour and elevation of being connected closely to international brands, working in international offices and for 'Indian' leaders and above all of the size and scale of operations, the vast power and money, was a characteristic of the majority of staff I encountered directly and indirectly. This is the 'magic dust' that family, friends and others, including future employers, perceive is sprinkled liberally onto all staff, a social illusion of assumed wealth and status, incidentally also widely bestowed on INGO workers. It is perhaps the ultimate brand association.

CoAA staff range from urban-educated, rising middle-class, twenty somethings at the start of a hoped for stellar career path, to mid-rank plodders, company stalwarts and voracious, new-in managers and leaders. Amongst the 'junior' element most of the single women were still living with almost certain career-end as marriage and children forbade them from continuation in the world of work, although a handful marrying into more open-minded families had managed to

continue at least after marriage, and a rare few through having children too. The younger staff seemed to be at a tipping point where the new wealth of middle class, was starting to outweigh caste, although the representation of different caste groups was unsurprisingly thin overall. With no systemised career progression or professional development within the company, the only way ahead was a chance plucking from the ranks by a leader who liked the look of you, an erratic 'grace of god' act, not without risk or burden (be dropped on a whim and usually serve the leader unquestioningly, tirelessly until the next apprentice was chosen and chores deferred to them). Those young staff by-passed by the god-hands tended to Hoover up experience, contacts and knowledge for around three years then aggressively seek better paid, higher positions in more structured entities. This was a cause of much anger and frustration amongst many of the Business Heads, who absolutely refused to recognise their role in any of this. The alternative was to serve time and hopefully age into a more senior position and increasing job security. This was the route of many of the mid-rank staff many of whom seem content to keep their heads down and keep their jobs.

The CoAA managers and leaders group are, unusually for a large family firm, from a range of backgrounds and castes. All the Business Heads are male, are mostly in their 40s and 50s, around half are Indian nationals and they have a mix of educational backgrounds. All are 'self-made' in terms of their business know-how and experience: they came in as juniors and have worked their way up and around various firms. One or two have international experience outside Nepal and India although this was gained working for S Asian firms overseas branches.

6C

As mentioned the Directors / Board are all members of the founding family bar one, who is referenced here as 'Victor'. Victor had risen through the ranks most probably because of his exceedingly hard-nosed approach to performance, to targets and growth. 'Adam', my key contact and sponsor of the inquiry as the The Group Director in charge of CoAA, is the youngest of the brothers in the founding family. Like his siblings he was educated outside Nepal in India and the US, is hard-working, highly internationalised and also living in the extended family home. He is ambitious and keen to make a name for himself through external recognition (awards, networks, media, social work). Andrew, the eldest sibling, was The Group lead, distinguishing his role through astute political manoeuvrings. The family Directors are Nepalese citizens and consider themselves as such. They also maintain strong links in Indian society through wider family connections and networks. The Indian-ness of the Directors is part of the CoAA staff discourse, sometimes used positively, sometimes negatively. Andrew and Adam are close although there is definite positional and felt hierarchy between them.

What happened and what emerged: the first process and outcomes

As described in the Research Project Approach Section the interventions were concentrated over a single month at a less-intensive point in the business cycle. The month’s interventions post-ceded years of work with Directors and an Appreciative Inquiry style strategy development series of workshops several years earlier involving several of the staff participating in this inquiry. Thus there was already a degree of trust and familiarity. Following the month intensive, there were additional meetings, workshops and days of just hanging out watching, chatting and listening.

7C

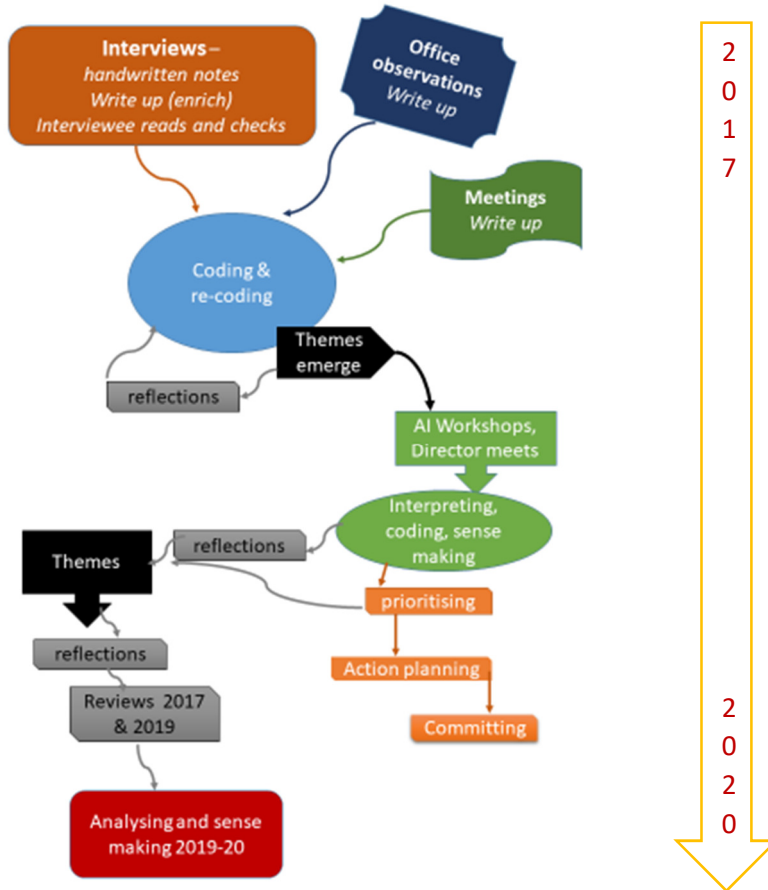


Figure C1 showing what happened when: the research intervention journey at CoAA

First interviews

I interviewed all the five Business Heads, heads of IT and HR and one staff member who was moving between teams. I held group interviews with two of the vertical teams, the new Modern Trade (MT) team and HR team. The interviewees chose the time and the place of the meeting: some called me over to their cubicle at random; some were arranged days in advance in booked meeting rooms. None chose to sit in the extensive roof gardens or outside the office HQ. Some interviews felt very informal and comfortable, others were the opposite. Most went on for much longer than planned as interviewees told stories and drifted into where they wished to go.

All interviewees preferred to have their input anonymised hence all names used are pseudonyms and all recognisable brands or organisations have been allocated pseudonyms too.

As is shown in Figure C1 I transcribed interviews from handwritten notes and annotations. I sent the transcribed interviews back to individual participants for them to check for accuracy and to edit as needed. To try to capture the fullness of the experience, non-verbal aspects and ‘my stuff’ I enriched the approved notes by adding in: memos on the scene, atmosphere, place-space etc; reflexive notes (on my experience of the interview, how my state of mind was and other influences); reflexive memos (on the experience of doing the methodology and critical analysis).

See Figure C2 for a sample of an interview record.

At Co AA HQ 3pm on a public holiday. The office is almost empty – the team have gone off to watch the latest Bollywood movie together. M7E says he has seen it before and chooses to work. *[I found out later that none of BH, bar one, join in socials, team build or other informal activities initiated by CoAA, HR or teams themselves.]* In meeting room (suggested by M7E)

M7E first points out he’s Indian from Kerala. We chat about Kerala for a few mins

Excerpt 1 – transcription, about 20 minutes in

JC: And how did the team here accept you (as new boss)?

Chocolate was like a mess, they had a huge stock to be liquidated in a month. The warehouse was absolutely full – this huge stock pile on a very short date. But we did it. Without the team I wouldn’t have been here today. The team’s input is what it was – they helped me, they coordinated with me, they worked very hard. It would have been a huge loss for me you know coming in if it had failed. I mean there was some financial loss (we made only 7rps per piece not 10).

I really really appreciate my team. They have a lot of bad habits and they (not fully faithful) are quite easy going – they don’t care – they are like children – they don’t access the importance of the things – not taking seriously

JC: What do you mean by not fully faithful? (easy going – not taking seriously)

They leave easily. You have to boost them each and every time. It’s like Hanuman – he knows his strength only when someone else talks about him. Every day I am saying to them ‘you are the major pillar of this company, you are a very good man (and gives more examples of praise) ‘how will we achieve things, we will together; come on you can do it man!’ (gets very animated) [insincerity]

They don’t come up with innovative ideas. We have to help them. They are like a little child – you have to tell them many many times – same thing many times.

So they accepted me very well. They were thinking ‘how the boss is gonna be?’ so for the first 1- 15 days span my aim is to take the confidence of the sales team. ‘he is not my boss, he is my big brother’ ‘you can talk to me about your personal problems. I will give you support and guidance as big brother.’ So inside the office we are professional so we go outside – informal

Doing Research – The Cases

place. And we go to the market 'you are the boss in your area' I give a lot of respect to them in front of the distributor. And I say 'if you don't like the distributor, he's not good then I will back you up.' It is only when you have that good relation with them that you have the chance to scold them. They see it positively. They see it as for my betterment. I say to them 'if I want to improve my performance then I have to do something to grow the company. I have to do some good, to improve then I can go for promotion. I encourage them for this'. So they understand that I have to push them. It's for their own good (too).

Figure C2: extracts from interview record with M7E, a Business Head. 'Chocolate' is a major brand.

Similarly to the interviews I have extensive notes and memos on observations from just hanging out in various spaces in the head office and also from attending team meetings (six in total). Finally I have notes, memos and reflections on training sessions and meetings I ran and of my interviews and observations with the Director. See Figure C3 and C4 for short samples. I coded these as I went along, where possible reviewing, sensing and coding as close to write up as possible, then repeating the process several times more as I accumulated more experiences. (See Section Research Project Approach for more details on the process).

I want to sit in the office but realise that as soon as I sit there I cannot see anyone else and hearing is v difficult – there's a sense of isolation and also exposure.

May 16th 17th 20th Sitting by the front desk writing listening watching I'm struck again by how much interaction there is with the help desk girls – some casual flirting some genuine joking and chatter. There's an energy about people outside the office which is much deadened inside. Stifled?

This could also be my reaction

But I compare to other quiet / large open office spaces where there is an air of productivity – a kind of quiet buzzing, a hum, as people get on with their business. At CoAA there's a heaviness.

The liveliest place is by the door area where it's all female and the arrangement is like a cube rather than long rows. People are obviously engaged in work – industrious in patches – but quiet.

Funny to see Adam walk through and not engage with anyone nor anyone engage with him.

Figure C3: Office observations and reflections

It's really cold in there (AC on full) but no one does anything about it (B has already put jacket on)

M7D comes back in as the meeting re-starts. He asks if the problem has been resolved [*did he leave deliberately??*]. S reports back. M7D is defensive and goes on the attack. RS responds. M folds arms. Position now – M&D sits square on at head of table – laptop lined up in front of him – RS directly square on opposite. RS makes rational points. M7D responds. RS interrupts and is animated in response. West and RR now engaged. S is silent. Retreated. RR queuing to interrupt W/ R/ RS/ M but seems disempowered.

R spends ages looking for power source to plug in laptop – 3 x tries but no one acknowledges or tries to help. He doesn't ask.

They are talking about a Washing powder. R responds. M7D now very aggravated. He wants a mindset change – team seem unwilling to try and change (in his view). M7D now making notes directly on to Word doc – live stream to screen. Power. Control.

Finally now R tries to plug in and RR and then M help.

M7D now very direct – finger pointing (“am I right or am I wrong?”) – then relaxes and jokes – feels parental. M7D now directs full force of argument at RS who is now agitated – legs twitching, leaning forward and everything folded. M7D comes back to risk vs support – softening tone, becomes very musical, ‘great orator’. He now brings up a report on the screen – chewing gums.

M7D now directs attention to M and congratulates him on great performance – gets everyone to clap ‘great job done on previous April’. Then to K ‘I would clap for you but you just missed your target’

Goes on to R and names the problems he faces on the lost D-lite trade. M7D now using the 3 agrees technique with M who knows he's being played and ably speaks to the figures to defend himself. Pressure being put on M – very resistant – lower voices by all.

M7D now fully stripping M out – his physical discomfort is palpable. Absolute silence and stillness from the rest. Gets ‘tikka, tika, thikka’ response. Acquiesces.

My reflections, woven in during transcription: I wondered about the relationship between the ASMs – was there one? They meet regularly and many have been with CoAA for years and years. Is this another type of dual relationship – no connection in the work place – hang out and be mates in the social sphere? There were questions posed by S around lunch. Maybe everything switches gear. It all seems so fake and false and insecure – unstable, unpredictable – the attack the snipe the betrayal could come at any time. And the praise also too – he switches from one mode to the other without breaking stride / sentence. Attacks turn to jokes and laughter- relief?

I realise I was scared of M7D – that ability to turn praise, to smile nicely and be on the attack at that same time. Insincerity. Lack of trust

Figure C4: extract from a meeting observation with the entire team of Area Sales Managers (ASMs) all senior men. Meeting is led by M7D, the Business Head. Extract is about 40 mins in. S is M7D's deputy and has been asked to step in and chair as M7D takes a call.

Language, words and non-words

Interviews were carried out mostly in English, with some Nepalese. Meetings ran in a mix of Nepalese, Hindi and English with participants switching fluidly between languages to find the most effective phrases. My comprehension of Nepali is good, Hindi less so. In these times I tuned in to the non-verbal communication, leaned-in to the group skin and transcribed these noticings into text. (See Figure C4 for an example.) This turned out to be an incredibly rich medium and a

liberation, a turning point to finally step back from what was said and focus on what was actually happening. It felt courageous to leave the interview words behind. I realised I'd been carrying a deep tension – intuiting (but hiding from actually *knowing*) that the non-verbal was where the power flows were happening, that the medium functions as part of the communication (McLuhan, 1977 in Neri, 1998), but too hemmed in by what I thought was the 'proper' CGTM and its predilection with (spoken) words, as detailed in the Research Project Approach Section. The second aspect to the fear of stepping into where I know I calibrate best, into the unconscious-conscious, was my fear of 'being overwhelmed' (Ringer, 2002). As Ringer notes part of elegant facilitation (in this case facilitation of research) is retaining the ability to remain connected to our inner selves.

At that point I realised I was quite vulnerable to the dark forces flowing and very aware that I may be overwhelmed by them – I had no personal ~~containment~~.

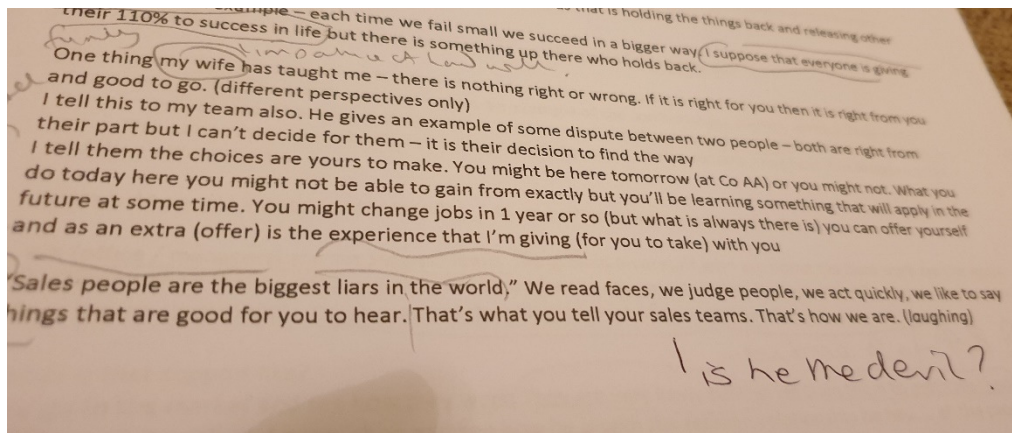


Figure C5: the final comment by a BH after a 90 minute interview. My annotation: I'm feeling played

Stories, storytellers and illuminations

The interviews provided stories from people, by people, of people (mostly of themselves). They were the storytellers. The stories they told gave their perspectives on their 'who', 'why', 'where from' and their 'how' in CoAA with each other. The experience of being-in-interview with these people also provided some insights on these people-in-relation: with me, with power, with place, with other people and with their past.

The observations of office activities and meetings provided the stories of how people are together. These were stories without narrators, stories performed and played out, where I, the audience sitting quietly off-stage, performed as rapporteur, capturing the stories in words. Tuning in from the outside illuminated the dynamics and unspoken 'who', 'how' and 'what' of people-in-relation with each other and with place. The relation-with-me was less acute and less of a ripple.

The interview stories- tales told

My career journey: We entered most conversations with the 'how did you get here?' 'what's your story?' questions. The older BH were keen to emphasise their humble origins ["I have a very simple story" M7D] and in common with all interviewees how hard work, seizing opportunities, drive and their ability to "learn from scratch" (M16E) had shaped their story from

the bottom to the top. [“I joined as a fresher in India with no one to help me.” M7E]. The majority also recognised family role models, mentors or patrons as an important part of their success. [“As far as mother – I will never be anywhere near the person she was..... She maintained discipline in the house. She never accepted anyone’s challenge in her domain.” M7D]. Common to all leaders was the theme of being ‘plucked from the ranks’ – a hand of God moment and / or a ‘stand-up and speak out’ incident. Many referred to their mentors / saviours as the models from whom they learned how to be successful and to lead. All had moved from company to company across sectors, some to different countries. There was courage, fight, sacrifice and adaptability in the journeys of most.

“From 2005 -15 I was out of the (FMCG) game. Almost a decade I had no knowledge of..

The number of people increased, the thought process changed. To come back again and to focus was not easy for me. I had very little time to acclimatise... I was forgetting names ...” M7D

This seems important – the need to prove himself, to have the expertise. Particularly to remember names – this was something that happened when we met. He told me his name 3 or 4 times and made me repeat it the same...

They all without fail described ‘being picked’ or ‘getting a call’ to join CoAA i.e. being headhunted, which seems to frame the relationship with CoAA and the perception of the position: the chosen ones, being gifted an opportunity and also reinforcing high self-belief and self-worth.

12C

And on the here and now of CoAA: The overwhelming sense of *who* and *what* from the interviews with leaders and managers is of paradoxes and dualities: of confidence and of faking it; of ego puffery, pride and self-proclaimed humility; of the vulnerability and fear that they both incite and live in. The solution to everything is working hard and winning. Winning means getting the (sales) numbers in. And for most, but not all, outright aggression (underhand and upfront).

Faith and religiosity infuse everything with all interviewees. This manifests in the seeking of /acting as Protectors and leaders acting “like Gods” (M15A) in both the punishments meted out and the guidance and advice of disciples. There is a culture of belief: ‘believe in me’, ‘believe in the Brands’ and of course ‘believe in the power of hard work and all will be well’.

Example Being a Protector: “I got our guys away from there. I made sure my team is fully safe. Kevin left.” (smiles) M15B speaking about a power struggle with ‘the MD’s right hand man, Kevin’ “Kevin was small-fry part of it”

Example of Munificence: “They are like children” “we have to help them. They are like a little child – you have to tell them many, many times - same thing many times”. M7E.

There’s also a notion that ‘Belief in hard work’ might even create equity “if you work hard and are sincere then there is no gender. I believe this” (laughs) [female interviewee] despite much evidence to the contrary. There’s a simmering resentment and sense of being unfairly ‘done-to’ in many, felt in the spiky, weaponised humour and, more positively, their calls for ‘trust’, ‘more connection, more honesty’ and the removal of cubicles which are widely held as barriers to communication and trust. A sense of unfairness underpins the deep frustration that toxic or

under-performing staff are not directly dealt with (trained or fired) [“the process is entirely not good”] and its impacts on everyone “due to these things the office culture is destroyed” (M15A). Equally team members feel the unfairness of solid or great performers not being recognised when very average self-promoters generally are.

Significant power hierarchies are revealed and enforced in the interview narratives. The stories told are of agentic, all-powerful bosses and supplicating, un-agentic subordinates who require moulding and scolding. The contradictions in the stories are found between-the-lines and in let-slip comments that reveal the fragility of being a leader in the threat felt as younger, more aggressive staff emerge or recruit in; and of the feeling of being watched by hungry staff waiting for them to make a slip [“240 pairs of eyes watching me – I walk the tightrope” (M7D)]. All the BH intimated or spoke directly about the pressure of work, specifically pressure to maintain high performance and growth at any cost. Some described the pressure as a positive driver, for others the weariness and stress of chasing the numbers was apparent.

Reflection: pressure seems to be a shaping factor in leading, in the culture. Does it remove agency and drive?

Whilst the bosses may *feel* watched and under threat, the people working in teams live with surveillance “When the BH is there, they (teams) are being noticed, they get fully dedicated to work and efficiency. They are very closely observed” The pressure is on when the bosses are there. The flip side of this is that once the cat is away the mice are mixing business with other tasks “of course they are doing their personal works. It’s normal”.

13C

There were several mentions of the Nepalese – Indian difference which seem to both note and resist Indian dominance/ superiority: Indian interviewees: “There is such back-biting in India – each man has allegiance to someone higher up than you, they go behind your back. [] Here (Nepal) it’s an area of comfort – your team is your team here.[...] Nepali people behave” M7D); “You know in Nepal it is very hard to get good manpower” (M7E). Nepalese interviewees: when asking if the deference he noted in CoAA people came from caste “(deference)... is an echo of Bollywood! In India this is prevalent at all levels. In government it is pervasive. Even the word ‘ji’ is odd”]; the second on how Nepalese are good workers [“like donkeys”], but “don’t present themselves well [whereas] Indian can do all blah, blah, blah”.

Tribes and tribalism prevail with leaders corralling their ‘teams’ and invoking rivalry, or at least separation from other teams physically, with communication and performance [“you know other people are around but you’re just locked in there. There’s no conversation face to face” M25B]. The BH themselves have a tight friendship group but only in the informal ‘Smokers Club’ which they laughingly acknowledge. [“(laughs, relaxes). Smoking, yes – we met to discuss regarding business – more easy” (M15C)]. Conversely they seem to rarely interact in the office and there is no formal BH group to coordinate business etc. Other staff interviewed noted other informal, friendship groups of smokers: “If a new guy joins and he smokes and there are already people on the inside who smoke then that guy joins and immediately he is on the inside. They vomit out everything and then they are part of the team” M15A

People’s perceptions of communication between BH and their teams are mixed: some note how positive it is to hear junior staff interacting robustly with managers; other report that BH rarely

speaking to their juniors individually (“you cannot ignore them all for a whole year and only speak at PA time” HR lead).

There is loyalty and pride coursing through these people: loyalty demanded by and given to the Protectors; to The Group; and above all to The Brands. Loyalty to each other seems to be generally wafer thin and collapses as soon as someone has chance to get ahead at another’s expense, especially if getting ahead means getting closer to your Protector.

There is a noticeable exception to the hierarchical construction of relationships and pervading aura of contempt, conceit, deceit and fear mingled with ‘friendship’ and loyalty and the exception is the new-in head of Market Trade (MT). This BH, M7C, is tasked with establishing a new team and a new way of working with a new and growing sector. The difference in his approach and way of being is stark. Other BH have been equally thoughtful and reflective, but with an air of duplicity and some dark undercurrents. There’s nothing of this in interview (or in subsequent team observations): M7C is relaxed, open and seems to have no game to play. He made his way up through the ranks of some of the biggest global brands in India thinking and acting differently, innovating, being entrepreneurial and speaking up even when this was against the prevailing view. He watches, listens and thinks critically. Like the others he has worked exceptionally hard, with ambition and drive, but unlike them his stories are all about the people he was alongside and leading with. The stories he told of the new role at CoAA involved getting to know his teams’ motivations, listening to everyone (personal interviews with even the most junior staff, breaking lots of taboos) and, in doing so, radically improving morale and getting results. Personal connections, care and “being a tough taskmaster” are the keys to his success he says. It seems he has a high degree of empathy and respect [“... The Boss has understood all these fears in me, so in some way I should do the same for my teams”] and understands the link between this and great team performance. He has high expectations of people around him, not in their knowledge (cf the rest of CoAA) but in their attitude [“I want cheerful, openness, positive attitude.” “I delete people with no willingness to learn”]. He uses words like love and care, and talks about values and motivation.

14C

Dynamics: what was happening between people; between people and place

Observations on the meetings

Meetings are literally that: people meeting together with no clear structure (no agenda) and no defined outcomes or reasons for meeting (purpose). They are performance venues- colosseum for tutorials, punishment and reward. Some are talking shops and some do have outcomes and most noticeably in the less adversarial meetings, there’s a naivety and lack of skills on the basics of ‘how to do meetings’. The set and costumes look right but the script is missing, hence the storyline and finale is all a wandering improvisation. In fact the ones who do have a clue what is going on are frustratingly side-swiped from showing what is needed by their bosses. There is a great deal of posturing and performance of acute power differences. People do speak and speak up, but there is something not right – they are not equal and can be belittled at any point by any one, particularly the boss. There is very little sense of team and of working together, whether the boss is there or not. It’s often hub and spoke communication, a series of 1-2-1 dialogues between the boss and the staffer.

School room tactics are frequently deployed by all: sulking, withdrawal, bullying, shouting, siding, over-speaking, use of humour as aggression. Laptops line up like defensive shields; pens are wielded scratching notes of secret words; spreadsheets on projectors used to hypnotise and quieten. Keep pointing to the numbers. Talk in numbers. From these we can make sense. Power tools everywhere.

This is soap-opera-esque drama.

In the new (MT) team there are similar degrees of chaos, some lecturing but there is also enough lassitude and space, and enough sense of purpose for team members eventually to start to get to know one another and work out what immediate actions to take. There's little command-and-control leadership here, less tension around the table overall, although still with some outbursts of highly charged exchange or negative behaviour as people jostle for position, group shape and clarity. It's noticeably much less adversarial and relatively generative compared to other meetings I observe.

In the response, re-active, survival orientated spaces of meetings there is scarcely room for action let alone for contemplation of more complex issues. For example, the incredibly wicked problem of the grey market and its disruption to core business is present but never tackled. There's no strategic space, no medium to harness the know-how in the team, the intelligence that the BHs claim to draw on.

Both IT and HR claim to be relatively autonomous [*"nobody should have to tell me what to"* IT lead]. Without the driver-stick of numbers (sales and other targets), but with relatively ambiguous goals (e.g. digitise remote sales) both have space to be curious, innovative and to communicate with each other more liberally and openly. It helps that very few others really understand what these units do. Although it was not possible to observe a full IT team meeting, they appear to have carved out a more comfortable, safer territory.

Elsewhere the numbers drive everything; they are the purpose; they provide rules for the game (get the numbers by any means possible); structure (this team is for these numbers); pathways (you got the numbers – move to the next level; you didn't – you're sacked) and behaviours. Documentation, process, systems (the how of work) are either unknowns, or known and ignored, perhaps because of their pointlessness (what do they contribute?), the effort and skill needed to create and use them (we don't have it) or perhaps their danger:

"The work planning, everything was ad hoc which allows you to get creative (sits back smiles). I got everything on paper so no more shouting matches – an agreement of expectations of service – negotiated on this and finally finally got to a point" (IT)

*So **documentation is weaponised** – a source of protection (and yet so rarely used throughout – it's a numbers place, are they afraid of documentation – or they don't have confidence in written word 'simple guys'?)*

Observations on the people, place and interactions

Panopticon: Hanging out in various spots around the HQ watching, listening and sensing the atmosphere and dynamic, my overwhelming sense is of the stifling of communication, of the shutting down of voice through a combination of the physicality of the space (I can't see you, but I can hear you, there's no privacy for chit chat let alone work related communication) and the sense of watchful eye of bosses nearby. It seem where people are not empowered or asked to discuss work then conversation becomes something that requires permission. The cubicles are quiet-ish, the meeting rooms are silent to the outsider but everything is visible. It's a mini panopticon.

Sociality: There is a sense, also very noticeable in the interviews, that for many people the office community *is* their social life, a place for enjoyment, friendships and fun. For older men their own families (wives, children) are a duty, a place of no alcohol and assuming a responsible role whereas work offers after office drinks, smokes, sales team meets in nice restaurants etc. For younger, unmarried women the office world is the chance to dress up, flirt and chat with both sexes without scrutiny from parents, aunts and uncles where for many such behaviour would be unacceptable. Many younger men may have access to bars and hangouts with non-work friends, but these have a cost. It may be that work itself, work relationships, the work place is the opportunity to test and try new versions of themselves and build new and different friendships.

Parallel universe: I felt a reasonably strong sense of 'team' and togetherness in the vertical groups I got to know and observe. Although not without interpersonal bickering and frustrations there seemed to be a general sense of cohesion, particularly with those that were able to sit in close proximity in the cubicle maze. In the informal spaces inside and outside the HQ building it was astonishing how gregarious, lively and dense the clusters of people were: local cafes packed with young men and women in the most unlikely mixes (if the work teams were anything to go by). It was like a parallel universe.

CoAA is a place of paradoxes and dualities. Are these my misreads? Truth and fiction are hard to separate.

What did the coding and scanning and recoding produce?

First round: [dark themes emerging](#)

The themes that emerged from the first round of coding were overwhelmingly dark: power and its use to maintain fear, status and to keep packs (groups) at bay was the overriding tone. There were bubbles of more positive themes largely in the informal interactions between friends; and as noted some people, including leaders, who were newer into the firm, however these were exceptions to the CoAA norm.

Some of the themes emerging:

- Patronage- Protectors – be like me – heroes with superpowers (don't shake it up)
- What you see is not what you get – duplicity throughout – faking it
- Knowledge is power (keeping ahead – withholding) (expanded in Figure C6 below)
- We are not one family, we are many (small gangs): othering, be on the inside

- Let's talk! Let's connect! Oh no..... shhhhhh they're watching and listening (control, surveillance, bubbles of chatter)
- Vulnerability – fear – insecurity (backstabbers, liars, emotional blackmail)
- Individuals are fearful (leaders included), vulnerable, isolated – be in a tribe
- Numbers rule – bow to the number (paper and people are insignificant unless in service of the numbers; documents can be dangerous and we don't trust them)
- Professional and personal compete – we're all playing the game of being a modern organisation. It looks like one, we look the part but actually it's a pretty exciting gameshow and we don't really know what the inside of a modern organisation does, how it works so we run with old school, patriarchies instead.
- What we complain about in others we see in ourselves / we do

The threads of contempt; conceit, deceit, friendship and aggression are everywhere

Knowledge is power

- Know your worth – fight for your rights (expect a fight)
- Surveillance
- Employees feed us useful info / data from the market – they are useful to us
- It's for your own good (I know best)
- I have to know more than you (don't expose me – you're snapping at my heels)
- Vulnerability – self-esteem
- Knowledge (and expertise) is where status comes from

17C

Figure C6: themes within 'knowledge is power', extracted from the 'check-in' presentation to friends and colleagues in the monsoon of 2017

My role in theme devising: I'm very aware that my state of mind at the time, my rawness, was probably as much a co-constructor of the themes through my biases. It's possible I was projecting my turmoil onto the situation, it's equally possible that by integrating into the firm's syncretic sociality (Neri, 1998) I became a funnel or repository for the dark forces and feelings extant across the teams.

Whether projecting or funnelling, the themes are, of course, a product of my own making. They reflected me-in-the-situation, me-with-the-CoAA-people. Any pretence that they did not could only be constructed from a pseudo-qualitative notion of the 'objective' researcher occupying a God position. Accepting my role in interpreting and subsequently creating themes from the situation, exposes problems inherent in the coding process: perhaps the process of doing coding is only ever the researcher inquiring into the experience of being-the-researcher-in-the-research-situation? The codes become the descriptions of what was experienced and how. Coding becomes a phenomenological inquiry into doing research. The coding process and what it produced may have been problematic, but the extant conditions experienced by many (not just me) were still useful and informative. These were experiences of power flows; lack of psychological safety; the withholding (or drip feeding) of knowledge to maintain authority (and the subsequent feeling of purposefulness this caused); people's patchy focus and the very short-

term (non-strategic) approach to challenges and opportunities. These were all real and all related to the idea of ~~containment~~, or in fact it's absence.

Noticing lack: It seemed what I was noticing was lack of ~~containment~~, if not across the whole of the HQ, then certainly a patchwork in time and space.

Questions: There were many questions raised by the themes, their nature and my reflections on what they were 'doing'. For example: Is this situation typical for Nepal, for this sector or is there something particular to this firm? How much of this is 'my stuff'? Is it possible to notice the presence of ~~containment~~, or is it something we notice only when it is *not* there?

I was mindful of Brene Brown's (2013) experience of inquiring around communication and seeing only an absence of this, had changed tack to inquire around vulnerability.

Should I change tack to and explore the dark themes?

Round Two: Checking in – getting over myself

I saw that as the co-creator of the emergent 'theory' and themes I had become enveloped in the darkness of my own situation. I wanted to know how much this had influenced the research. I felt it was not helpful to uncritically continue along a pathway of (research) 'progress', I had to keep the research problematised and check in again. As an agentic individual in the research I also had a choice. I saw Mara and named him (Figure C7). Knowing that darkness cannot exist without light, and also aware that I had to report back to the company, I re-interpreted the darkness as 'lack' (positive absence of) and used lack to re-code for strengths.

18C

Mara: Buddhist stories tell of Mara, a demon personifying temptation and distraction, who came to destroy Buddha. Each time Mara approached, the Buddha simply said, "Mara, I see you," and offered him tea, then continue in his meditation. Buddha was neither fearful nor fought. He noticed Mara with kindness. Because the Buddha knew Mara thoroughly, his act of clear seeing kindness was effective in bringing his freedom from craving and grasping. Mara represents the choice to stop being subsumed by emotions but go into them mindfully to use them to best effect.

Figure C7: Mara, the demon

Seeking out positives, and actually finding them (see Figure C8a and b), put the lie to any notion of objectivity and highlighted the absolute imperative to remain highly self-aware and transparent about my own biases, strengths and limitations. It reinforced my gut-feeling of requiring more voices in the interpretation, sense-making and breaking of the inquiry (and the fragility of having only one 'noticer' and 'recorder' in the gathering phase). And in keeping questioning everything.

The next steps then were a series of sharing and collaborative analysis with others: with the participants (and sponsor); and with friends and colleagues who had lived experience of Nepali, Indian and Western organisations and their leadership.

Re-coding for positive-neutral themes produced:

- We model behaviours and use these to grow
- We speak up (and get knocked down)
- Ambition is good – use it, go for it
- With direction and purpose we work hard
- Friendships and fun are why we're here too
- Pressure helps us get stuff done
- New in – new attitude – new approach: breathing new life
- Loyalty –lite

Figure C8a: codes from a different headspace

19C

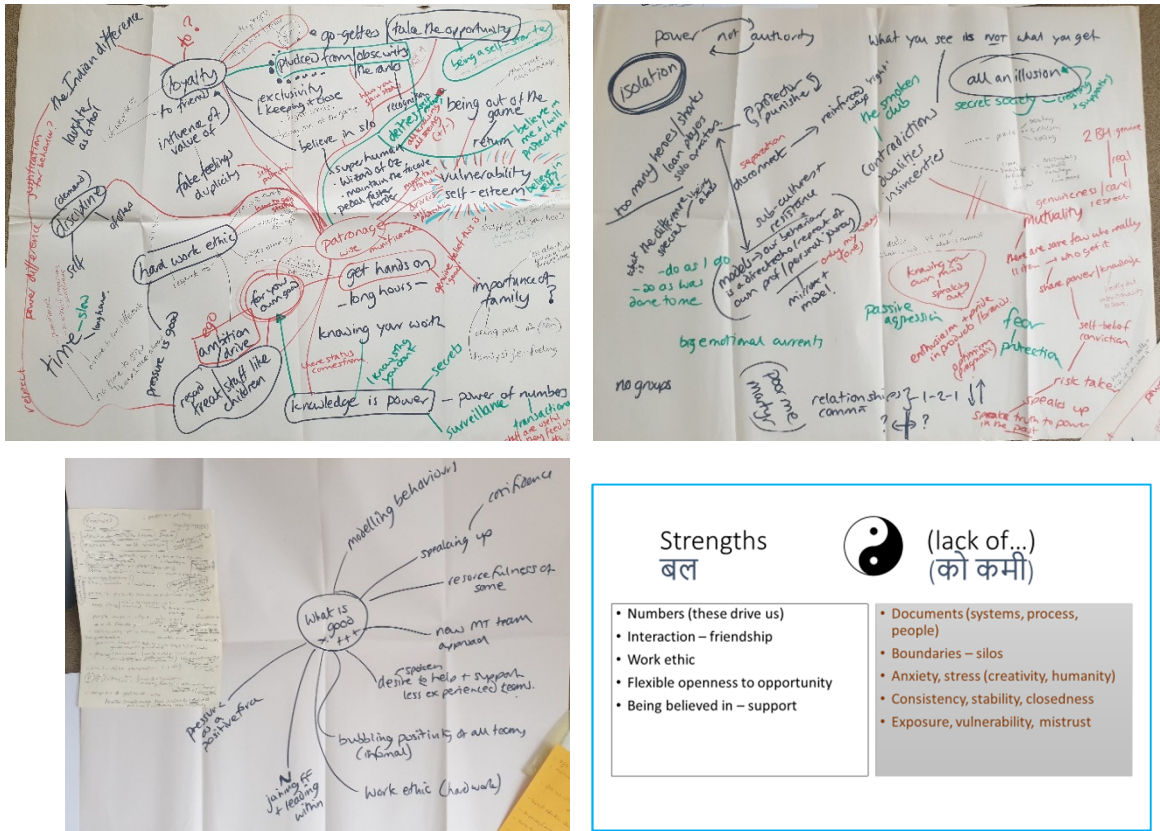


Figure C8b: phase 1 and 2, from dark to light codes – the power of the coder

The check-in within the company team was a multi-step process: first, reviewing with the Director to gain permission for next steps. Then a check-in with the Business Heads, IT and HR leads to gain their feedback on the findings and interpretation (is this true for you?). Next, an all day workshop with 35 members of staff, with a similar presentation of the findings. See Figure

C9 and C10. The full presentation and outputs are available for view in the Appendix to this Section.

Theme (neutral)	Area to explore <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • where is this a strength? • where is it overplayed? • where is it missing? 	Workshop outputs: what we want (best possible)
Numbers	Where else (besides sales targets) can we use numbers positively? Where should we not use numbers / use less?	To be 1100 crore! More granular sales numbers HR, creativity, enthusiasm..
Interaction	Where do we need more types of ..? Where do we need less?	More cross team meets More open agenda meets Professionalised meets
Work ethic	When is it too much? What else could we value? How do we recognise and reward this?	Give your best; use pressure constructively; be proactive; better work-life balance; show the value of what we do
Openness to opportunity	Where is it too much (ego driven)? How are we learning from this? Where else?	Paths to feed ideas upwards; delegation; (fairer) recognition of all / collaborative efforts;
Being believed in – supported & protected	Does everyone have this? Where do we need more / less? How do get this?	
Sharing learning, info & knowledge	Where does this (not) happen? How should we do this?	One CoAA; systemise for all; leaders should create leaders; lose I-I-I/ gain we-we-we; break silos
Being a self-starter	How can we support self-starters? How can we help everyone to grow? Is it too much? Is it everyone?	We are only working for survival now
Attracting good people	How do we keep and grow them? Get more? How do get rid of / avoid 'wrong' people?	
Being proud	Where is it? What of? Do more? Do less? Pride as motivator?	Being proud of how and who not only what; we can learn and grow; share experiences; interact directly with bosses
Focus on action (getting hands dirty)	Are we always smart with action? Where should we do more / less? What about reflection, thinking, innovating?	

Figure C9: themes explored as strengths and lack with the teams' outputs at the two AI workshops

20C

7. Being a self-starter आत्म-स्टार्टर	
As a strength	Lack of
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We're used to 'learning from scratch' • We can get smart / ahead even with no help • We are resourceful and find a way 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability of and access to help / support / resources • Wider, deeper learning (it's a just-enough to survive approach) • Cooperation, collaboration (silo) • Risk taking, creativity (narrow focus)

Figure C10: sample slide presented at AI workshops

21C

People were at first hesitant to speak out during the plenary presentation. I reflected that Powerpoint presentations were used consistently as 'technologies of power' in CoAA team meetings (after Foucault, 1972). Numbers or words on slides became 'truths' by dint of the medium and the power of the creator-projector in acts of almost religiosity. Slides were therefore difficult to challenge, as was the slide creator. Papers printed with the themes and sets of accompanying critical questions proved much more accessible and generated much discussion for participants working in small randomly mixed groups. The groups made a few minor adjustments (corrections) to the first round themes, but the main focus was on using the themes to critically explore how life was at CoAA and how it could be better. What emerged through this process (and during a second similar event in July) and then sideways through the AI 'Dreaming' phase (seeking best possible) were a whole set of actions (the CoAA transactional outputs) that people hungered for change around. The aims of the actions were to achieve a fairer work place built on trust, where different type of achievements were recognised, people protected from unfairness and with a more unified sense of a single team. The actions required can be summarised as: better HR systems, new structures such as matrices and informal processes such as out-of-office benefits and socials.

Coding the action areas produced the following meta-themes of areas that need attention. These themes are all closely associated with psychological safety and sense of belonging:

- Fairness
- Trust
- Recognition and protection
- Internal relationships – communication, togetherness

Reflection, 2019: It was only much later that I noticed how close these emergent meta-themes were to the stated foundational values of The Group (and hence CoAA). There is I suspect a whole further study in understanding the parallels of lack (absence of) and the intentional values of the Group.



Figure C11: foundational values

Reflection on the workshops' process: The needs articulated by the teams speak directly to subconscious social emotions of group relations (explored in Section Voices on ~~Containment~~), huge undercurrents that manifested in multiple tangible and less tangible actions and experiences of working within the CoAA environment. These people in these workshop scenarios had explored, co-created and then extended a sense of safety and cooperation towards a common purpose (betterment). They had wrestled with complex, seemingly overwhelming problems (organisational culture, entrenched hierarchies) and, with support and encouragement, had found ways towards 'better' and worked, for the most part, collaboratively. We had co-created and maintained ~~containment~~.

~~Containment~~ could exist here, it could be helpful and it could support more agentic action. It was happening in pockets of time and space, aside from my intervention.

It seemed a big barrier to doing ~~containment~~ in CoAA was the leadership, or at least those in leader positions.

Reflections – unresolved questions, dualities and dialogue

On psychological safety and speaking up. There is something very contradictory in what the literature says about the relation between psychological safety and people's willingness or ability to speak up; if they feel unsafe it should be quiet out there. But here it's not. People are speaking up at times when suffering immediate strip downs and punishments are likely. However they still have their jobs. Perhaps they may even be respected and promoted because of this 'stand-up, speak-out' action if the BHs are really modelling what they tell me are important aspects of their own success journeys?

What does this say about people's sense of safety? Has speaking up and the subsequent attention (negative and positive) become a ritual of CoAA culture? Does the safety of the team enable this? Does caste, naivety or something else have an influence?

If recognition for hard work is not fairly meted out, and the hyper confident, sneaks, grasses and attention seekers get recognition regardless then perhaps speaking up is a survival or progress

strategy that is powerful enough to override fears about safety? Perhaps it even improves safety in the long game, even if it is traumatic in the instant?

There is something going on with safety and speaking up that I don't yet understand - another of the many dualities, mirages and illusions of this place.

CoAA is a paradoxical Place: it looks and feels like a beast of the modern world, of professionals and professionalism with its shiny floored, glass-walled offices, yet its inner workings are old-school patriarchies, where one man rules his particular roost and everyone else jumps. A lack of structure, of system and process in almost everything apart from sales performance and reporting (as seen in meetings, in work flow process) seem to be a cause in creating an environment that is ripe for jostling for position, competition-with-no-rules and doing-whatever-it-takes to stay in the game and get ahead. Combine environment with conflation of CoAA as place of career /place of social life and their associated, very different and perhaps contradictory aims and codes of conduct (hidden, encultured or explicit) and life-at-work could be highly ambiguous, complex and unstable. And therefore both potentially anxiety-inducing *and also* full of opportunities. Any ~~containment~~ might therefore be largely personal rather than relational (I am OK, I feel safe enough and I'm going to chase my own agenda regardless) and sometimes also group based when focused on attaining a numerical goal (our team is safe-enough within group, we work together for the moment). ~~Containment~~ seems rare when disassociated from a specific task-agenda.

23C

Perhaps the paradox locates in the tensions between Place and the other P's of the P lenses (People, Performance, Purpose, Practice, Process and Positions)? (See Emptying Leadership Section)

On loyalty: Ajit Rao's 2006 study of loyalty in Indian firms describes two types of loyalty: behavioural and emotional. Rao notes the impact on motivation and culture when these two are out of synch. These are loyalties to the firm. Rao claims that low emotional loyalty, but high behavioural loyalty means people stay, but they don't want to be there: they feel unmotivated, trapped and may become 'toxic'. Conversely high emotional loyalty and low behavioural loyalty may bring highly energised and motivated people who will stay only for a short while. Loyalty was a strong theme across CoAA. I suspect that for some at CoAA this is high emotional loyalty to the numbers, and the brands, perhaps including the brand (the image) of the firm. If loyalty is founded in care, in caring for something which is intrinsically valued¹, it likely involves speaking up and standing up for the object of one's loyalty. If CoAA's brand invoked emotional loyalty, but the actual experience of working there, of the empty shell, did not materialise this then the result may be confusion; a feeling of of being 'let down' and potentially a trigger for some of the conflicting emotions and behaviours observed.

Reflections 2018: What if we work from the basis that most people are bastards and will damage, attack, disable any 'other' if given the opportunity? What if we're not all nice experts, but are stupid malevolent fks?

¹ <https://stanford.library.sydney.edu.au/entries/loyalty/>

Is leadership about stopping or reducing people from ‘othering’ within the group? If you are basically a bastard, whenever there are ‘others’ there is opportunity, motivation or permission (?) to hate, to compete, to negate and undermine or attack.

Is leadership about overriding the switch to being a bastard – keeping us all glued together?

Towards a common ambiguous enough purpose (purposeful enough) that is motivating enough to stop us othering? Is that what we do when we do ~~containment~~?

There seemed to be so many contradictory forces and appearances at CoAA; so much dark power at play and yet I wanted to believe in some good. Was I being the idiot in this? Were my beliefs getting in the way? What was really ‘true’? Was coding helping or hindering understanding? Was this a Nepalese ‘thing’ that I was reading wrongly through my *bideshi* mind-eye?

I needed to get the questions out of my head and into dialogue with real people with different perspectives.

So on to the first ‘Checking-In: Dinner on Dualities’

Checking-In ONE: Dinner on Dualities

I gathered together a group of friends, some Nepalese, some international, all who led local organisations across a variety of sectors. We gathered in a shabby restaurant one stormy monsoon evening in Thamel, Kathmandu. Seated on damp cushions amongst Newari carvings we peered at my laptop screen and the short presentation of what I had done and found and felt at CoAA. The information generated lively discussions. The key points of which were around hierarchies, Indian influence and the numbers game.

Discussion points: Leadership was unlikely to be distributed, attached as it was to position and sense of place both of which are incredibly encultured here in Nepal. You have a place and you stay in it. Younger, urban generations, especially returnees from ‘outside’, are moving towards flatter power structures in their start-ups and enterprises but the older generations just don’t do this or see this. Thus it is up to one person, the leader, to hold their teams through uncertainty and there’s an attrition of the ability of one person to do this. Perhaps the older, longer time-served BH are just worn out with ‘carrying’ the anxiety of their teams? Perhaps they were resisting or refuting this burden. Or simply breaking under it.

["It is no longer easy to convince them. The pressures of work increased many times. I can't always hold that pressure – I have to release it sometimes." M7D talking about the increasing work load and push to achieve "Today its like a bullet train."]

A Think School study in around 2012 (since deleted from the net) described conceit, contempt, and cynicism as the major behaviours associated with vulnerability. I witnessed all of these in spades at CoAA in the leadership and to some extent in the team staff. The fourth linked behaviour, withdrawal, is not an option I suspect when remaining in company. Withdrawal means leaving. If leaders felt vulnerable themselves, how could they develop safe spaces, containment, for their teams?

One friend noted that in his business, whilst there may be trust and people speak up, and there’s a sense of team (there is safety), he still has to keep checking up on work, on quality and make his presence and authority as the boss felt. There’s little sense of responsibility, agency or ownership from the team – that is the boss’ role, despite some of them being long-term friends. He does however feel confident to leave them for short periods, although he couldn’t say why he is comfortable doing this. A second friend added that in his offices teams chatter and ideate to the point of distraction and would need to be pulled back into focus by him (as boss). This reflection came in response to the cubicles discussion. This would put into scrutiny the idea of problematisation here in a strongly hierarchical society: perhaps without a shared sense of responsibility for the situation and challenge in general, having clear specific goals (numbers?) and frequent nudges to keep going are what stop teams lapsing?

The issue of Indian – Nepalese tensions arose. Friends felt that Parent-Child model (from Transactional Analysis) power-play may originate in the Indian-ness of the firm (that this was less of a Nepalese quality).

They were also candid about the lack of professional structures inside most Nepalese organisations and that the CoAA situation is quite typical in this regard: there are no SOPs, no systems, no HR processes etc. They reflected that companies here focus just on growth without

full investment of time, people, or money in sustainable organisational development. In CoAAs case with such rapid growth and operating at such scale with all the trappings of ‘modern’ this situation could be exponentially worse, hence the pressure on individuals. Usually at this scale of operation in a modern firm, much of the burden of administration and process would be carried by the system; at CoAA most things were still managed by individuals. When labour is cheap and systemising is expensive there may be little motivation to invest or change. And yet, CoAA leaders complained of lack of capabilities and skills in the workforce.....

The paradoxes seem to be real. Safety was a notable force acting that affected behaviours and relationships; safety and belonging seemed to be in some sort of tension; safety and problematisation were glimpsed and when they were they seemed to be a positive for relationships, behaviours and performance.

The friends suggested I follow up with a young Nepalese company to understand more about roles, status, culture and ~~containment~~. This is described in The Case of CoBB.

Checking-in TWO: a call with a writerly type

The second friend I checked in with has written extensively on Nepal, has seen the worst of times working in the development sector during the conflict years and the best of times mountaineering, hanging out in tea houses and the cafes and bars of Kathmandu with local friends. I called on him for his critical perceptiveness.

The call was made in the UK from one side of the country to the other after aborted attempts to meet. I was craving Nepalese connection at the time.

We agree that there are so many layers of Nepalese relationships and society that we can never see and that this limits my read on the CoAA situation – “it is so much more complicated than it is here”. The Writer notes that there must be some level of cooperation and some benefits or staff wouldn’t stay and they wouldn’t function.

He brings up the need for fairness as a fundamental condition for everyone, even those in power: “everyone is seeking this” and “figuring where the unfairness is in Nepal systems is so hard for Westerners”. Unfairness in the workplace is virtually impossible to resolve given the flimsy legal system and incredible levels of corruption running through everything: “How do you seek justice in Nepal?” There must be ways to accept or resolve this that we don’t understand. We also note how the power plays etc in Nepal are very much a mirror for the UK – in Nepal there’s just no cover up, it’s out there and visible.

As an example of the difference in perceptions between UK and Nepal, he cites a Nepalese social worker who came to the UK on an exchange and was horrified about the poverty she encountered on the streets of one northern city, “the abject squalor, the poverty of people’s minds, there is nothing nice in life”.

The conversation ends. I am certain that keeping questioning, keeping the inquiry process alive, not settling into theory making, is the only option.

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CoAA people: 2017, in conversation

M7A – BH, international Cereal Brand

M7B – BH, international Chocolate Brand

M7C – BH, Modern Trade

M7D – BH, international Brand suite

M7E – BH, Indian Dairy, International Chocolate Brands

M15A – Deputy Managing Director

M15B – Head of IT

M15C – BH, Energy Drink

Kate – Marketing specialist – international brand suite

P – Marketing Executive - international brand suite

Mel – MT Team

HR Lead

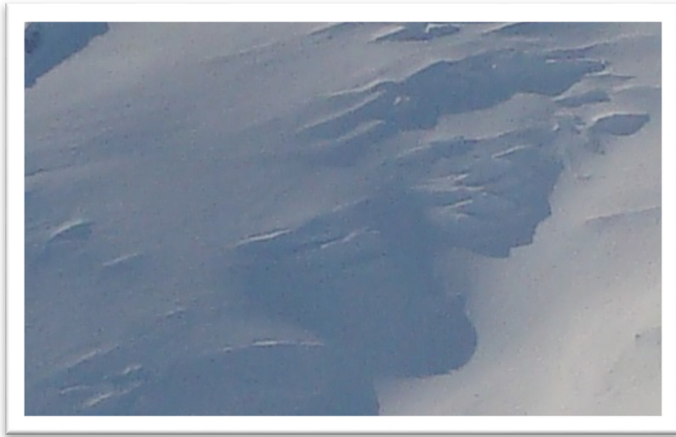
Adam – CoAA Director, founding family member

Andrew – The Group Exec Director, founding family member

28C



30C



The Case of CoBB (Study Two)

2.2 The Case of CoBB – seeking containment (Study 2)

Context

Previous to this intervention I had spent some months working with a Multi-National Enterprise (MNE), referred to as CoAA, holding an inquiring presence around the substantive area, ~~containment~~. I had spent time noticing, questioning and also working with CoAA people – how they were with each other (and their place) and what stories this told; what stories they told about themselves and each other and if, how, where, when these revealed or could be understood as ~~containment~~ at work and what this did. What I found was patches and periods where people grasped at and actively created their own safety-enough to problematise into the immediate tasks at hand – usually to achieve targets and also to protect themselves / their group from dangerous forces. The doing of leadership in most places seemed to actively break ~~containment~~ through both creating vulnerabilities and also undermining or removing agency. In fact the people in leadership were often themselves lacking ~~containment~~: mainly through lacking safety. There were also some notable exceptions.

Lack of structure, systems and process (noticed as a lack of documentation and lack of numbers other than sales targets) added to a sense of lack of fairness. Fairness seemed to be at the heart of the matter. I had also lost my ~~containment~~, feeling overwhelmed by the perceived dark forces around. That was, until I flipped my approach – turning to look for good, for positives and finding them. It was at this point that my thin confidence in the Constructivist Grounded Theory Methodology (CGTM) cracked: ‘codes’ could be anything, it was context that mattered – the written words were useful triggers but the sense of ‘what is’ or ‘what might be’ came from the emotional currencies and psychodynamics of power flows; how tuned I was to these and what I did with these noticings. I also couldn’t be sure of my ‘read’ of the cultural, socio-historical stuff of CoAA. Whilst I had an over-saturation of themes they felt so subjective that it would have been arrogant and /or foolhardy to pretend these constituted a theoretical emergence. I needed more voices, other Places to weave into the story to reach any sense of ‘enough’; to have consensus enough to move belief to knowledge; for the many partial narratives to be complete enough; for my position to be solid enough. Hence the evolution of the CoBB inquiry as next step in the ongoing dance towards ‘enough’.

The Study below focuses on the ‘Whats’: what happened, what emerged, what this means (meant at the point of departure from the intervention and means now in the context of the wider inquiry).

The aim of the intervention: The aim is to understand how much of the themes emerging from Co AA is specific to that company, or to me-in-research-at-CoAA; how much I am reading or not reading is ‘of Nepal’ and can actually be read by me the *bideshi* (outsider). And at the heart, whether looking through a ~~containment~~ frame is helpful, complicating or just nonsense. And if inquiring around ~~containment~~ is a helpful framing, if it is a practice or craft of leadership, what does noticing it do, what could it do?

Assumptions:

The assumptions I was under similarly but slightly differently from CoAA:

- ~~containment~~ is probably a helpful practice for ‘good’ leadership;
- I’d be able to perceive it, or at least the safety and problematisation aspects (and maybe others would too);
- that it was OK (ethically, morally) to make the intervention and that in some way the process was ‘for good’, and that setting that out as my explicit intention along with an openness to provide support where or if I could, would be ‘enough’;
- that I needed to be very mindful of myself in the process and seek my own ~~containment~~ in order to be effective;
- that being different (Western) was both helpful and unhelpful and that I could use the privilege of being from outside on the inside to aid the inquiry (and the firm).

The relative newness of CoBB and the enormity of their ambition, wrapped their situation with a degree of precarity in my mind and hence I was tentative, and as mindful as possible of doing no harm and / or having minimal impact.

Summary of the who and why of CoBB: CoBB is essentially a transport firm introducing a pre-booked taxi service with standardised fares to Nepal. They are for-profit, just over a year old (at the time of intervention) with strong social ambitions and a small but growing staff, plus multiple hundreds of partner taxi drivers and owners. The founders are young, idealistic and ambitious with a strong technology background and extensive professional networks.

Why them, why then: I selected CoBB as one of the (two) founders and I had worked together as grassroots activists during the post-earthquake tourism revitalisation. In this inquiry he is referenced as Pablo. Post-earthquake he had a Flight ticketing company built on a digital platform and was also using digital platforms to try new ways of working in traditional areas of the tourism and travel sector. Pablo is pioneering, educated but not from an elite i.e. he didn’t start out with a wealthy/ connected foundation or from a high caste. He seems business savvy and is a player on dark and light side networks as far as I can tell. For example he has direct connection to the former PM (and, it turned out, the next PM too); has cultivated strong relationships within the police, army and various Ministries. He also has humility and eats-up advice, opinions and information critically but hungrily. For these reasons CoBB seemed a good next step to CoAA. There were many differences in structure, ideology, size and age, but many similarities in ambition and networking. I had access and trust. CoBB also welcomed the opportunity to have an external perspective and to work with their teams differently. As with CoAA, research access was a trade for a short strategy review and support including an Appreciative Inquiry style process. However CoBB also saw the research process as intrinsically beneficial.

[Some context on the structure, relationships and business of CoBB](#)

CoBB Business: CoBB started in 2016, founded by two young, male entrepreneurs, Pablo and Riki, who wished to bring a pre-booked taxi (Uber type model) to Nepal, which was at that point dominated by taxi owner-mafias, untrained drivers, vehicles in various states of repair and ad-hoc pricing systems (barter) that left everyone bar the mafia dissatisfied. CoBB was set up with an ambition to transform this sector. The entrepreneurs used professional networks to bring in expertise, market intelligence and investment capital. At the point of the intervention they employed 35 staff and had deals with fleets of hundreds of taxi drivers and owners. The brand

was becoming known in the capital city and their cash flow was improving. This is a business being built on relationships and technology with a stated social benefit base. Their mission is ‘to make transportation easy for everyone’. They have seven stated principles and two stated Impact goals: poverty alleviation (by building the capacity of drivers to earn regular income to support and educate their families); reducing unemployment (aiming to create more than 2000 good jobs in their first year). They are a for-profit business with a need to return benefit to their investors.

CoBB Structure: The business is structured around departments. These include: devoted to training drivers in driving skills, maintenance and customer care; vehicle repair and maintenance; an R&D/ tech support team focused on creation of an app and tech platform; Operations and Customer Support (call centre). They had also established marketing, HR, finance and administration units whose role includes extensive monitoring and evaluation for quality standards and business understanding. Pablo and Riki worked closely with their core team of department leads and in particular Sami, who had previously founded a taxi company on a similar model, but ran into cashflow and capacity challenges. Sami now leads CoBB Operations. People move frequently between departments making the department ‘teams’ rather loose structures: this is less a company of small solid cells, more a mesh of more firmly and more loosely connected individuals.

CoBB place: the CoBB people work from several locations around the Kathmandu valley: the ‘head’ office is a suite of small non-descript, windowless, modern-ish offices within a shopping mall on one of the busy, main streets of the city centre. There may be a sign indicating their presence, maybe not. The second location is on the other side of the Bagmati on the edges of the UN – INGO inhabited sector at Lalitpur: a purpose-built, half-built, rambling office block next door to Riki’s first start-up. This is a more typical, family-style office with its thin carpets; dark wood, lightly battered furniture; jumbles of corridors and rooms including kitchen, a ‘didi’ bustling about; shoes scattered outside open doorways as people percolate in and around for quick chats, long discussions and other meetings.

There is a third place, a driver training centre and parking/ maintenance ground that I didn’t get to.

CoBB strategy and focus: CoBB was primarily focussed on establishing itself in the market, growing its customer, team and cab base and growing, snagging and evolving its platforms and processes. Whilst managing cash-flow and growing income was important most attention was being poured into getting things ‘right’ (sustainable, high quality, making real the ideas and vision of the founders). It was about people, practice and process to create quality performance.

CoBB People: a mixture of young (20s and 30s) men and women from a wide variety of backgrounds: some ‘from the village’ with NGO experience; some returnees from ‘outside’ with MBAs and an international, modern outlook; many self-starters; many urban, locally-educated graduates – a mix up of castes and family status. Most wear office-casual gear, they come by scooty, micro, bus and motorbike.

What happened and what emerged: the first process and outcomes

The research process:

This was a relatively simple series of interventions comprising: an initial, inception meeting with Pablo in September 2017; two strategy review workshops with the unit leads, one before the Dashain-Tihar break and one after. Finally there were nine interviews with team members. These happened in November 2017 at the city centre and the Lalitpur sites, within offices or outside on sunny rooftops in search of warmth, quiet and privacy. Interviews lasted between 20 minutes and 2 hours.

I used a small audio recorder for these with the intention of freeing myself to focus directly on being with the participant, who they were, how they were and what they said / didn't say. I transcribed the recordings, sent them back for checking and correction then coded and added memos and noticings where I could. There were few places-spaces to hang out and observe and I did not ask to join any team meetings.

Reflections: What I came to realise was, whilst the participants seemed comfortable with the recording process, it definitely 'did' something and that something was less rich, less connected and just less than the process I had worked with at CoAA. Ironically, without the task of noticing and listening to capture, I was less focused and my attention seemed to be more diffuse. I found myself thinking ahead to 'what question next', listening less acutely and noticing and 'reading' less astutely. I listened intently to the audio recordings as I transcribed but couldn't conjure up much more than the words. I found the transcription to be a chore rather than a curiosity as it had been with the conversion of written notes, signs, coffee stains, folds, scribbles and stretching lines into digital words. Contrary to my expectations, the letting go of writing words ultimately made the word more prominent. I realise I need the embodied experience of capturing. I needed the physicality of the notepad and all the memories and triggers packed into its tattered form to catalyse my multi-dimensional remembering and reconnecting emotionally, sensually, reflexively and also intellectually with the people-place-performance-presencing of 'the interview'. The codes may become the 'transitional objects' (Leigh Star, 2010) between attachment and abstraction, but in my world without the entity of the notebook there can be no attachment from which to abstract.

Compounding this fuzziness in remembering, was the paucity of my own reflections and notes at the time. The intensity of the interview schedule (most were taken in 2 days) had provided little room for reflection and, with no written notes to doodle on and add to, no triggers and no anchors, the experiences had become blurred. They remained a random set of someone else's images.

Altogether the dip into CoBB felt like a thinner slice of being-experiencing-presence than I'd had with CoAA. In part this was because of the different tools; in part because there was just less drama, no emotional currents to surf or be battered by. In part it was out of necessity: I already had a huge swathe of 'stuff' from CoAA, and the CoBB was intended to be more of a dip than a full immersion. I also felt I had more experience on 'how to be a researcher' to draw on: doing

research was less about faking it and I had given myself more permission to be there and to do the needful, thanks to the checking-in processes with friends and the Writer.

Different sources: whilst I spent less time in CoBB's place and didn't have the intensity of CoAA, I did have access to the CoBB founding documents as a source of information to complement the observations, workshop-meetings and interviews. These documents felt fresh, live and lived – connected to the actuality of being CoBB and a relevant part of their context. I scanned and coded these too.

Storytellers and stories observed

Pablo in conversation

The very first interview was with Pablo, the founder I had known for some time.

I had just arrived in country after a long journey, a week of intense travel and also constant pain from back and joint manipulation. I was tired but relaxed – less inward focused, working hard to stay alert and connect. I decided not to take notes but to listen better, tune in, observe and work with the flavours of the session. Pablo appeared nervous, a little embarrassed and proud (of the achievements to date). Also weary.

He talked at length about the story of the company – how it has shaped and shifted – but more on how he has been working with political, legal and other sectors recognising that the company would live or fall by how it connects with and responds to/ negotiates with the external operating environment. *(Reflections: is this about ~~containment~~ of the wider space beyond the team and CoBB? Is this the weaving of the wider space into CoBB's ~~containment~~?)*

It was noticeable how often he used value and belief words – how these structured and guided not just the narration of the story but the story itself. For example, he works on the basis that the core impact the CoBB must make is on the lives, social and financial, of the cab drivers. If they are doing well, if they are happy and understand the benefits of working the CoBB way then they should be providing a better service all round to cab customers.

He has a strong empathetic sense recognising that when failures happen (as they did with initial attempts to gain traction with cab drivers) there are probably also reasons for this that are out-with his knowledge or control factors i.e. he recognises that lives have complexity and work is not a process that can / should be separated from the rest of being a full person. He is curious about the motivation of others, what limits them, what makes them get out of bed, what they aspire to.

My sense is that he is an excellent communicator and relationship builder with teams and the wider ecosystem. He thinks laterally and carries pragmatic confidence, an inquiring wisdom.

He described the recruitment of various investors, the mistakes made in the contracting with them and the time / burden of having to constantly manage them out. The ten investors were being overly directorial, interfering constantly in the business and trying to take advantage. He and Riki took a firm position and gave them a choice: stay and stay away from business or leave with the return of their capital. Most opted to stay.

The challenges he felt and that seemed to deeply trouble him were:

- The very different style of his co-founder Riki (according to Pablo, not a communicator, good with figures, doesn't see the importance of looking out for / after people – harder?)
- The complacency and 'lack of competition' in the Cab Co teams – he described them as just constantly praising each other with no criticality. It seems the friendly atmosphere and friend circles have become stronger than the work ethic and professional sense

The research agreement is that I will help him find a way to deal with these problem situations and in doing so start to understand what is happening and what is important to people at CoBB, how and if leadership and containment flows.

Reflections: I am struck by the (apparent) openness of his comments and reflections (and also by the fact that I need to write the word apparent – I am still not fully trusting, but my gut here is that what I see is what I get). He talks openly about mistakes, seeing making mistakes as a normal part of business, without defensiveness or self-berating, just acknowledgement and learning; the focus on 'why', working with motivations, and on how, the values base – I want to believe, I want this to be not guru-ji spin, but a truth reflected in actions and dissipated across the rest of the teams. I leave feeling hopeful and very responsible – that I must take good care. A curious mix.

The workshop meetings (x2)

Shortly after meeting with Pablo I facilitate a meeting with the unit leads that are available, plus Pablo himself. Their conversation is convivial, friendly, some teasing and a definite ease at being together – mostly. People's different personalities were apparent – quieter, more boisterous, calm, restless, order seeking, jovial, shy They were clearly generally happy to be themselves, happy in their own skin without artifice. As a warmer I asked people to share something new about themselves the others wouldn't be aware of. There was a definite drawing in of the group. A tangible essence of connection. They then worked in two small groups on capturing the essence of the company establishing different working processes, and different outcomes addressing different perspectives of the brand. They seemed happy to work alongside one another, with very little sense of need to see, to compete or collaborate, but happy enough in task. They were open to ideas, to critical feedback from me – and some were able to provide this for each other. It seemed harmonious, productive and accepting

The second workshop was a different mix with four new faces (to me). Once again everyone seemed happy to express themselves fully, without group-think or defensiveness and the diversity in their preferences were pronounced. I was impressed that those who had taken on tasks from the previous meeting had not only accomplished them but developed them further into more applied actions. The power dynamics ruffled initially as Riki entered (a little late) and monologued slightly too loud and slightly too long for where the group was. The ripple dissipated quickly and he sat back into the group shell. Again splitting into small groups for tasks this time presenting their outputs and inviting challenge and interrogation proved positive and fruitful – people spoke up and a lively, but friendly discussion ensued.

Reflections: whilst the workshops I facilitated at CoAA also resulted in this type of team working and focus (my influence) the CoAA workshops did not have the Directors present throughout. When they were present at the start there was an absolute deference from the staff. I'm aware

that the ‘way of being’ in these workshops is probably as much about my direct influence as it is about how people are together, about safety and engagement. However, with the CoBB people there was a noticeable atmosphere of being ‘at ease’, as was the ability of some (not all) to critically, professionally engage with each other and the challenge at hand. It seemed the group were flowing with ~~containment~~ in practice: they were enabled to do whatever they needed to be doing in that time and place, safe-enough, critical-enough to work together productively in both process and outcomes. I was curious to understand more – was this a performative blip for the workshop? Was this more widely felt across the company? If so how did it manifest? How did this fit with Pablo’s concern that teams’ were too safe, too comfortable and not pro-actively stepping up?

The interviews and office time: themes and reflections

A note on presentation: I’ve included direct quotes to illustrate the different themes as they emerged. These are noted in different *shades of blue* to indicate different voices (participants). I’ve chosen not to attribute quotes to specific individuals in order to emphasise the often highly congruent thinking and sense of ‘us’ not ‘I’.

Overview: I find it very difficult to say how people are at CoBB. They are certainly open and easy-going, there was no drama in fact very little in the way of emotional current. I noticed how similar all the stories are in flavour and tone although very different in the details of who and how and where from and what. What was present in the majority of those I encountered and listened to was a spiritual current, a kind of low-tempo religiosity with tinges of awe and an undertone of faith. If CoAA had the dark brooding monsoon skies as its setting, CoBB time was suffused with bright, flaxen, sunlight blanching the characters into shadows and haloes.

Feeling words such as ‘love, care, fun’ litter the discourse about the business and the company, including the founders. The stories and the feelings behind the stories, even the less positive and less closely engaged people have a similar flavour: there is not a split boss perspective / employee perspective as I had experienced at CoAA.

CoBB as people-place is less intense, has a similar tonality but is not by any means homogenous. There is a flavour but it’s hard to distinguish, to name: it’s subtle and not yet fully formed. The ‘themes’ emerge as whispers only, flickers on the edge of perception.

Themes are shown **in bold**.

‘we believe!’ there’s a sense of having higher purpose, a calling or faith; it’s in the air and in the way people are, the words they use: a belief in the company; belief in the founders; belief in the ability to transform. People seemed gently suffused with a kind of bedazzled awe in the audacity and brilliance to not just contemplate transforming a sector, a ‘way’ of living and of travelling, but to have the very believable attributes, resources and pragmatic confidence to actually start and build an enterprise that might just succeed.

“All are the youngsters and those I see the belief system in all. They believe to change. All are the freshers, they are not experienced but the belief system I see the belief system in all of them”

“I believe in Pablo and Riki”

“The main thing is we are solving a problem that is worth solving we are relieving pain of a lot of people living here so I think that is the main thing that keeps me going.”

“I’m doing this and I’m changing the society like this”

There’s also a vague sense of eulogising, of preaching and converting (the cab owner, drivers, customers and other stakeholders). ‘Believe in the CoBB way, believe in us, be part of us!’ “So the only way to transform is to make them feel what I feel.”

The myth, the allure of CoBB draws people in. One team member came back to Nepal because he wanted to be part of it “it’s my dream”.

There’s a frisson of excitement, ‘we can hardly believe we are actually doing this’ type optimism and, for some, joy, a tremendous **Pride** in what they are attempting and who they are as a team.

“I feel very lucky as its new in Nepal and technology is growing very quickly [...] and I think it’s a great chance to work in such industry. It always makes me happy and makes encourage me to grow up that”

“It’s not only the company, its changing the national GDP of the country. It’s helping the consumers who are facing the problem since one decade.”

“I want to take pride in the good of CoBB.”

“At times it gets hard but I’m proud of the team we have got”

“Yah I feel proud because like when I tell my friend that I am working in such company..”

Values are a nice idea (in a hazy way): The theme of values and being values based as a company is in the discourse of most: they use the word ‘values’ a great deal but rarely use any values words: there’s a kind of haze when it comes to naming, to talking about actual values but a certainty that it’s about doing the right things in the right way. The idea of working from and towards values seems to be present.

“I believe in the values we provide.”

“I found the CoBB team and the founders they never worry about the money they only worried about the values whatever the money whatever the revenue we must to stand in our values”

“no matter if lose money or if we ... don’t do business, don’t lose values because once we lose value you lose everything so stick to the value, keep it intact so we can move ahead”

“One thing it’s not like in other companies that you actually get to know about the company for one, two, three months and then you come to know the values of the company and what you’re supposed to be doing and how you’re supposed to be doing it. In here in CoBB I think that everybody from the beginning knows what the values of the company are and I think that they made it a very good thing”

Perhaps because of their relative youth (or maybe the way I framed the questions) the absence of role models or protectors, patrons or the ‘hand of God’ in the life stories to the ‘how did you get here’ questions is noticeable by its absence. I wonder if Pablo and Riki would be named as

role models if they look back on now from the future? There is a pervading belief or faith in these two men: a wonder and respect for who they are, how they are and what they are trying to achieve. For many there is also a profound **Gratitude & Appreciation** for the opportunity to be an employee, part of this movement. (K, on being offered the job: “So I was so excited and I talked with dai, with Pablo dai then yeh it was awesome moment for me, yeh something is happening (laughs)”) This gratitude and appreciation are part of the founders’ stories (and a couple of team members too) for where they came from (many from very poor circumstances) and what happened along the way, including the hard lessons and mistakes made.

However the prevalent narrative across the founders stories and within CoBB is not of gratitude to others for being where you are now, it’s of **Fix yourself, fix it yourself**. Most people talk about how they are **learning and growing** within the company, doing this through active seeking out of new ways to do things, searching for the information they need. The founders talk about skills or qualities they felt they were lacking and so did the hard work to ‘transform themselves’ e.g. learning English, becoming more outgoing to be able to network (“I converted myself to a...” “I was in the learning phase I was needing a mentor”). This extends to doing what is needed to keep fixing the many snags, problems and challenges they face as a new company, working in a completely new way with no blue prints.

“Like if I have experience before in the similar then I can solve myself or I can somehow check on the You Tube. If not if I cannot do, then I must take help from the seniors.”

39C

In some there is also a slight sense of disillusionment – a realisation that behind all the shiny ideals is a great deal of hard work that is often boring and frustrating. (“Are you enjoying learning?” “Yeh, yeh and sometimes I feel very restless sometimes it is very boring. It is a mix of emotions.”). They spoke freely about the problems and challenges they face, and the ongoing change as the market and the company evolve. The **culture of openness** means that Pablo and Riki will listen (and will regularly ask) for ways to keep improving, to change and evolve their systems etc to reduce problems. This helps ameliorate the frustrations. The relatively fluid, messy and open structure means that sense of teams is quite low. This is a frustration for some, and creates a tension between ‘fix it yourself’ and ‘work together’ for others. However the tensions seem to be helpful in that they stimulate problem-solving and agency (rather than tipping people into anger and resistance). The calls for more structure, more ‘proper procedures’ by some may be in part about a need for efficiencies and solidifying of the company as it grows (“it’s a baby now, it needs some time for that”) and perhaps also a desire to get more comfortable and to reduce the level of daily challenge. (Where teams are more solid e.g. in the training department, people seem to feel more comfortable, more ‘in place’.) Finding the balance between messy alertness and comfortable rituals seems to be part of an ongoing challenge. **Networks not teams – individuals and movement, sharing, mesh** is, for the time being, part of the CoBB way.

“There are many teams and they all come together and discuss our various problems.”

“We also don’t have such type of platforms where we can share our stories, we can get together and say that we are the team.”

People appreciate the friendly environment and relative delegation, trust and responsibility to get on with their jobs “the freedom to work”. Yet at times they also seek stronger management. They are still actively finding the balance point between accountability and independence.

Related to Openness is a theme of **Keep listening to others, especially those outside: feedback, feed us**. People actively seek out the opinions of others to understand how well they are doing, whether what they are doing is enough, what works or what could be better. Perhaps in a space where there is no blue print, no model for ‘how to’ external feedback plays an enhanced role in reducing uncertainty. Perhaps this helps weave into their developing ~~containment~~? The active seeking of feedback belies the quiet, pragmatic confidence and **open resilience** felt across most of the people I met with.

They seem **undaunted** by the task ahead: **we are inexperienced but we will try!** Perhaps this is part of the youthful approach and the perception of equality at CoBB. Youthfulness is talked about by everyone there – it’s a strong, connecting force. **Our youth connects us** is the feeling behind the perceived lack of hierarchy, part of the culture of openness and being in this together:

“Like Riki-dai in SA (previous company) he has created that environment where we can be open and be not scared to give our point of views, thinking out of the box is not being laughed or scolded off so our ideas are actually being used and I think it is absolutely done here as well because Everyone is young here and you don’t need to be scared of the fact that your boss is around. They have their own sense of responsibility. It’s not like when the boss is not there they won’t work. It’s not like that. It’s very equal.”

40C

“Everybody is a youngster here and our co-founders are youngsters and [] I think it makes no generation gap between us. This is the main part”

What is not spoken about, absent from the discussions, is any sense of pressure, of needing to achieve targets. People are definitely challenged by the many problems and demands of starting up a new enterprise in a new paradigm and they apply themselves to getting through these as best they can. The survival, the set up and the shaping of the services are target enough. Yet there is a constant and continuous effort to monitor, to track, to record, to evaluate performance, effectiveness and process by the founders (Riki). The people I talked with didn’t mention this –positively or negatively. Numbers are everywhere except in the discourse.

Reflections and sense making

On Numbers: the role of

In CoAA numbers ruled the roost – they were dictators, Trump-esque in their power-over and their followers irrational, fearful belief in them. The numbers were one dimensional: only about targets, just the tips of the icebergs of what numbers could be for. One number (type) to rule the all. These numbers *drive* us towards profit, for one success in the financial paradigm. Here, they are gods. Believe in the numbers and be rewarded, fail them and be punished. Numbers lead the way.

In CoBB numbers are everywhere but not shouting, not leading. They are the operational backbone. They are in the codes. The numbers are targets; they define and *support*

performance, yes. However they do this *in service of* other softer paradigms: quality of experience, of happiness, of satisfaction, trust and motivation. And also of money and profit, but as one of many variables on which we measure ourselves. They enable CoBB people to understand whether and how their beliefs are being turned into real actions with the impacts they intended. In CoBB numbers are tools, useful, in service of. They can be changed as needed. They are everywhere. Not frightening in and of themselves. They are following.

Differently-together: As noted whilst there are some common themes there are also many differences in peoples approach, understanding and way of being at CoBB. Themes are by no means universal in terms of their intensity or presence: for example some people are almost prophetic in their belief in the higher purpose of what they are doing whilst others believe in the change needed and the CoBB approach, but as part and parcel of the work needing to be done. This differentiation perhaps reflects how new in to CoBB most people are, how close they feel to founders and who they are and what they bring. This could be a meta-theme: **differently-together**.

The meshwork: Strong, loose connections: It almost certainly reflects a second meta-theme which is around the **looseness** of the structures in terms of their shape and formation, but the **strength of cohesion** around the **commitment** of all (just for the short term for some, but a firm commitment nonetheless; a faith or calling for others), around the togetherness-in-the-face-of-the-task-at-hand (**transforming ourselves, transforming the world**) and more tangibly the **youth-connects-us** (bosses are still bosses, but we are in this together). The strong but loose connections leave space for, in fact demand, self-drive, self-reliance, self-initiation around decision-making and action. Some people are choosing to act alone, others in loose teams or with matrices of colleagues across the company. Achieving balance here may prove critical to CoBB's survival and success: too many solo players or too much solo play by some could loosen connections to a point where they become 'other' and are not aligned in their performance; too much tightening and people may feel restricted, or too comfortable, expecting or demanding direction from others and lose drive and motivation. I read this as a differently nuanced expression of doing ~~containment~~ – actively seeking and maintaining the balance, the sweetspot in the enmeshment. I am reminded of Flinn (2019) and, earlier, Neri's (1998) work on the two roles (or two leaders) one providing structure, task focus and order (the Dynamic Administrator) and the other, the genius loci, capturing and maintaining the spirit of the group, sometimes seeking chaos and disorder to be able to re-affirm this. The work in these groups is the active balancing of structure and spirit, perhaps also proxies for or different forms of doing ~~containment~~, of safe-enough from structures; and problematized-enough, from spirit and vitality. Are they living the thesis of the inquiry?

Reflecting further on the duality of structure-spirit and control-freedom I am reminded of Jupp and Hooper's (2018) investigation into leadership and ambiguity with the highly complex and fraught decommissioning process in Northern Ireland following the agreement of the peace accord. What they found was a firm agreement to achieve a weapon-free status by a defined date by all the varied parties along with absolutely no specification of *how* decommissioning would be achieved allowed each party to go and 'do decommissioning' by their own. Every party got to the end goal path in a way that used their expertise and was meaningful to them and their people. Having a deal of structure and definition about the outcome and output, but full

freedom over the process was the key to success, according to Jupp and Hooper. What denoted structure-enough / freedom-enough was different for the outcome and process. Conversely their research showed that ambiguity in the *purpose / outcome* combined with a very structured *process* reduced trust, prevents or at least restricts individuals, experts, from using their expertise and kills motivation to keep problematizing.

Could it be that CoBB had found a model to create safe-enough, problematized-enough organisational working through the clarity on purpose (the 'belief') and looseness of the mesh, freedom in the structure, systems and process?

Reflections- emergent thinking: The role of leadership then is the active interrogation, the sensing into, the wobbles to left then back to right as they walk the line, or perhaps more potently, dance the line between the 'enoughs' of safety, structure, spirit, criticality. I suspect there are many lines to dance; many atmospheres and intangibles to read into. Doing ~~containment~~ may be more multi-dimensional than just one balancing, one line to dance. Perhaps doing leadership is the drawing of these lines – the footprints we leave as we dance along into safety and over towards criticality. A metaphor might be the 'enough' of different disciplines: marching and jiving; of track running and fell running – one requires persistence, structures, followership; the other energy, intuition and leadership?

A patchwork: Maybe this is what I am reading in Pablo's concerns and questions: he is doing the walk or dance, drawing the line: sensing that for some there's too much safety: that the togetherness, and sense of belonging (from the care shown, the values lived) is enough for some and too much for others; that believing in a higher goal is enough to motivate everyone may have been over-simplistic (or optimistic), recognising that he needs to do something else to balance this for some people. The variety of people in the company is one of CoBB strengths and also that variety, the rich differences need or want different things: some need more structure and systems (as we have heard). The numbers, targets, short term goals and deadlines need to be more imminent, more real, hold more of an imperative. Some may also need and work better with more immediate, present line management - more and tighter frameworks and structures. And for all the self-starters presumably attracted to CoBB because of their independence and initiative who are now being seen as 'lone wolves' who some feel now need corralling – what is their perception of safe-enough, free-enough? Their need for structures and management may be radically different.

Containment and culture: Balancing the different needs and/or re-shuffling the teams to have fewer of the people pulling one way or more pulling another is part of the dance of balancing. It's about shaping the 'how' of the company, the culture, so that culture itself will balance and do ~~containment~~ in the way and to the degree needed to be CoBB in the sector it is shaping for itself. The mesh thickening and loosening, growing more and stronger tentacles in and through the thicket; becoming solid but not strangling; having room for each frond to grow and spread in its own way and also for and of the organisation.... Is this the enculturing of ~~containment~~?

Safety – inquiry: from light to dark: Whilst the atmosphere and themes of CoBB are positive, 'nice' in many ways supporting an aura of happiness and 'doing good' the forces in and of themselves are no less powerful. Belief, faith, higher purpose all have the potential to be soul snatching forces that take away agency, that overwhelm, subsume and oppress. How do we

judge when they are being used for 'good', in service of liberation, for safe-enough working, for critique, as glue-enough, as power-with.... and not tipping into, de-agenticising, negentropy or apathy? Or worse, power-over and oppression? How to maintain the fire-inside, the one that drives and ignites, the fire in the belly, to not extinguishing it nor, worse to have it become the fire outside that burns your ass and drives you re-actively? This is part of the dance of doing ~~containment~~.

What this did to the inquiry; to methodology; to theory-in-use the emerging framework

For the inquiry the work with CoBB provided more sustenance for the emergence of a theory-in-use: the noticing of the acts of active balancing, the complexity of factors and facets that might play a role in safe-enough and critical-enough. The experience in CoBB could be viewed in terms of doing ~~containment~~ and, I believe, inquiring, problematizing in this way could provide useful tools and approaches for leadership to practise differently and better.

Structure and confidence; difference – group think/ cultism; proximity to each other, to the problem at hand; loyalty-sense of belonging – all of these are present as sliding scales, tensions and areas to work into questions for doing leadership. I brought these together with the Wicked problem - Leadership relationship, proposed by Keith Grint (2005) in his co-option of Rittel and Weber's 1970s work into the Critical Leadership field to try to locate the idea of containment against an accepted framework. (See figure CB1). The sliding scales- tension areas seemed to correlate relatively well. I gained some confidence. Whilst the idea of theories and models still felt too solid and somewhat repellent and indeed paradoxical to the idea of remaining problematized in the leadership place, what did feel more true and pertinent as a 'So what? Now what?' next step was the evolution of a tool-kit (theory-in-practice) that could be used to enable problematizing of leadership situations.

43C

I realised I was done with Constructivist Grounded Theory Methodology (CGTM) and it was done with me. What was emerging from the doing of research journey was a notional community of increasingly diverse voices supporting, challenging, pushing and pulling, rolling around ideas, critique and understanding. My role in this community seemed to be the weaver together and transcriber of the sense making as it emerged. My duties emerging as the one who initiated the gathering together and inviting the voices into a space to create a place for speaking up, questioning and exploration. And also simply being present - sitting with the unknowing. This was the role of the researcher here in this place. It didn't seem to be the role of a CGTM researcher.

CGTM had provided some handrails to get to this place: the act of coding as process had been useful. However it now seemed too loaded with contradictions and too blunt a tool to use further. I wondered if this doubting and community building was in fact part of CGTM in process. My intuition was telling me 'no'. Adhering to CGTM rules no longer seemed relevant or helpful. They seemed to be getting in the way of understanding, of 'coming to know'.

Reflections: I notice the balance of colours across the text has changed across the two Studies so far: the purple italics sections becoming longer and denser as my own reflexive voice, my critical

questioning start to eclipse the CGTM structures and rules: I am shifting from march to jive; track to trail... about to leave the pre-determined lines and expound across the wild fells.

Reflecting on the experiences at CoBB and CoAA and on my professional practise prior to this, and on discussion at conferences earlier in the year and extending on the work of Jackson (2017), Grint (2005) and Simpson (2017) I developed a question frame, the P lenses. The early form of this frame is shown below in Figure CB2. The P lens idea has evolved through different versions shown in the last Case Study and several other sections.

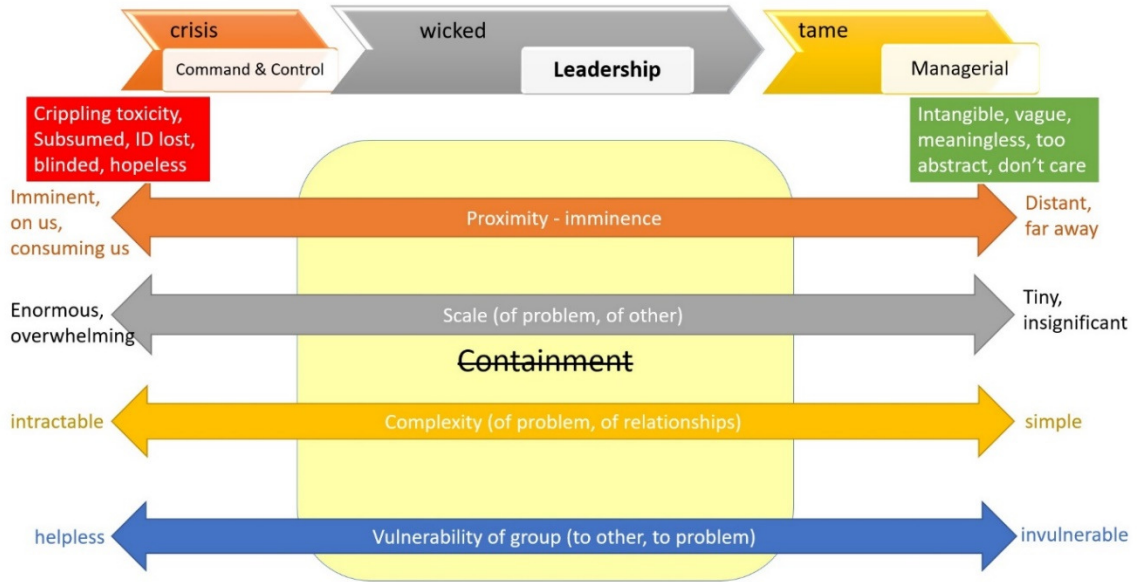


Figure CB1: sliding scales, Wicked problems, Leadership and the dance from 2017

44C

Doing Research – The Cases

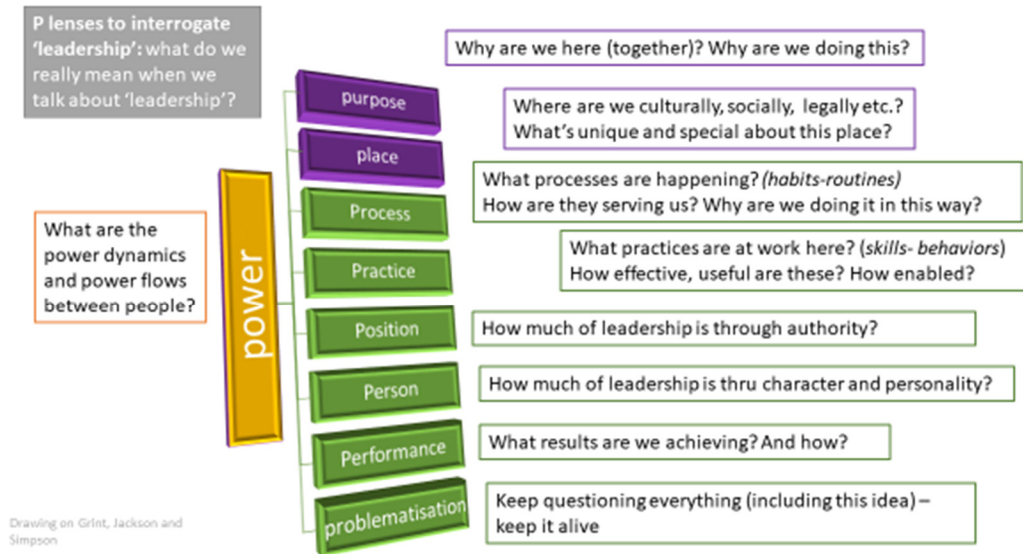


Figure CB2: 2018 version of the P lenses framework for interrogating leadership – the first tool for doing containment-as theory-in-practice

What next?

The next steps presented themselves shortly as a connection in India, who asked for support with a leadership situation and her 'Very Difficult team': a chance to apply my professional practice and see if the P lenses, the noticings on containment would be of use, in service of doing leadership for better.

My uncertainty at this point was that the inquiry-as-practice was actually just me doing my stuff in the world: that I had come full circle and created a justification for Jo-isms. If this idea, theory-in-practice, tool-kit thing was to have legs, to be some thing, then it needed to be divorced from me-in-practice. I hoped the P lenses might form a way of separating, of abstracting the 'doing leadership development by developing doing containment' thing into a more accessible (and better named) realm, of detaching it from me.

So onto The Case of Team GROW: a case study on doing containment as leadership development.

And then to The Case of the Toxic Team: reflections on growing containment.

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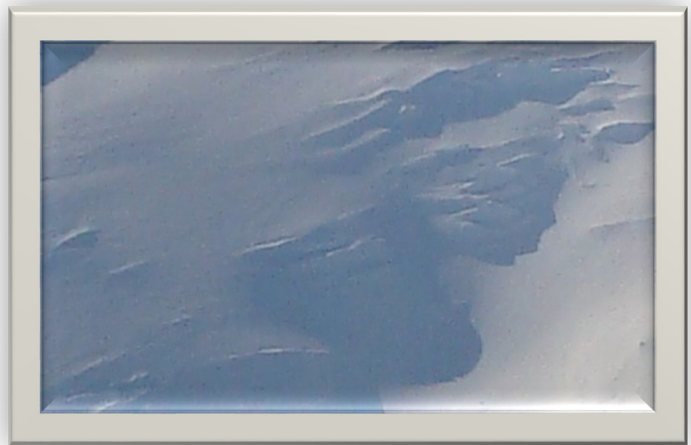
Simpson, P. (2017) presentation on 'lack' at UWE, Bristol UK



[Click on the image to return to the start](#)

47C

The Case of Team GROW
(Study Three)



2.3. The Case of Team GROW: playgrounds, parents and performance

All names are anonymised at the wish of the participants.

My aim is to work with the situation presented, explicitly inquiring through the lens of ~~containment~~, through balancing sense of safety and criticality, and linking these into some very tangible aspects of performance; cohesion and team effectiveness and sustainability.

On serendipity and responsive research: This was intended as a light-touch intervention. It was opportunistic in sourcing and carried out at a distance. I worked only with the team leader using their input and reflections. These factors were not planned, they just are. This Case emerged from a practice situation to which I was able to add a research lens. It was about dropping in the infant theory-in-practice, watching it grow and (hopefully) start to crawl.

Context – scene setting

Place: The case study is situated geographically in South Asia, within a UK firm's local offices operating in several major Indian cities, staffed mostly by UK and Indian nationals, although with some other nationalities included. The firm is referred to as GROW in this paper. The organisational culture appears to reflect a bureaucratic management style; includes both British and Indian working norms and also, inevitably given the wider socio-political situation and historical context, holds echoes of past colony, empire and collaboration.

Positions: My contact, Flo, is relatively new into her role and to India, however, has extensive global experience at senior level with similar firms in the global South. She currently leads a team of Indian nationals located across multiple cities.

The GROW senior management are largely UK nationals, whereas the team are Indian nationals. Flo feels that the team play the 'neo-colonialist' card, and draw on socio-political discomfort around this to escalate and manipulate outcomes in their favour. Flo, is aware of this, understands what is at play, but is quite hamstrung by protocols and political correctness to 'call' this and has limited room to respond.

Problems - Performance: There are two major challenge areas noted by Flo: firstly disharmony manifesting as internal fighting, passive-aggressive and downright confrontational behaviours of some team members to others (ganging up, accusations of bullying etc). Secondly, the relatively poor performance (quality, effort, outputs) of the team as a whole and general disregard for professional norms or rules e.g. negative attitudes; poor time keeping etc. The team's performance had been noted in previous senior management team reports but not actioned or resolved. Multiple very poor staff surveys that should have triggered an organisational response had not been acted upon so systemic failure was also at play.

Purpose: Flo was required to bring in, establish and implement a major new programme and to ensure that all aspects of delivery and management were compliant with the stringent GROW regulatory and reporting terms. She needed to resolve the team dysfunctions for multiple reasons, not least to create a culture and working atmosphere that was professional, positive and enabling.

People: Over the course of conversations Flo explained a little more about the prior history of the team: the Deputy Manager (DM) was also new in position, his job having been opened up for application, and which other team members had also applied for. One in particular was very disgruntled at not having won the position, was making her feelings known and was accusing the DM of bullying and harassment, which the deputy manager has then re-accused the team of.

Caste played out strongly in the team with many Brahmins and Chhetris. Some of the antagonism occurred between higher caste individuals in lower rank positions than lower caste individuals. It manifested in behaviours such as low-level sniping and also more strategic barbs.

Flo has been creating spaces and meeting points for dialogue, has removed and replaced some very low performing team members or strongly supported their wish to move across the firm. She has managed to retain those who she believes are strong individuals including the new DM. She believes she has gained the trust and confidence of most of the team through an open, listening and conciliatory approach to interpersonal issues. She feels she is seen as fair (if tough) in drawing on and playing to the GROW rules and standards.

Prior to my request for a conversation specifically for the development of my research, Flo had arranged for a half day team meeting during which many of the grievances had been aired in open forum. Far from resolving things, several provocateurs had subsequently raised further formal grievances on the grounds of bullying and harassment.

The story was ripe with intransigence, arrogance, fear, righteousness, righteous indignation, blame, absolute lack of accountability, foot stamping in the face of rules, mob culture, racism, withdrawal, contempt, cynicism, conceit (sarcasm). To my mind the narrative was loaded with many of the signs of closed resilience (vulnerability) and lack of psychological safety.

HR support was not apparent, and whilst Flo's line manager was sympathetic, the response was 'oh well, more of the same – it's like this everywhere' i.e. notionally supportive, but ineffectual.

There was a sense of exasperation mixed with quiet determination and patience to see this through and keep working towards a better solution. I wondered if Flo was showing ~~containment~~ at an individual level in creating a safe space for herself *and also* staying with the problem (using negative capabilities or reflexive inaction). If so, I wondered if she could also extend this to the team or encourage them to develop this for themselves? It was also possible she was projecting her own 'stuff' onto the team, failing to 'read' the situation accurately enough or didn't as yet have the skill set to do leadership in this situation.

I asked to have a call exploring the above as part of the PhD inquiry and in return offer some coaching responses / support mechanisms.

The intervention Part 1 – coaching conversation

Flo and I spoke for an hour plus on the situation and her-in-the situation. Our specified intention was to support her in finding new insights that would lead to her having more and different choices on actions to take to move the situation towards 'better'. My intention was, if relevant and appropriate, to explore the situation using the idea of doing leadership as the exploration of the continua of safe-enough / critical enough / confident enough; of structured enough – loose enough; tasked-enough – spirited enough and other similar dualities that had emerged from the

inquiry to date. My core practices were noticing, sense-breaking and making, storytelling and other active guidances.

(Note: I have been coaching various clients for the last decade using a mixed bag of coaching tools from NLP, to Clean, to Transactional Analysis and positive psychology).

Two key themes surfaced immediately. Firstly, the idea of ‘**control**’: ‘being in control’ is good whereas ‘being controlled’ / ‘being controlling’ is ‘bad’. Secondly, **agency and responsibility**: Flo expects team members (should) have full empowerment, skills, initiative and professionalism to be stepping up to the demands of their roles and proactively taking responsibility (“*I work on the assumption that we’re all grown-ups here, I’m just here to provide motivation*”). Her working model seems that knowing GROW’s expectations is enough for people to work within them and her hands-off management style is a sign of trust and liberty.

Flo has attributed the problems to “cultural issues”. It is possible the tensions may simply be a result of a clash of a rules-and-regulation based culture meeting a network based one. However, many of the team have been in GROW for a long time and the intensity of the fighting suggests something else is going. I challenge Flo on both her attribution and her working model. They do not seem to match what is actually happening (the ‘playground’ behaviours). We explore the idea that the team may be ‘acting up’ due to a feeling of lack of safety. Perhaps they might be seeking more visible rules? They also might be seeking a rule enforcer. We explore rules and roles:

What are your beliefs about rules? “They shouldn’t be there to control but to protect.

- *Protect the work (so this doesn’t slip)*
- *Protect the team (so they don’t screw up)*
- *Protect me as line manager (I rely on these)” (said with absolute clarity and conviction)*

Yet she seems deeply uncomfortable with the idea that bringing the GROW rules to the surface, adding team rules might be what the team expect of her, something that she could / should try. She believes the team see her not as one of them but as mother figure, which I feel she sees as a nurturing role; a benevolent other, protector. We unpack the idea that parents are also rule enforcers, and that this also is part of protection.

Reflections from the time: There’s no indication that she wasn’t ever ‘in control’ just that she didn’t feel like she was... (and being in control is a good thing). If she didn’t feel like she was in control, did the team also feel like this too i.e. they perceived she didn’t feel in control of herself / of them / of the situation and this reduced / disabled trust and safety...

Digging further into the history, the story unfolds of the previous Deputy Manager acting as team protector (one of them, doing it for them – Haslam et al., 2010). He was “*a leader they put on a pedestal*”. And he in return helped sustain a fantasy of ‘we are good, we are great’ people, performers in GROW (neither of which were true) and to some degree infantilised, or certainly created a safe space of followership. Under his rules everyone did everything and roles were not clearly defined. When he went they lost their heroic power-source and their shield. This was when the in-fighting started. There’s also blame and loss of face around the previous DM’s over-inflation of their capability: “*it must be hard to realise you’re not as good as you believed, that*

you've been lied to by the leader you trusted". This must amplify the sense of vulnerability and shatter trust. Shame is a very powerful social emotion and would fuel extreme behaviours. From the Team's perspective the (unspoken) rules of the game have changed and they appear confused, uncertain and angry about both the change ("*we're not supported*") and either the lack of clarity around the new rules or they are simply resist accepting them ("*the T&C² are biased, unfair*").

It emerges that Flo herself removed the DM. I wonder what this does to the team's perception of her role and power. Perhaps she is less a mother figure and more a superwoman to be feared, respected and perhaps tested?

From Flo's descriptions it seems the team have a strong sense of belonging and emotional loyalty (the right to stay) so there is no flight, just an escalating fight.

Their performance remains very poor. They seem to be stuck in a vicious and escalating cycle, provoking the intervention of a formal adjudicator through the invoking of grievances and claims.

Through the ~~containment~~ perspective it seems things are not safe-enough, people are actively reducing others safety, othering and creating safety in sub-groups. To counter this Flo commits to making visible and enforcing some basic rules for everyone, for example on timekeeping. She decides to work with individuals and the team as a whole to develop a reward and recognition system based on qualities and behaviours they respect – to create a problem space for them to work together temporarily in; that will hopefully model collaborative, performative working and potentially also co-create a sense of safety. Finally, she will investigate the GROW T&C and invest in capacity building where skills are missing to build clarity, to overcome any sense of injustice and show that rules are what she believes, there to protect.

51C

Check-in: several months later

I arrange a short call with Flo to find out what is happening post-intervention. I am interested to understand whether conceptualising the situation through ~~containment~~ lenses was helpful in firstly, raising awareness and placing attention on psychodynamics/ group process (i.e. did it raise antennae and help her calibrate into the situation?). Secondly, did using this perspective provide a way to understand differently? And finally, were these enough to enable change, to unstuck the stuckness? What changed and how?

Firstly, what changed?

"Differences the conversation made; It helped me make sense of some fairly jumbled thoughts and to bring structure to those.

I have made direct changes as a result. [...] I have brought a lot more structure to the team, giving them clear expectations on our ways of working and accountability to each other as a team based on the basics of respect, professionalism and commitment to delivering to the best of our abilities as a team. They have responded well to this. I have started to separate myself more, mentoring my DM

² Terms and Conditions (of employment)

into his role with a stronger focus on building his capacity and demonstrating to the team that I trust him to deliver and therefore they should to.”

She also arranged a couple of away days where people spoke freely and explored what they meant by ‘being professional’. This has resulted in a shift in expectations *“If someone is telling them they are not doing their job properly this is not bullying or harassment.”* and role clarity *“previously there was confusion about responsibilities and finger pointing if people were taking on jobs that isolated / differentiated or were asked to do something that not everyone else was doing.”*

They all agreed core values of ‘kindness and respect’ that they have displayed everywhere and work towards. They are also documenting the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for the work flow process and this is having some impact. However, the underlying vulnerability seems to be still there:

“...asking for responsibility but they are scared of taking decisions. This is the real challenge here, they don’t want accountability” Why not? “Scared of screwing up, having to admit they are wrong, it’s down to exposure”

I ask about how people are feeling (*“much happier”*) and how she knows this: *“I see them walking over to each other’s desks; sometimes laughing heads off.. mmm”*

So if there was a metaphor for the atmosphere or a colour, what would that be? *“Umm want to say it’s yellow”*

Want to? But.. *“Yeh it’s kind of – some days it’s more poo coloured, some days it’s sunny – so it kind of wobbles around yellow. Atmosphere is a bit viscous, flowing but sticky”*

And before? *“Before it was black or red – not sure – but strongly angry and unhappy colour”*

It seems the use of the ~~containment~~ lens, of thinking into the group psychodynamics, of asking questions about how safety might be playing out were having some positive impacts. Whether these were on criticality, whether performance is improving is not clear but the trend seems to be of ‘better’ working and of being more performance focused.

Flo is noticing differently, feeling more ‘in control’ because of this enhanced perception and is more confident to test and try different leadership practices as a result.

~~Containment~~ taking shape: for practice, with purpose and bringing performance

I have wondered if my coaching is adding anything new to practice or to academia. Is it just working on psychological safety, something that has been in organisational toolkits for years?

I believe working with the ~~containment~~ lens does actually bring something different.

The difference is in the ‘how’ of the approach to safety, doing it through critical inquiry, through generative problematisation. Opening up a safe-place for reflexive questioning, for helpful inquiry into place, position, practice, power etc. Questioning that looks upwards and outwards and is not at least initially directed towards solution-seeking. ‘Safety’ is a relatively ‘safe’ term to use as a gateway into or even a proxy for the other facets, the ‘everything else’ of doing

leadership. Safety as a term has the benefit of the ‘solid’ foundations of B-School research and is part of the organisational lexicon accepted by even the most hardnosed ‘pff, snake-oil’ Management types.

More subtly, when combined with ‘enough’ safety becomes an ongoing challenge, it gains life and requires attention. It seems ‘*enough*’ is a key addition to all of the doings of leadership so far encountered, when we think about leadership located in relations. In an impermanent, interconnected world, ‘enough’ will never be settled – it’s the driver to keep the inquiry of leadership alive and continuously demanding attention.

At this point it seems ~~containment~~ as theory-in-practice does seem to have legs enough to crawl. It could be in service of.

My concern is that what I am calling ~~containment~~ is ‘just what I do’. It is my practice in doing leadership development and therefore not of use to others, not unpackable and positionable for others to critique or grow. Not an addition to this inquiry.

Reflections: I realise I hold an attachment to resisting the idea of doing leadership by (only) one person, in a leader. I’m fairly positive I don’t have an attachment to the oft posited and equally romanticised opposing notion of dispersed, distributed, collective leadership. However I really struggle to let go of my political-social, echoes-of-past-battles conflation of leadership-authority-figure: the positional leader wielding power-over and allow for the influence of one person to stimulate change, to have impact, when that person holds an authority role. I’m feeling sheepish about not having worked with ‘the team’ and any interpretation that this may be because they are ‘less than’, a collusion with authority. The horror. My hunt-sabbing, punker, fk-the-system self is still entangled in the web of positions, snuggles of place. I feel myself not wanting to ‘allow’ the intervention with Flo to have had an impact – isn’t this anti-democratic? Several questions help me start to resolve this: what happens if I zoom out and re ‘place’ Flo as member of the wider GROW team? Which she is also. Does this make her doing leadership, and my support of this, more democratic – impact based on merit (power-within) rather than position (power-over) (and ignoring the minor irk that position might have been won by merit)? Is there a taint of the metaphorical Persecutor-Victim-Rescuer triangle³ and if so, where is my ego in all of this? I notice I am working through the P lenses in my reflexions on self-in-the-inquiry and sub-texts on who I ‘allow’ to do leadership. My attachment is shifting....shrinking

53C

Next, I present one final scenario, this time not just working with the leader’s perceptions but working with the whole team. Who gets to do ‘enough’? Who gets to do leadership and how?

This final Case seeks to extract and solidify ~~containment~~ as theory-in-practice, as a tool for doing development and contribution to knowledge.

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karpman_drama_triangle

References – Study Three

Haslam, A.S., Reicher, S. D., Platow, M.J., (2010). *The New Psychology of Leadership: Identity, Influence and Power*, New York: Psychology Press

54C



[Click on the image to return to the start](#)

The Case of the Toxic Team (Study Four)



2.4 The Case of the Toxic Team (Study 4): developing leadership development

All names have been anonymised at the request of the participants

This intervention was with a UK based team leadership situation within a Higher Education Institute (HEI)

Context

Background: Through a series of professional interactions with 'Lisa' I came to know of the 'incredibly toxic, dysfunctional' team she leads (positional). With gentle further enquiry around the context and history of the situation it seemed this might be an opportunity to apply and test the theory-in-practice of ~~containment~~.

This study took place in the UK towards the end of my reverse-culture shock phase of re-entry to UKness. As noted in Position and Place I was still raw, probably over-calibrating and certainly feeling 'other'. It's from this outsider-on-the-inside position that I entered the Case.

My aims: I hoped the intervention would help to further develop the frameworks for doing ~~containment~~ as a Leadership Development (LD) tool. I needed to address the concerns I had that the conceptualisation, recognition and addressing of safety / problematisation was 'just Jo doing her thing'. I wondered if this was me just developing my own practice, and therefore not making a meaningful contribution. In the course of reflexive conversations I let go of 'better' and determined to focus on the theory-in-practice that would makes what I do "implicitly more explicit and therefore accessible to more people" i.e. to unpack my working methods, practices and assumptions and translate them into some 'thing' that could be of use to others.

My reflections on starting this study: it's really hard to examine, to critique and somehow almost also feels very positivist to try to break what I do down into smaller parts, to atomise and inspect. Is this pseudo-science? I am trying to understand this for what reason? To be able to extract an essence that could then be transferable. This is exactly what I should NOT be attempting – it runs counter to the posts, to the middle way... everything is contextualised – situated – temporal.....

Or is my resistance just a lack of discipline?

The interventions: The interventions were a series of coaching conversations out and about in the hills, around campuses and also virtually with Lisa, the team leader. This was supplemented by a sunny autumn afternoon working with the team explicitly with me in researcher-inquirer role aiming to build on decade plus of leadership development and facilitation practice for the purpose of the PhD. The session was focused on a theme they had previously identified and, positively, decided to work on developing.

Comments in green are Lisa's (as leader) reflections on these first conversations as we reviewed the interactions as a doing leadership development process.

Part ONE: getting to know – early insights and impacts

The first conversations with Lisa provided a natural entry point into the situation and the people – an obvious start point from which to choose how to, where to, what to do as a support-challenge 'development' practise.

Looking back, unpacking my practice, I realise I was immersing into the 'everything' of what was happening for Lisa in her world with team. It is a process of absorbing into me, both intellectually and in an embodied sense. The conversations were open, allowing deep dives into aspects of the scenario for details. These deep and different questions simultaneously opened up new perspectives for Lisa and so new choices for her doing leadership.

Looking back I also realised I was following lines of inquiry and bubbles of insight around the P lenses: these were not orchestrated as such but appeared a natural fit. At this point I had yet to develop question sets around each P theme offering questions in direct response to the situation. During the conversations and reflecting afterwards I have captured and started to build those that built criticality as a question 'bank'.

To aid sense-making and to understand how useful or not the P lenses are as an inquiry set, I've loosely organised the study around the P themes in the narrative below.

57C

The lenses: Power, Purpose, Place, Practice, Process, People, Position, Performance, Problematisation

People, positions, past and power: The team are eight academics from two different programme areas, brought together to co-develop and manage these programmes and their administrative responsibilities. Lisa joined as team leader almost three years ago, although the team structure has existed (mostly with the same members) for longer. The people come largely from practice backgrounds, but it transpires that Lisa (and most of the others) know very little about what these journeys were or why each person moved to HE from wherever they were. There seems to be a reticence to understand, to know too much. There's a sense these journeys might not have been happy. This prompts Lisa to question the role of shame in what is happening and she is surprised she hasn't noticed or 'done' anything around this before. At the moment it is a 'hidden' area to the team, something they may or may not wish to reveal, something they may not even be aware is hidden (or being hidden). It may be about shame – a very strong, social emotion. Maybe not. Noticing this provides Lisa with new choices about future actions. The lack of past selves, contrasts with the thin, but deep slivers they choose to bring with regard to current personal circumstances.

Lisa has tried multiple interventions, some structural, some locational (work from home / on campus) and some process e.g. MBTI. There are some historical issues still at large involving grievances and claims of being 'unfit for work'. There is constant 'closed door' chatter by twos and threes against other people; these are not fixed positions – A, B and C are just as likely to bitch about D then D, B and C bitch about A. Threat is constant, but shifting. Willingness to be

'the threat', to undermine one another through sub-grouping, is also constant and high. There are ongoing power plays using power-over and different power-with sub-groupings.

There seems to be a very strong negative glue that holds them all together and a huge effort being put into maintaining and growing the toxicity and nastiness even in the face of multiple opportunities to either walk away, reduce intensity or stop behaving like this to each other. They seem addicted to the bad air, the drama and power flows.

Having reached a 'stuck' in what to do and being also negatively affected emotionally, professionally etc by the team behaviours, Lisa has been spending less time and effort with the team. This was reflected back as 'you've abandoned us' by two members – highly emotive language alluding to the 'protector' or 'parent' role they may place her in. She has also brought in her line manager for a day to experience some of the behaviours language has been unable to convey. The manager was horrified and advised walking away. Lisa feels stuck and acknowledges this. I suspect she is afraid: of their frailty, their mental wellbeing and the consequences of action – of pushing. *"I am not a therapist and this could really open up some stuff for them"*.

Reflecting later I notice that the team leader in GROW (Study 3) also suffers this lack of support from her managers and from 'the organisation'. This must be exacerbating any feelings of vulnerability, of exposure, perhaps a tacit desire to find the magic solution (become organisational hero?) and potentially withdrawal ('why bother, if no one else does'). Their Positional authority is fragile, Power reduced.

Lisa's reflection: This (power) aspect was very useful in unpacking what is happening.

58C

Part of us or other: I notice Lisa flickers around several different pronouns as she describes and explores the situation: sometimes 'we' and 'us', sometimes 'them' and 'they'. This mix-up perhaps reflects her wavering sense of connection, relation and belonging. I wonder if the team notice this and what it does.

Place: Failing & surveillance

The institution is perceived by many staff and by some externals as failing.

One of the team's programmes used to be very successful with large cohorts and high employability. Now the course struggles with very low numbers. The second programme also has low numbers. The programmes are therefore seen as failing. They are under intense scrutiny and surveillance from the HEI management around their viability, and quality. The team are perceived by other teams as failing and poorly functioning.

The wider practice sector is also under considerable scrutiny and strain nationally.

All around are models of failing and the fall-out from this. This is the place, the wider context, the team is 'of' yet they seem to be refuting or ignoring its influence on them and on their performance.

What would recognising and naming this wider and more fragile environment do to the teams' purpose, practice and performance? Noticing the interconnectedness of the team with the wider environment, turning outwards rather than inwards bring new choices for doing leadership.

Lisa's reflection: "This question set helped me move out of 'its them' and into a more positive space of 'it's situational too'." "the whole system focusses on failure rather than success"

Performance

As individuals most have reasonably good rapport with other academics and relatively good reputation within their academic and practice fields. As individuals they cooperate in terms of guest lecturing etc. As most are practice-based there is a large focus on learning and teaching services. The bias towards research in HEI metrics means overall the team's recognition is limited, however, they do score very highly in NSS and are regularly award winners in teaching excellence arenas.

Where they excel (and are recognised for excellence) is in support for marginal and failing students. They go 'above and beyond' to tutor, mentor and counsel students who are struggling – whether through academic, emotional, social or mental health challenges. Some feel they go too far: they say there are some students who shouldn't be on the courses or in the university and should be allowed to fail. Worse they are propping up a failing system.

Thus there are tensions inherent in success and striving for success: performance could be a contested or even meaningless dimension. With loss of confidence or faith comes potential demotivation, loss of purpose and attrition of practice.

Lisa has leadership choices around both the narratives of what performance means and its value. And of changing these narratives.

59C

Practice

Lisa's preferred practices of doing leadership have been around empowerment, enabling, listening and supporting where possible. She's spent a lot of energy adding structures to help overcome gaps and failings. She has also spent much skills and energy on 'working out what's wrong' and why. We spend time storytelling around her own and others practices and she realises firstly she has a practice choice and secondly that it is not serving her so well, that perhaps its become a habitualised response. New choices are revealed. There are also choices about who gets attention and who doesn't and the balance between support-enough and challenge-enough practices.

Lastly, we notice that she and the team have become almost entirely outcome driven (performance-focused) and have lost emphasis on the process, on how they practice and what this brings in and of itself. Again new choices open up.

Lisa's reflections: "My take-aways - My tendency to put them before me and to feel over-responsible for them;

My favour for 'empowering' and 'consultative' leadership probably creates a void in which identity issues play out - I could reduce that and increase certainty." "I've focused mainly on Practice at the expense of the other P's"

Purpose and syncretic identity

Why do the team exist? What is their purpose? Does there even need to be a team? Is there any sense of being a team? These questions surfaced fairly quickly and seemed very hard to answer. We circled around noticing lots of interesting, but not especially useful factors e.g. the practical reality of the team as a structure, a unique performance unit is highly tenuous: there are a few meetings every couple of weeks, but the 'why' that binds has little stickiness or solidity. Either there's a clear and definite purpose to working together or they should stop. Yet, there is a reluctance to let go of each other. If anything they cling tenaciously, albeit toxically, to each other. But to what end?

Lisa's uncertainty about whether they "*are a team or not?*" had created a 'stuck', she hadn't been able to move past this. Something in the storytelling and movement shifted this: "*Realising this didn't matter was really key in the 'release' process*" "*just work with what we've got here and now*"

At this point we suggest a 'together problematizing' strengths-based session to develop a task or project that might feel purposeful-enough to start to improve relationships and sense of safety.

Lisa's reflections: this gave lots of insights about assumptions

Problematization

Lisa has spent a deal of time questioning her own leadership, leadership-team-self relations, her role, the team's 'stuff' and the causes. It seems she has become stuck in this loop and the questioning process itself may be driving the stuckness. She has been in this questioning process solo, not with the team who appear to be overwhelmed, disillusioned and have pretty much withdrawn from efforts to be a team, better performing or just better. Questioning in this dimension, driving towards solutions and doing this alone is probably not critically problematizing the situation. It is just questioning. She is not able to be comfortable sitting into this deeply uncomfortable situation, not in a state for critical exploration, for problematizing.

The 'team' as individuals have turned their critical attention to other projects (outside this 'team'). I wonder if there is also some sort of *negative problematisation* happening: they are putting their individual attentions (tacitly or explicitly) into the question of how to screw each other over, the university (and possibly themselves) as effectively as possible?

At this point I realise I've assumed problematisation, critical questioning is a practice *for good*, towards the group / organisational purpose. It could equally be a practice for putting one's own purpose and ends over those of the group or organisation, especially when the group's purpose is frail or valueless.

Lisa's reflections: This was KEY! Negative problematizing that reinforced issues and fuelled negative behaviours.

My reflection: What else could be going on if this is not about psychological safety, not about identity and purpose etc? I fail to find anything, but in the interests of problematisation, I will keep this question alive

Where we are at the end of the conversations

Me in LD practice: I recognise I've been holding the theory-in-practice of ~~containment~~ as the foundation, the entry point to our conversations and keeping it alive throughout in terms of the framing of the conversation (practising keeping the dynamic between me-in-conversation and my inner state safe-enough, critically questioning-enough); the conversation process (supporting Lisa to inquire into the situation with a safe-enough, critical-enough practice) and in terms of the content (what might be happening with the team-situation in terms of safety and critical problematisation). This approach seems to be doing something in all three realms: I notice I am able to stay mindfully attentive for longer and with more care – the challenge, is to hold back from solutionising and keep holding space for different positions and perspectives; Lisa seems also to be relaxed, confident and also critical from the Adult position (TA) i.e. noticing emotion and power, but not working from them – neither defensive, nor pushing; she also seems to garner new insights and perspectives on the situation through inquiring differently. There is, of course, the ever present danger that we are colluding in a phantasy of 'we are good, this is working' and actually the process is nothing that couldn't be achieved by other means. Whether phantasmal re-invention or actual original practise, ~~containment~~ as practice is performing – it is doing something towards *better*.

Unsticking – changes for Lisa

By the end of these conversations Lisa has noticed different aspects of herself doing leadership, of herself-in-team, of the group dynamics, of the situational context and its impacts and to some extent of the people, individuals. The new noticings have opened up new choices and, she has made some decisions on action on the basis of these. One action is to invite me in to facilitate a group session exploring doing ~~containment~~ with them together.

61C

Extracting ~~containment~~ as theory-in practice: adding qs to Ps

Deliberately holding ~~containment~~ to the fore of the coaching conversations, reflections and reflexion I've started to disentangle and name the messy practice of doing developmental work. Having Lisa's reflections on the process has helped to separate out what could become a theory-in-practice for more people to test and try. It has begun to ground the research inquiry in an embodied knowledge contribution, if not yet an intellectual knowledge contribution. It feels like it is solidifying and becoming.

The **P lenses** seem to be budding, growing in critical application in depth, flex and rigour. The collecting, testing and growing of critical question sets grouped around each 'P' is a tangible output of this practice and the thesis.

The place of Power: I realise my placing of Power as the key lens had likely happened out of deference to the 'elder statesmen' of Critical Leadership Studies ('notice me!') and also because of its centrality to psychodynamics, the Western field I have drawn most from in terms of literature and other voices. Feeling a little more confident, caring less about the opinions of shouty white men and realising my 'voice' bias its time to rearrange the P positions and put Power back in its place. I realise that Place, the 'everything-else' of leadership (beyond the actors) is where attention needs to be focused and that focusing attention is achieved through

critical, purposeful Problematising. The Process lens seems important for revealing habituated actions, ritual and assumptions we carry and what they do to safety and critical inquiry however using Process for critique is a less tangible, too abstract term. I find I'm bypassing it. Is this my bias? *Ke garne?*

Preparing for the Group Session

My research questions going into the Group Session are around the performing of ~~containment~~ in this Place- the university, sector-field-UK. I still feel like an outsider-on-the-inside but this time am seemingly culturally, visibly less distinguishable as 'other' than I had been in Nepal. What would the change in visibility do?

What would the practices feel like, be like for the 'team' and would they be useful? Would the P lenses be useful or desirable?

What if I'm making all of this up?

The group session

What, who, where, when: The group session was suggested to the team by Lisa as a way to further a recent practice goal (PG) they had identified via a free consultancy as part of a PhD research inquiry. The suggestion was taken up willingly and a time, date and venue were agreed.

Lisa and I spent some time setting up the large, bright room arranging chairs and tables (a petal shape), marking up flipcharts and laying out various sweet treats. Two members of the team were unavailable. People arrived, chose seats, some cautiously, some confidently with a little banter and chat. We began with a brief introduction to each other, to the aims of the session and the wider research context and mapping out the session structure and flow. It was a beautiful warm autumn day, the campus had lots of green space and gathering areas and I was aching to get out of 'classroom' space and invited us all to move outside. In the warm sun we ran a series of pairs based, walk and talk activities, listening to and telling the stories of 'how we got to be here' from which partners reflected back strengths and values they had heard in the storyteller. We gathered these into a group 'strength pot' and then, jerkily moved back inside, arrested by the 'better get an outcome' commitment. The latter part of the session ran in plenary identifying a 'best possible' for them with PG and using the identified strengths to get there. The approach was appreciative, process-focused towards a general outcome.

What happened, reflections and sense-making: the team

Incredibly everyone was relaxed, engaged and enjoyed the conversations: the bright, warm air and movement mirrored a bright, warm feeling of cohesion and togetherness.

Place: The transition between outside and inside was also a transition between process and output focus, the former enjoyable, enriching, desired and the latter a big stick of 'ought to'. The return was jarring and created a distinct fracture in the group skin –like a micro and intense Sunday-night blues moment. The inside-place felt like 'back to work' and there was a definite shift in dynamic as people seemed to put their 'in work' selves back on. Yet, this was mostly driven by a noticeable 'task hunger' from them. (*"I could feel E really wanting to press on and*

wondering how we would get through the agenda” participant). We brought a little of the bright, warmth with us, but lost a lot in transit too.

and Process (habits): In a pre-arranged feedback call with T some weeks after the Session, he explained that the team were all absolutely overwhelmed by the endless admin burden in their daily work. Then he described his initial feelings about the walk and talk *“it felt so wrong. We were out there in the sunshine. I wasn’t at my keyboard. How could we being this be ‘work’? I almost cried”*. It had taken a few days for these feelings to settle but eventually these had turned into a kind of slow awakening: *“it is OK to be a different type of ‘productive’”, that investing time, energy and self in getting to know each other better was actually more ‘productive’ than “hammering away at the keyboard”*.

Reflecting on his comments and that endless ‘get stuff done’ agenda I wondered if this leaks out of the very walls of the university – moving back inside, the physical space had exponentially enhanced that task-hunger.

and Practice: Back inside there is a lot of ‘taking the moral high ground’ from many sides. It seems to be one of their many negative habits, perhaps a safety mechanism, a defensiveness. It surfaces first in the noting of the two missing people when it comes to gathering the ‘pot of strengths’. I am feeling it, others too. It is voiced by one, not in a kindness to the missing two way, but a point scoring manner. They have habituated point scoring it seems. In re-positioning back in the room they have re-settled into the familiar, well-practised habits of ‘how we are when we are together’. I wonder how to re-find that ‘shake-it-up’ momentum and the new ways of communicating. It feels lost already.

63C

A: his reaction to The University and the lack of certainty/ change in role felt like he’d been cheated by a lover – he raged against this. Sounds hurt, let down. Confusion. Lash out. Soft-cold... The University is a heterogeneous entity – some bits loved, some bits hated, some fear... big emotions, where and how to direct these – what to latch on to – paradoxes

A has big influences on U (‘ironman too’) and S. Less so on C. Clarity, confidence, assuredness in much of how he speaks and what he says (even if full of holes) – this ‘way’ has influence here

E – confidence, eagerness, but has been burned – visually she is strong in my memory, but her words have hardly stuck. Why is that? My biases? And yet she seeks to bring clarity as a strength

Lisa – very quiet presence – no locus of power here; C looks to her; A and less so; U ambivalent

T – relieved? fragility....

M – signals fuzzing and fading then coming in stronger

Figure CD1: a fragment of my notes from the Group Session (TEAMUS are initials used for participants plus Lisa)

and Power: reflexions on the storytelling revealed each person held very powerful, very present connections to The University in some form or another. For some the connection had been made through a transformative moment, for some the university was a place of shelter, some a place of empowerment.... their stories were different but they shared an intimacy and passion

for The Place. They are surprised. It feels like an elephant has been named. There's a recognition of shared feelings, a quiet 'aha' moment.

It occurs to me that this might be part of their unholy addiction to each other: I imagine a notional jostling for territory: 'I belong here more than you' 'I was here first', a fight to the metaphorical death for the holy grail of 'my place'. Feeling territorial, perhaps immovable could create feelings of inviolable safety, however, having to share those feelings with others and in a climate of redundancies may create great vulnerabilities. Perhaps the way to reduce the threat of removal by The University, of being made homeless, is to redirect this at the others? Throw someone else overboard to save yourself?

Leadership is .. where?

I realise have never been explicit about whether the Group Session is also leadership development or not i.e. checked my assumptions about whether the team has leadership or not. Am I infantilizing them? On critical inquiry I recognise the whole Group Session is absolutely in pursuit of doing leadership. In my mind it didn't need to be named - it was inherent.

On reflection I think naming the session 'leadership development', making my (hidden) assumption explicit would I think have been problematic. Leadership Development labels can imply a 'deficit' that 'needs developing' particularly for those already feeling insecure. Calling it leadership development would I think have brought further toxicity and division. The happy accident in not choosing this frame, but in framing as 'a collaborative effort around PG' was probably more helpful for actually developing leadership.

64C

Lisa and leadership practice – developing?

What did Lisa notice about her doing leadership from the interventions and specifically the group session? Has there been any leadership development for her?

On framing: place and power

Problematizing the ground rules in set up: Lisa brought a great deal of sweet treats and goodies, shiny, sparkly things to the session. As noted we both spent a great deal of time establishing a physical structure to the room. Our intentions were to claim the space. I also wondered if there are power-over issues in this prior act: do the props and placements create a greater feeling of agentic safety or do they also reinforce power hierarchies? I have an underlying suspicion that the goodies reinforce the unsaid knowledge that the power is with the group, the dark forces of the mob (Freud, 1921) and the goodies are some ritualistic appeasement 'please play nicely'. Whilst as Flinn notes (2019) the facilitator in Dynamic Administrator mode, setting rules and creating structure (the petal of chairs and tables) in the session framing, can have a tremendously enabling effect on the group process and performance, the 'rules' on sweets and treats seem less carrot and more stick. There is a tinge of coercion which works against agency and open collaboration. I noticed I was comforted by the supply of sweets and chocolate, but at the time didn't question why or what these would do to the session. Would they tip us from safe-enough (mother is here) to too-safe? This revealed a blind-spot about the habits we have, Lisa in her leadership, me in my leadership facilitation practice.

Lisa: “great food for thought (pun intended)”

Position

In the group session Lisa was definitely positioned within the group. There was no explicit difference in power or position. This made a difference and maybe tested some of her confused pronoun use mentioned earlier – it allowed for power-with.

“It was really powerful to be ‘in’ the group, a real change for me, and I enjoyed the process. I need to explore how to continue this even when I am in charge with them.”

However as noted above, her position in the group set-up was different: she was the convener, took control of part of the room set-up. An extension of the power-with position would be the democratisation of the set-up, moving from Hierarchy to Cooperation in John Heron’s Planning Dimension (Heron, 1999)

New Practice to change Process (habit)

Throughout the interventions it is clear there is an organisational rhetoric of over-work of too much busyness and pressure and stress – this is the narrative of ‘normal’, of what work is here. As noted above, the team have a task-hunger, outcome-focused habit, possibly in part driven by the narrative as much as the volume and intensity of work itself. It seems to be an approach to work they are overplaying to an unhealthy degree (noting T’s comments). Pressing pause on this for a moment to focus on process via the walk and talk storytelling provided a relief, a moment to notice the task-habit. It may not be possible to change the volume of work, but it might be possible to change the experience of and approach to it by changing the discourse, creating a new narrative about who we are and how we work.

Reflection: ‘We may not be able to change what happens to us, but we can change how we respond to it’ is a principle I’ve used most of life to deal with personal circumstances. I realise I have only thought of this as an individual choice, but it could also be a group or organisational choice.

An option now for the team, led and modelled initially by Lisa, is to begin to re-shape the discourse of us-in-work, to tell a different story about the experience of doing work. There is a body of work in leadership fields around the use of narrative, of storytelling as both the root of personal change (of leaders) and of leadership changing organisations and the social sphere through narrative (Mowles, 2018; Boje et al, 2015; Little, 2019; Cleverley-Thompson, 2015; Schedlitzki et al 2015 to name but a few). Storytelling is a recognised practise for doing leadership and one Lisa seems curious around, potentially the team too.

Purpose (with a small p?) - place

Building a practice (and maybe reputation) around PG seemed to be tangible, achievable and desirable and lent a purposefulness to the group functioning, at least temporarily. It wasn’t explicit but there seemed to be some *hope* emerging. Perhaps the hope came from the idea of doing something that could make a positive difference, or perhaps from the appreciation of

spending an afternoon 'being us differently'? The team had created a pause in hostilities, a model of a different way of working. It was possible. And also up to them to take it forward (or not). It is about agency.

Lisa: "I had a realisation that its 'just' doing good work with them and that may have wider benefits and that they 'may' or 'may not' gel into a team and that is okay too – a place of acceptance rather than fear and resistance is arriving." I am curious to explore how Lisa's shift from a place of concern to a place of acceptance will / will not affect the team. Finding this 'space of centred calm' is an aspiration of many leadership / leader styles. Having dipped into this Lisa now has choices about trying to sustain this place and noticing what it 'does'.

Me doing leadership development – extracting theory-in-practice

The purpose of this intervention for the research inquiry was to continue to develop doing ~~containment~~ as a theory-in-practice and specifically to extract it from my own practice in some sort intelligible manner so it might be tried for size by other practitioners and written up in this paper.

What did I notice about my own practice? What did other's notice?

Note: the use of the word *tension* in this discussion is something I view as 'good', helpful to problematisation.

66C

On framing: embodied – intellectual knowing tensions

I have long felt that the practices involve in framing (preparing for) facilitated interventions form the bulk of the facilitation process – the submerged iceberg to the delivery tip. I was aware of balancing how much of myself to present to the team before the session: I wanted to be 'clean' of assumptions and also establish enough credibility or trust to be 'let in' to the group space. It is a practice of problematizing - of feeling comfortable in discomfort. My aspiration is that the participants will come to know me through my authentic and full presence in the moment of doing facilitation – through an embodied knowing, unpolluted by a prior political, social or intellectual knowing, hence my efforts to arrive 'clean'. In not building their expectations about me-in-the-process I am encouraged to be present fully and openly and be OK with the concurrent vulnerability of this position. Being open-enough; scared-enough from showing up; and safe-enough from inner stability, my skills and experience. It's doing the ~~containment~~ balancing, wobbling along the line of 'enough' with its pushes and pulls into the gutters of 'too much' / 'not enoughs'.

On framing: outcome-process tensions

A core tension of my practice is between wishing to run a process-oriented session and let whatever outcomes emerge be the outputs; and the needs of clients and participants to have an articulation of Intended Outcomes prior to the contracting (the 'what do we get for our investment' aspect). T noted this in his feedback: he wanted "*more explanation beforehand to be better prepared*". Being respectful to these needs and also holding them at bay enough to

allow what needs to happen to happen is a tension, a key problematisation of practice, and not unique to me. It's part of the game of doing Leadership Development: being artfully vague enough in the Outcomes to allow the process to be clean and also still create the change that's needed.

On staying present *and also* problematised

When we started the Group Session I was in a high energy state; very present; very centred; actively holding a calm place being both in the middle and on the ceiling. I note feeling slightly intimidated by A and S and also aware of this, noticing the tension to hold it there also be aware of it and not disappear into it. In my notes I wrote: 'I found myself wanting to make it ok: I feel their broken hearts'. This is at the heart of what Richard Little calls the 'radical anxiety of facilitation': noticing and feeling the emotional and power currencies and also remaining detached enough to keep the purpose and process in flow and also noticing one's own inner emotional state – calibrating into these and using them to evolve, name and maintain the process. The tension between the rising task-hunger of the group and the need to note but not disappear into this is similar.

This is the dance of doing ~~containment~~, of balancing safe-enough, raw-enough, confident-enough, purposeful-enough, and always attentive and critically problematizing. It's the outside-inside perspective. Simultaneously abstracting and also attaching. The naming of Mara, seeing him and showing kindness in the Buddhist practice (see ~~Containment~~ and the Case of CoAA).

67C

Tim Ingold's (2011) articulation of children's understanding of their place on earth is a good metaphor: when small children are asked to draw the earth and then add themselves and the sky, they at first draw flat 'ground' with sky above and themselves standing on the ground and 'in' the sky. As they get older and shaped by school they draw the earth as a globe as if seeing it from space. They then become confused as to where to put themselves and 'sky'. In facilitation I feel like the older child both seeing from outer space and also being in the middle.

Place and pace help sustain this practice and keep it performative.

Place helps stay problematized

Responding to and being 'of' place is part of the practice of problematizing, of keeping critically attentive and questioning. Place: moving through and with the physical, geography of land, of landscape, lights and habitats pushes and prompts alertness, physically, emotionally and intellectually. Movement, position change – the real as metaphor for the intellectual-embodied landscape. Place as space-time: what came before, past entering present; stepping inside and outside the encultured space-places – it does something.

Reflections: "I was so happy the sun was out" my reflection during the Group Session, inspiring, bringing confidence to respond to what I was noticing, to calibrate the group potential into.

The feedback phone call with T - he in University office, me in Delhi. My place in the laptop camera/ mic obliterated in the biggest, loudest maddest fireworks of three enormous god effigies being destroyed in a crazy blitz of light-sound. The expected intensity of the call consumed by the

intensity of the battle as Ram defeated Ravan and won back Sita in the park outside. It was the last night of Dussehra. We giggled at the absurdity. It re-framed everything. Look outward. There is a bigger world. The complete intrusion of place in the sense-making seemed to keep the 'its ok to step back from the keyboard and perform differently' liberated and validated.

Adding Pace to the Ps

Reflecting that the Group Session might have provided a “*glimpse, a flavour, a feeling of what a contained-space and state might look, feel and be like – to show an alternative way of being together*” prompted the naming of one of the key determinants of how we are with each other, what rules our worlds of work and life – time. So often colleagues and I have bemoaned the fact that we are slaves to the clock, running interventions only “if time allows” until we “run out of time”, wondering why we honour the clock but not the people. The attitude to and regard for time and speed through time is, of course, critical to doing leadership, to the choices we make and how, to the ability to feel safe-enough and problematise. And yet I had never even thought to think with it. Perhaps it was so huge an unchallengeable assumption it was invisible. The reflections forced it to the forefront:

Lisa: “one of the key components was taking time – we run, run, run at everything and never have enough meeting time to do anything thoroughly enough [...] this session ruptured that pattern and made us invest in one another.”

68C

Without naming it I had for many years been responding to and playing with pace in my practice whether in the training room or coaching. Slowing down, pausing, speeding up – this makes a difference. This matters! This is Pace in doing Leadership Development. Does it matter in doing leadership? I believe it does: it’s inherent to the ‘Crisis’ that prompts Command & Control; implicit in the lassitude to problematise teams into a very wicked problem space; a key component of the neo-liberalist management discourse (e.g. ‘keep your foot on the gas’) and the virtue of the busy-ness agenda. Time needs interrogating in what it does to doing leadership. I decide to slot it into the P framework and see what happens

Using Pace in coaching “*At times we walked naturally, eyes to the landscape - at other times we would slow and make eye contact as we spoke, and at others we would stop and have an exchange. I can’t pin point what we did when, if there was a pattern, or if that was intentional on your part, but it certainly seemed to help - the pace aided the process.*”
coachee

‘Moving more quickly now into the lane and the open views’ Lisa reflections: “Pace and ease of walk complement the pace and ease of solution finding....”

‘I tell stories about what others do, burbling on as we descend to the river. There was a stuck moment. A stop by the bridge, the water rushing sounds. Stillness. Flowing thoughts.’ My reflections on a coaching walk and talk.

The Research Journey: pausing to reflect

Stepping away from the interventions, what has been achieved? What happened to the research inquiry?

Through the four interventions we have transitioned from ‘could ~~containment~~ be a thing of leadership?’ to ‘doing ~~containment~~ as establishing pre-conditions for doing leadership’ to bringing the development of it as an idea, a craft into the doing of leadership development and finally, to the aim of understanding and extracting my practice in doing ~~containment~~ development.

Where I am now:

Doing ~~containment~~: doing leadership in and with and of the actors and also the everything else of the place is to do the dance of ‘enough’: to keep ever responsive to and actively engaged with the stuff of safety and keep finding those sweet-spots of safe-enough, critically problematized enough to do leadership and to do what is required of leadership at the place (space-time). Keep sensing into, keep your core strong and supple, keep walking the line of ‘enough’...

P lenses

These are a tool-in-evolution to help sense-into and critically question doing leadership, to dancing ~~containment~~

69C

The lenses: Purpose, Power, Place, Practice, Process, People, Position, Performance, Problematisation, Pace

Purpose: *Why are we here? What are we for? What is leadership for here and now? How strong is sense of Purpose? Whose Purpose? What does Purpose do our identity?*

Power: *What are the power flows? Power-over, power-with, power-within – where does power originate? Who creates it? What tools support it? What is the role of control, being controlled, being in control? How visible are the power structures? How much do I trust you / they / myself to use power wisely – for good?*

Place: *Where are we culturally, socially, intellectually etc? What came before that informs us? What is around us? What are the interconnections? What does this time-space, here and now do? How much do I/we feel I belong here? What is my/our relation with place?*

Practice: *What are the practices we are using? The balance between them? What is overplayed, underused, missing? What is visible / invisible? Where is our artisanship? How practised are we, could we be?*

Process: *what are the habits and rituals we use? How strongly do these structures enable or limit us? Are they scaffolds supporting us or do they restrict us? What are the (unspoken) rules?*

People: *How much of doing leadership is about the person-people of the ‘everything-I-bring’ and ‘all-that-we-are’? How much am I free to be me? How am I reshaped by the people-place of here*

and now? How much I am subsumed into the group? What is unique about us here together now? How am I balancing syncretic and individual identities?

Position: *How much of doing leadership is through positional authority? How able, willing and agile are we to move positions? How do our positions interrelate? Where does my position locate? How partial, how complete or solid is it?*

Performance: *What are the results this leadership is expected, is producing? How are we performing? How are we performing together? Whose performance matters? How much does performance matter and to whom?*

Pace: *How fast are we moving? Who sets the pace? Can we change the pace? How much does pace drive or constrain us? Are we all moving at a similar pace in this? And with the ecosystem in which we sit?*

Problematisation: *How critically enabled are we? How are we staying alive to doing it differently? Who is questioning? How do we question and what happens?*

Meta-question: *For each P, is there ‘enough’?*

70C

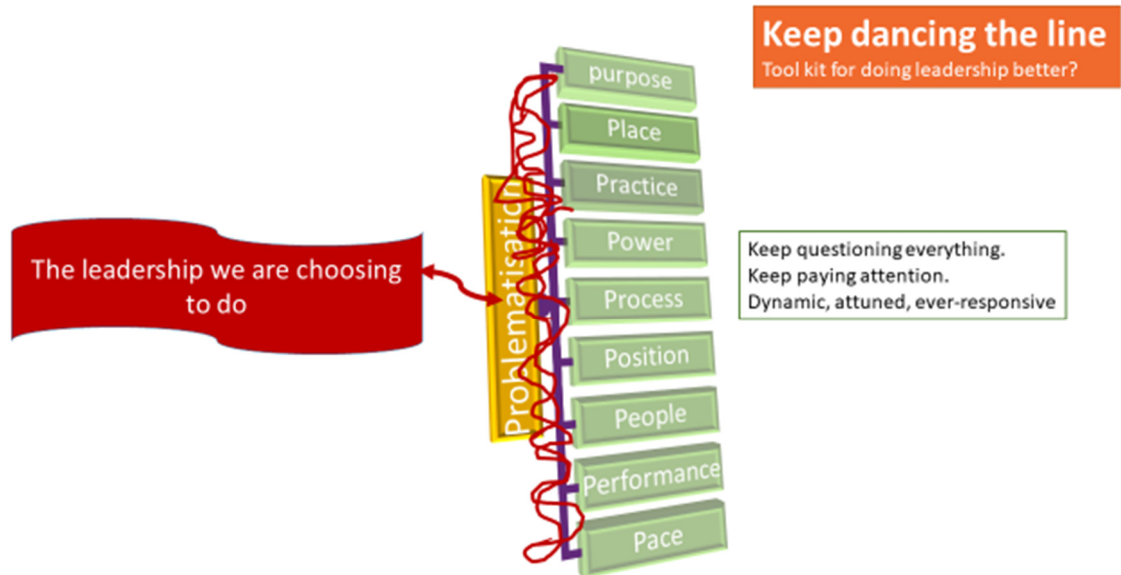


For each question, also ask the negative – e.g. Why are we doing this? (why are we not doing something else?)

Figure CD2: the updated, refreshed P lenses

Much like the twelve limbs of dependent origination (Mahayana Buddhism), I consider the P lenses all interdependent, all to some degree *at cause* with each other although not in any particular order. The visualisation (CD2) might lead us to think there are only two dimensional links between the frames. This is my weakness with graphics. If you can, imagine the P lenses sat amongst a thicket of interconnecting tendrils, each connected to each other, enmeshed and agitating as different interconnections become more or less relevant for the instant of questioning, of inquiry. The P's neither have essence nor do not not have essence.

Each snapshot of doing leadership reveals a different combination of different strengths. It's the dance between and amongst of critical questioning to keep mixing and remixing to find the balance of safe-enough to afford doing leadership optimally for that moment.



71C

Figure CD3 – refocusing attention on the balancing act, the dance of doing leadership ‘enough’

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[Click on the image to return to the start](#)



Emptying leadership into place

On content

This Section starts with a philosophical perspective on the conundrum of the intoxicating uselessness/powerfulness of 'leadership' and suggests the answer *is* the conundrum itself. There's a dip into possible sources of the leadership intoxication, specifically where the hero-leader attachment may have originated and how this may influence the discourse and practice of leadership for the better.

An exploration of further questions around doing leadership follows focused on a mesh of interdependent question sets for interrogating leadership usefully.

The final words refocus the picture *around* leadership, locating ~~containment~~ in practice.



What is leadership?

“Is this leading or is this managing?” a question I have heard many times from anxious clients on leadership development programmes. Their anxiety is founded in concerns they are not doing the ‘right thing’. The ‘right thing’ would be leading. But what is leading? What is leadership? The expectation: *‘I should know, shouldn’t I?!’ ‘Everyone else must know except me!’*. Others believe they have it sorted, they know *the* answer (*‘It’s being authentic!’ ‘It’s being sustainable!’ ‘It’s being strong and kind!’ ‘It’s being appreciative!’*) and cling firmly to the adjective perhaps hoping that it will override the slippery ambiguity of its collocation partner, leadership.

Leadership: word of a thousand-and-one expectations. It can so often feel like a lexical landmine stuffed with expectations-assumptions that only surface as they are exploding beneath us; a Russian roulette of possible meanings, one of which may be the magic bullet delivering the promised land, others which may blow up in our face. Leadership: power-full and thereby potentially dangerous; creator of heroes and villains; awash with possible meanings and thereby also empty (after Laclou, in Laclou and Mouffe, 1985).

So ‘what is leadership?’ Many expect there to be AN answer to the question. This was my expectation too. As I’ve explored in previous papers (2016), blogs (2017 to 2020), presentations (2018, 2019, 2020), development programmes (2016-20) and in the Start Point (p.6) of this thesis, I was wrong.

The ‘what is...’ question most often leads only to confusion.

The ‘what is’ question is circular – leadership *is* whatever you want it to be, or more properly whatever you-and-all-the-people-in-relation-with-you-in-this-here-and-now want it to be, expect it to be.

This is leadership. Leadership is this.

And yet it persists. Discourse about leadership, leading and being a leader is also everywhere. Put the word leadership into Amazon (books, co.uk, 02-06-20) and get 70,000+ direct hits; a

single journal (Leadership Quarterly) in a single discipline published over 4000 peer reviewed articles in 2017 alone (Antonakis et al., 2019); 5 journals received over 400,000 citations for leadership articles in 2019 (Antonakis et al., 2019). This is just a tiny slice of the lay, professional and academic chatter.

The leadership discourse itself *does something* (Learmonth & Morrell, 2017). The sheer volume of it also *does something*. We can't ignore it. It's all pervasive. So how did we reach this impossible impasse, seduced by something so compelling and so utterly nebulous, unable to stop talking and writing about, demanding and refuting it? What is it we are seeking? And why?

Reviewing leadership discourse I have been continuously struck by two tendencies: the first, to abstract ever outwards creating theories and fields from specific leadership situations (e.g. Gardner et al., 2020); the second similarly (and differently), to attach deeper and further diving into particular leaders' lives, often reifying these leader shapes (e.g. Hughes, 2015; Owen & Davidson, 2009).¹ Neither seems to satisfy curiosity.

Old adages around talking less, knowing more, seem to hold some relevance here. The proliferating leadership discourse seems to be obscuring leadership.

Foucault's proposition is that discourses are more than the intersection between a reality and a language (St Pierre, 2014), they are "practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak" (Foucault, 1972, p.49). That is, words conceptually solidify ideas into 'things'. Once formed we may be tempted to believe the 'thing' has a solidity, certainty and constancy – a truth. We may become attached to the thing-as-truth. I suggest this is the case with our beliefs on leadership. We create an image, an idea of the thing of leadership, it solidifies and becomes our anchor in the whirling maelstrom of diverging-converging narratives and discourse that keeps threatening to blow us off our feet. We grasp. We attach. The language-as-materiality or merely language-as-text binary (Derrida, 1967/74; Foucault, 1972; Woolgar and Leuzum (2013) in St. Pierre, 2014) extrapolates to a different locus: the representational supersedes the material, language becomes belief.

There is a different perspective which, similarly to Deleuze and Guattari's (1980) dismissal of the material-representational-subjective relevance to their ontology, offers a way out of the endless discourse debate. It does this through the very emptiness of leadership, allowing it to be freed from no longer helpful attachments and the opportunity for it to be useful. This Mahayana Buddhist perspective would suggest the idea, the representation of it and therefore also the thing it becomes, are mutable. They (ideas, representations and things), like all forms, are steeped in a 'radical indeterminacy' (*sunyata*) (Nagarjuna interpreted in Berger, undated). To follow this logic: neither are they in themselves nothing, nor do they "*possess a positive absence (abhava) of essence*" (ibid). They are empty. Further, they (ideas, discourses, objects) relate to one another *because* they are able to transform and be transformed (and not because of any jigsaw-like interlocking of pre-determined forms). Discourses form and also dissolve the objects of which they speak. And they are also formed and dissolved by them because they are inherently empty, mutable.

Given that ideas, words, things are also in relation with all other forms in the wider world (they are all interconnected). They all are also 'susceptible to ongoing transformation' through *these*

¹ The attachment- abstraction duality and its role in epistemologies are explored in depth in Voices Section.

wider relations too. Thus, the ideas held in leadership, the objects created, are continually susceptible to transformation as the actors, environment, everything changes. However the word, 'leadership', remains fixed, ossified in form and shape, re-said, re-printed and re-used without change. It looks the same, sounds the same. It is unsurprising therefore that we may expect the materiality of leadership to be constant and consistent.

'What is it?' seems an utterly reasonable question if we expect it to have a fixed 'it-ness'. If we follow the rationale of Nagarjuna, the 'it-ness' of leadership doesn't exist, nor does it not 'not exist'. Any 'It' is shifting, transforming with all of the other interconnected 'stuff'. And will transform again. And again. Leadership is empty. Asking 'What is leadership?' is seeking to know an 'it', an essence, so cannot be answered, nor not answered. The question is redundant. However, emptiness is not. Starting with the emptiness of leadership allows us to shift focus from the (entity-natured) stuff of epistemology and ontology, towards becoming-unbecoming. The 'ology' of both studies makes *logical discourse* (-logia λογία) an inherent aspect of the studies of knowing and being. It brings us back full circle to the representational-material in our ways of understanding. Both -ologies, in whatever their historical-philosophical iterations, turn attention towards what is (and what is not), how we know this, or came to know this. They systemise, particularise and abstract. Even 'becoming' as a tradition of ontology carries the idea of moving *towards the 'empty fiction' of being / object / knowledge* (Nietzsche on Heraclitus. (Cox, 1999)). Emptiness, leadership neither with essence nor positive absence of essence, re-articulated in the Western tradition, leads us ontologically towards a Bergsonian philosophy of movement and change and "the replacement of static conceptions of things through the creation of dynamic conceptions of processes in continual transition" (Grosz, 2005, p8). Conceptualise leadership *with* becoming-unbecoming, inquire *with* the "material flows and movements contributing to their [its] – and our – ongoing formation" (Ingold, 2011, p.88). Emptiness as concept encourages critical, honest, un-attached inquiry and the shrugging off of expectations and assumptions for more critical, reflexively engaged practice.

3L

Whilst the 'what is' question may be redundant, questioning, critically interrogating, keeping leadership problematised and alive to keep making better choices, taking more fit actions, seems very reasonable. Asking more and better questions to unpack and surface current ideas 'leadership' is holding; actively shaping the discourse to keep forming the 'object', liberating ourselves and the word from unhelpful attachments might just give us direction-enough, confidence-enough to do the leadership 'right thing' for the here-and-now.

[Why are we so attached to some ideas of leadership?](#)

Above I noted the problem of attachment to leadership ideas. Specifically, we seem to have strong attachment to placing leadership in single individuals, into big heroic men (Chaffer, 2017). Heroic leaders: the conjoining limb between the Siamese twins of mainstream leadership scholars and their contrary Critical Leadership siblings – locked together in their determination to alternately revere / teardown the big man (Chaffer, 2017). Heroic leaders: also the selling point of many a good airport bookstore read. As Grint has graphically described in his 2010 paper the practice and underpinning ethos of leading has oscillated back and forth between a trait-base to a more distributed, rational model from the times of Thomas Carlyle (Great Man theory) and Frederick Taylor (scientific managerialism) to the present day. Add to this the invention of 'leadership' studies in academia in the 1950s and the subsequent proliferation of positivist heroic, post-heroics and their equally romantic (Collinson et al. 2017) counter theories; critical, although not as critical as they perhaps claim (Learmonth & Morrell, 2017), most pivoting off the great man idea, but, critically, to dispute and refute it (Collinson, 2010).

Emptying Leadership into Place

Love 'em, hate 'em, refute 'em, feed off 'em, elect 'em.... We can't seem to get enough of the big man leader. Why? Following Grint's idea and indulging my evolutionary science past I chartered backwards through time through some of the major civilisations to the earliest human groupings to understand what leading, doing leadership might have been like during our longest single evolutionary period on the plains some 3-200,000 years ago. This was visualised in the wall chart (shown in Figure L1 below) produced for a training group at the Institute for Leadership & Sustainability in 2017.

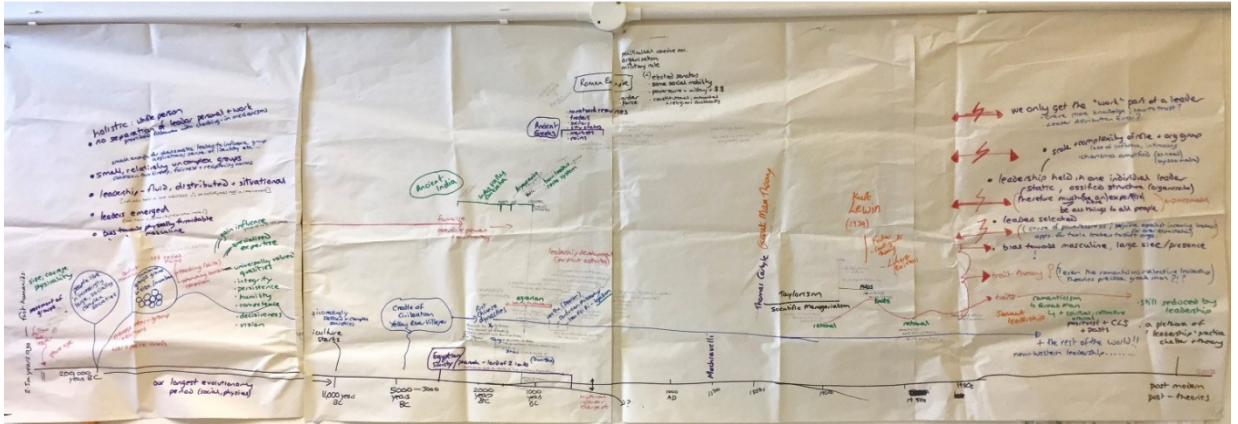


Figure L1: an evolutionary journey through leadership

4L

Van Vugt et al. (2013), Popper & Castelnovo (2017) and others in the fields of evolutionary leadership postulate that hunter-gatherer leadership roles included sharing expertise (teaching) managing intra and inter-group relations including conflict and developing group cohesion. Groups would have been up to around 150 persons in size. Leaders would have been of the group, emerging into leadership with the specialist skills needed for that time and circumstance, likely reverting to group member status as the need for their particular expertise reduced. This is supported by historical records of Aboriginal Australian peoples created by anthropologists and social scientists in the 1790s² who noted: “The idea of a single leader did not exist” (Evans & Sinclair, 2016, p.473.). In contrast the same authors note current anthropological studies show that many leaders are born into the role in some tribes. The leader figures, whether permanent or temporary, would have lived, worked and played in the group throughout their lifetime. It seems too that early human groups had a preference for following physically large men as their leaders.

It could be that our preference today for leadership by large, masculine leaders is a relic of the evolved mechanisms. Add to this the proposition by anthropologists (Shweders et al., 1997) that we implicitly equate status with virtue and low rank with sin, an aspect of the ‘ethic of community’ and part of what some evolutionary psychologists describe as “universal mental faculties” (Haidt, 2002; Rozin, 1997 in Pinker, 2002) and we have a potent recipe for desiring and revering particular shapes and types of individuals, creating heroes at the top, that are reified (deified even). [Wilfully ignoring or excusing their inevitable fallibility, their mortality, never letting the truth get in the way of belief, at least until some intangible bursts the bubble and the hero becomes devil.]

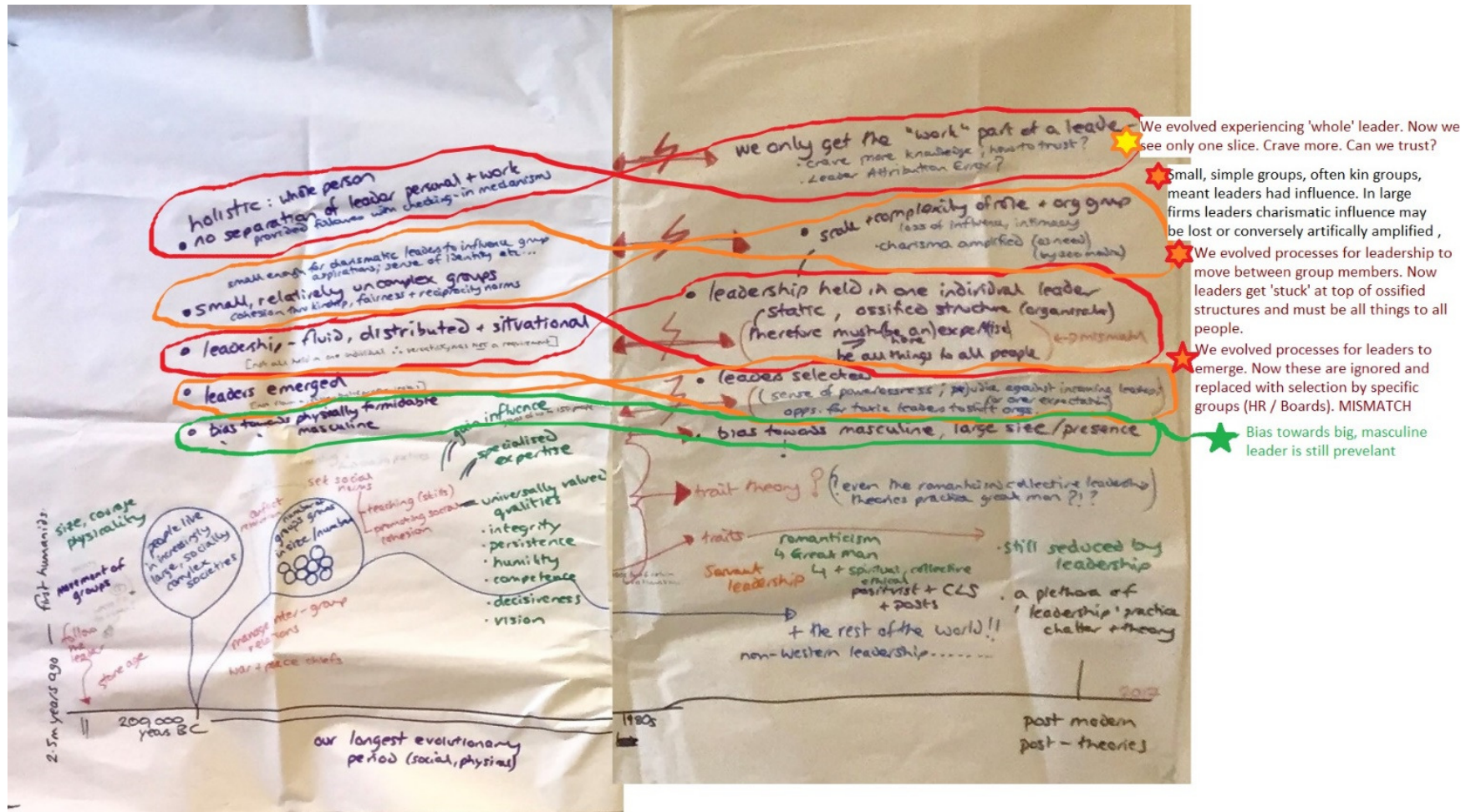
² It could also be that Western researchers studying aboriginal societies didn't recognise the leadership happening, given the substantial differences in the two philosophies ways of knowing and being

Emptying Leadership into Place

This may partly explain the ongoing potency and prevalence of heroic leaders, but if it does why do so many people also intellectually, socially and ethically fiercely refute the idea?

Emptying Leadership into Place

Concertaining the chart to place the hunter-gatherer leadership practices against leadership practices seen today shows that there are several key mismatches between our evolved process and expectations of leadership and those of modern leadership (see Figure L2).



6L

Figure L2: mismatches in expectations of leadership across evolutionary timelines

Perhaps we have the craving for big men leaders but the processes by which we get them; the roles they take on; and how well we feel we know them are out of synch? And this mismatch leaves us with a subconscious confusion, anger or frustration for which, in academia, vehement intellectual debate is perhaps a proxy. And in practice, in organisations specifically, the mismatches in 'how' and 'who' leads us raise questions around the very notion of followership (Kempster, 2016) and imagined leadership-followership relationships: Who is this person? What power do you have and how did you get it? What is the purpose of your leadership? Do you have the expertise, the know-how to do the leadership needed? And if I am thrust into leadership.....?.

My suggestion is we fish these tacit, or gossip-based questions (and many more besides) asked in open forum and bring them into a permitted framework. Keep problematizing.

P lenses to Problematise doing leadership

In my efforts to better understand what leadership might be happening in my practice and in this research I constructed a question set (P lenses) to problematise doing leadership for all and any of the actors engaged in doing leadership and its development. The P lenses draw upon the work of Grint, Jackson and Simpson in their creation. In 2013 Keith Grint introduced a typology of leadership: 'Leadership as..... Position, Person, Results and Process'. Brad Jackson (2017) reconfigured the idea from typology to a set of lenses with which to interrogate leadership. This is the perspective I also take – and extend. He added Place and Purpose.

In conversation Peter Simpson (2017) also (jokingly) suggested problematisation. I realised I had been considering this but rather more seriously. So, I have added Problematisation partly to enable the lenses to dissolve themselves and also to highlight the dependent origination of the questions and questioning.

The final two lenses I have added are: Power (power dynamics) as a fundamental critiquing point whatever the epistemology/ ontology, borrowing Starhawk's (2011) phrasing in the questions; Practice - what we do when we say we do leadership and how we bring others with us in this - our approach founded in artfulness, attributes, attitudes and more.

Why I've selected these lenses is elucidated further below. The lenses are illustrated in Figure L3.



Figure L3: P lenses for interrogating leadership meanings

The P words – sources and justifications

Starting with the work of Keith Grint: seeking to distinguish doing leadership through wielding authority, using the influence and power of **Position** or status from charismatic influences (**Person**) illuminates the power sources. Specifically, it helps us understand whether doing leadership is a function largely of power-over and or power-from-within. This difference has, I believe, fundamental impacts on whether we do leadership with sustainability, in complexity and democratically.

The centrality of **Power** in leadership has long been one of the central divisions in Critical Leadership Studies (CLS), somewhat ironically dividing the big, powerful CLS academics (see Practice notes below). Results (amended to **Performance** by Jackson in 2017), is of course the measure of leadership impacts for much of the world, though what is meant by 'results' is of course a very contested area both for what counts (we need only to look at the fires raging around leadership's role in the climate emergency or the pandemic) and for the degree of impact we perceive (or misperceive) leadership has in achieving the stuff we measure e.g. the Leadership Attribution Error in Western cultures (Hackman, 2002 & Nesbitt, 2003).

Brad Jackson added Purpose (also purposefulness) and, drawing from human geography and Maori traditions, Place. **Purpose** in my view helps us understand the purposes operating and/or dominating when (re)viewing leadership actions: the leaders' personal purpose, the purpose demanded by the immediate situation or the higher purpose of the group/ organisation / movement etc, some of which may align, some may contradict. It is also helpful to query the degree to which purpose is commonly held or hidden, and to which it is a driver and, above all, how clarity on purpose helps us define what leadership actions are needed in the specific context or place.

Place for Jackson (ibid) represents location, locale, sense of place (after Agnew, 1987 in Jackson, 2017). I add group field, shared space (e.g. ba 場), echoes of what came before (cynefin in Welsh, *turangawaewae* in Maori) and the eco-system of cultures and environment within which we are enmeshed. This is place as the named location-concept within which we are tethered (Ingold, 2011). The nuanced noticing, interpretation and being of Place and how this influences

choice of actions, what to do when we do leadership, are I would argue, as fundamental to doing leadership as purpose.

If we accept leadership is, at least in part, socially constructed (Alvehus & Larrson, 2019), then the doing of leadership is located in the relationship, the relational (in)action between people, between people and place (Chaffer, 2016). Further, Alvehus & Larrson, (2019), propose that ontologically leadership is located in social interactions i.e. this is *where* it is socially constructed.

There is a body of research led by Joe Raelin which argues that the location of leadership is in the **Practice** of it (Raelin, 2016). Whether Leadership-As-Practice (LAP) is a movement or not has been hotly contested in a series of articles in Leadership over 2017 and 2018 (Collinson, 2017, 2018; Raelin et al., 2018). It seems to me something of a distraction and at the same time epitomises the ‘stuck’ of scholarly leadership contributions in their attachment to positions. The fact that their positions are about ‘attachment’ (practice-phenomena in the Raelin camp) and ‘abstraction’ (power-structural in the Collinson camp) seems a double irony. I suggest both views are interesting but neither are exclusive or complete, rather they represent partial narratives from different positions and not perhaps the God’s Eye they posit (Haraway, 1994). The LAP spat is but a sliver of the seemingly endless positions the multitude of practitioners, academics, narrators and others take and continue to take on leadership and leading.

My interest is not in the position on practice, but in the breadth of practices, crafts and ways that peoples perceive when they perceive doing leadership. From the *rangatiranga* (weaving together) of Maori leadership (Pfeiffer, 2006), to the reflexive inaction of sitting into discomfort (Simpson, French & Harvey, 2002), to the soaking-up “go out there and absorb into us” of Australian Aboriginal arts leadership (Evans & Sinclair, 2016, p.481), to business leaders recognising great work (Sturt, 2015), to being able to react and adapt quickly and innovate (McChrystal, 2015), to long nights in cold tents wrestling with anxiety over life or death decisions (Chaffer, 2017) or just holding us together long enough to stop us self-destructing (see Section Doing Development): as there are endless positions to take on leadership there are also endless choices of practices in leadership. How we determine which practices to deploy or not; when, for how long, to which intensity and by whom is in itself a practice, an art, perhaps a meta-practice or pre-condition. This is where this study sits, in the practice of focusing on a particular practice that may perhaps be a pre-condition for doing leadership. And that practice is located as much in the web, the environment, the non-actor place, as it is within the actors. This practice requires a re-focus on the non-actor place, a de-focus on leadership and its actors, a quietening of the chatter – a re-balancing.

This practice offers a choice to take no position on leadership. Let the discourses do their work, obscuring leadership. Let it fade from the centre a little.

I return to Nagarjuna for some help with this, putting leadership through the four errors logic, perhaps the core process in developing the Middle Way, moving beyond arguments towards an emptiness for exploration.

Positioning leadership within the four errors logic might appear like this:

*‘No this is not leadership,
it does not fail to have leadership,
it does not have and not have leadership,
nor does it neither have nor not have leadership’*

Emptying Leadership into Place

This is not violating the law of the excluded middle (A cannot have both B and not-B) but is a denial, a principled refusal to answer. It takes apart the idea of leadership but is not offering a counter-thesis. It is a decision to take no position on leadership on the principle that to do so is a waste of time.

Instead let's examine a re-positioning with a wider field of vision, emptying leadership into place³.

A reflexion on the P lenses

Building on the headlines of Jackson's work, to extend these (adding Problematism) and turning them into practice based tools through the question sets and active deployment in leadership development practice has been an interesting and useful exercise in extending my thinking and approach to doing leadership. It hasn't been done before (to my knowledge) thus it adds to 'knowledge'. It fulfils the needs of clients wishing to focus support on their people, it was helpful in the inquiry as a tool in the theoretical framework application (see the Case Studies Section). It is still a useful tool to throw into a leadership development scenario, even just with the P words – some words go off for people like hand-grenades triggering thought provoking discussions and change to doing leadership; some words land like overripe fruit and quietly decay into the contextual ether. It adds to practice. However, I realise the lens tool has now passed its sell-by-date in terms of the research inquiry. In fact, here and now (June 2020) I feel positively allergic to it, focused as it is, largely on the actors of leadership. The P of Problematism is the core inquiry lens of this dissertation and as such feels a little under-valued when placed in the lens tool. The P of Practice is also in some ways at the heart of the inquiry as doing leadership – with a twist. Doing leadership is the approach. ~~Containment~~ is the pre-conditional practice enabling the leadership practitioner(s) to choose and keep choosing their leadership practices wisely. Of the P lenses Place, as a proxy for the 'everything else that is not leader-follower-other' of leadership, is the one that should remain and merits further exploration.

10L

³ The title of this section is a deliberate play on words, specifically 'Putting Leadership in its Place' the title of the 2019 ISLCC at UWE, UK and of the Special Edition of Leadership currently in Call for Papers. Guest Editors Neil Sutherland, Gareth Edwards, Doris Schedlitzki and Richard Bolden

Re-focusing, re-balancing and letting leadership disappear: the art of containment

In the Start Point I use a metaphor to describe how to approach containment in relation to leadership: **“It’s about paying attention to the winds and air and where these meet in the ocean-air place within which the various ‘ships’ of leading, following and more sail, as well as the captains and crew or the ships themselves.”**

These last pages are an attempt to shift perception and pay attention differently. The P lenses are still applicable, still relevant, but the emphasis of the P’s is different (see Figure L4) as described below.

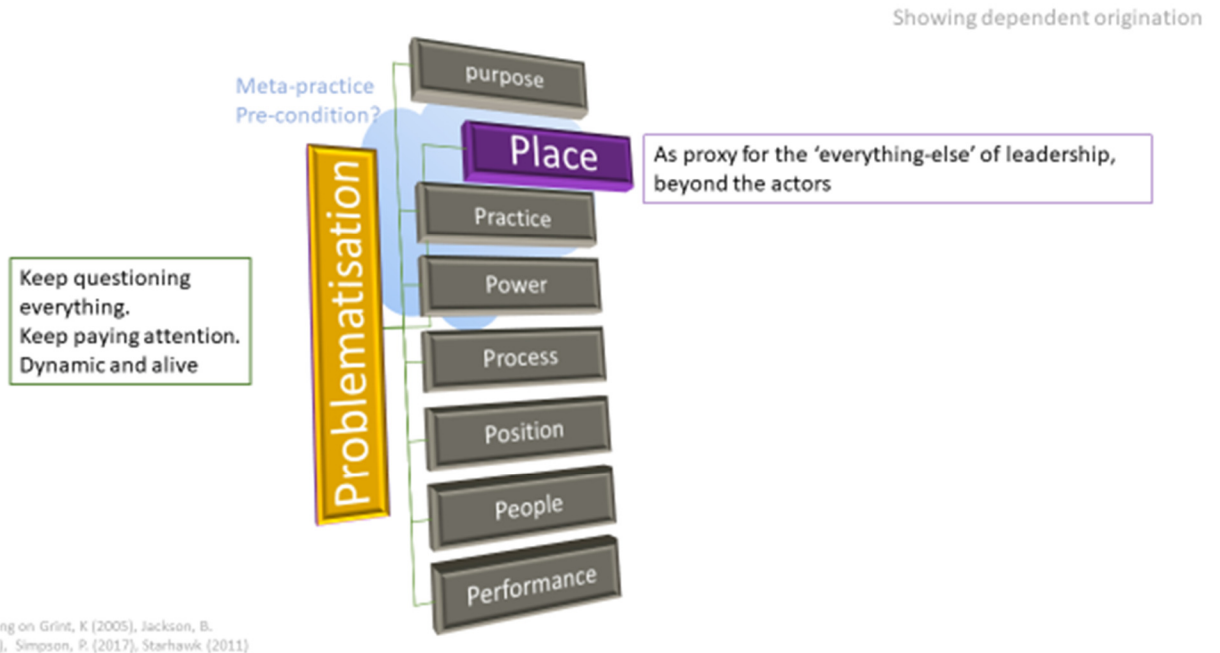


Figure L4: P lenses rebalanced: paying attention to Place

As noted above the vast majority of leadership (development) literature has leaders and other actors centre stage, the focal point(s). Instead, I wish to focus more on the set(ing): to diffuse the inquiry away from the actors to the atmosphere, the ether in which the actors (the ‘ships’) are immersed.

In his 2003 book Nesbitt claims not just that people from different cultures make sense of the world differently, but that there are evolved differences in the physiological, neurological encounter of the world between peoples of different geo-cultural origins, specifically those of us from trading society origins (e.g. N American, Greek rhetorical) and those of very stable, harmony-seeking agrarian origins (Indo-Chinese, Tao-Buddhist). He cites multiple experiments (Masuda et al.) with groups of American (representing trading origins) and Japanese (representing harmony-seeking) participants where the Easterners’ notice, name and recall the ‘field’ more often, more clearly than Westerners. They also recalled and described the image using the field characteristics as the primary ‘tag’ for images (moving and still). Westerners, in contrast, saw, prioritised and understood the same images by the ‘focal object’, something that is distinctly bigger, brighter, more active etc e.g. a multi-coloured, huge fish and recalled the image by the object. This perception difference in background-foreground primacy was echoed

Emptying Leadership into Place

in differences in other aspects e.g. seeing the relationships rather than unique entities; noticing textures rather than shape.

Nesbitt and others claim peoples of different cultural-evolutionary histories, (specifically Western and agrarian) sense, make sense-of and operate in the world differently. If we continue this line of thinking into the leadership sphere, might it be that (largely) Western discourse, especially academic N American discourse (and therefore inquiry) is operating from the 'foreground' position? If this is *a* position (and not *the* world view) it follows that there are other positions, other views open to us. I suggest that these are very likely to provide other sense-making and other action choices for a re-understanding of doing leadership.

It's a perception shift moving the 'everything' of everything else from subsidiary or secondary awareness to full attention. And similarly moving the actors, the ships towards subsidiary. Re-balancing.

It's from this perception shift that I bring ~~containment~~ back into the room; or in fact bring our attention to the room, to the space-place-time-position ness – what I am going to call 'atmosphere' (deliberately drawing on Neri (1998), Bion (1961), Ingold (2011) and others') of doing leadership. Can we re-focus on the enmeshed space, the atmosphere rather than the actors? Can we enmesh the actors within the atmosphere thus bringing forward the 'background' and also pushing back on the 'foreground'? Can we notice with more symmetry, re-balance?

Can we sit in the *and/both*, in the fuzzy boundaries of both Western and Eastern perception to metaphorically 'locate' the doing of ~~containment~~ here?

To make this more tangible (and developing the metaphor above): an image I've often used in leadership development, specifically strategic leadership programmes, is shown below. You might recognise it. It's been floating around the 'business insider' style internet as a sadly unattributable piece of over-used visual flotsam for nigh on a decade.

12L



copied from <https://sites.google.com/site/managersandleaders/matters-of-management-in-media/vision>

Figure L5: a vision cartoon

I've used it 'as is' to encourage a quick and dirty response to 'vision' and more thoughtfully thence to crack open this heroic nut (asking 'Whose vision?' 'Why them?' 'How do they 'know (and the rest don't)?' etc).

As an aid to unpack leadership itself I've used an adulterated version of the cartoon (below), asking participants to share their perceptions about doing leadership in the image for example 'who is doing leadership?', 'how or why do you think that?', 'how successful are the leaders?' i.e. using some of the P lenses.



Figure L6: looking for leadership cartoon adaption

In doing this I've also been stuck in my 'foreground' Western priority. It was all about the actors.

What if we re-balance and re-focus on the ocean, the air and the in-between fuzzy boundaries where the ocean-air-ships meet and choose to 'see' the whole picture? (see Figure L7).

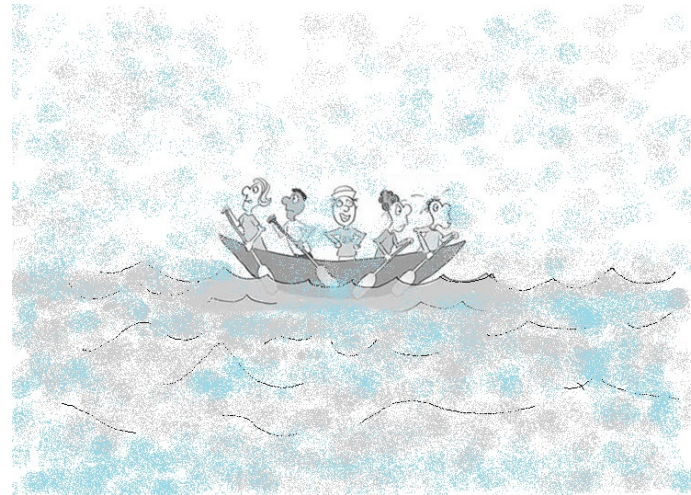


Figure L7: rebalancing field and objects in leadership

As I review this, I notice that whilst the 'ships' are less distinct and relatively smaller they are also still at the centre. There is a re-balancing to somewhere in-between field first /object first. For now, it's a good-enough metaphor to illustrate the principal. It is this last image that represents the way into ~~containment~~ as theory-in-use, as leadership development practice. Practising getting safe-enough, problematized-enough (confident-, committed- enough) ~~containment~~ requires noticing and working with the dynamic flows and ever-changing relations of ocean-air-ship-people-oars atmosphere. My assertion is that when we are attentive and in action with this realm, then we may make better, freer and more attuned choices of action/inaction to lead (and follow).

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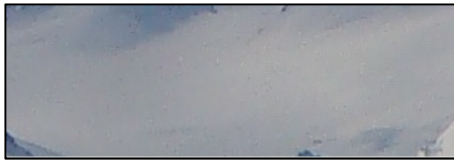
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Position and Place

The 'where' of the people-in-the-inquiry

The purpose of this Section is two-fold: to show the location of my current position in the research and to show the place of the inquiry, geographical, socio-political and cultural. These two lenses are, I believe, essential to you the reader in your sense-making of these words. This Section aims to illuminate one of the key W questions around of the inquiry – Where. All the W Questions are of course co-dependent and interrelated thus the Where informs and is informed by the 'Why' (Start Point Section) and the 'How' (Research Project Approach Section) that shaped the 'What' (Sections on Voices and Case Studies) and to some extent the 'When' and 'How long'. The questions of Position and Place are particularly useful in helping reveal any assumptions that you hold that may be different to the ones I hold or that the participants and others of the inquiry hold.

This section also serves as acts of: *humility* (to actively cast aside the detached researcher-in-God's-Eye position); *equality* (acknowledging aspects of my own shaping; the influences or at least the ones I'm aware of) and *connection* (assisting us to shuffle lightly into the worlds and perspectives of the other actors here). Finally, it is also an act of *pragmatism* in noting some of the limitations and constraints of the inquiry.

1P



Why position matters (to the inquiry)

It appears I've been occupying a constructivist-socially constructionist position in relation to my work (and to some extents to the world) over the last decade or so, and no more so than in this inquiry. In my view, the inquiry is *of me* and I have become *of it*. I am shaping it and it is shaping me. To know the inquiry is to know me and therefore to know me (at least in passing) is to know the inquiry. If the researcher is shaping, driving, doing and sense-making the inquiry into its eventual final form, then it is incumbent on the researcher to critically open up pertinent aspects of themselves that may be shaping, driving, sense-making the inquiry in *this* way (and not another). As such, exploring *how I come to occupy* the position of 'the researcher' and *how I occupy* this position is to attempt to situate myself and therefore also situate the knowledge I am seeking. It's about acknowledging both the location of the inquiry in the inner processes of my mind (the constructivist bit) and the ongoing (trans)formation of mind processes by the

wider world I am enmeshed in and therefore the co-construction of the inquiry with the world (the social construction bit) (Sommers-Flanagan, 2012). And potentially collapsing them into each other. That is the ego-centric, Western version of the researcher-inquiry-knowledge nexus.

Examining the same question but from a Mahayana Buddhist practice provides a different, and perhaps more wholesome view. I am empty of I. If I am empty of I, of essence, then the researcher you hear in this inquiry is a phantasm shaped by the interconnections, the experiences, voices, being, doing and becoming of my so far 50 years on the planet and, potentially, by the karmic foundations of previous times prior to this. Neither I nor the inquiry have an *it* nor do we not have one. The how-I-research, how-I-think, how-I-choose, how-I-understand (or not) are a performance-in-action of the relationships with world, with others-in-world with myself-in-world of past and of present. This Section describes and acknowledges a relevant smattering of these multi-logues and their place in the 'reflexive deliberation' that shaped and shapes me and the inquiry.

Back to the West and in words of Kenneth Gergen¹:

"As I write these lines I am reflecting myriad dialogues with professionals and students, for example, and am speaking into a relationship with readers. The words are not "my own," the authorship is misleading. Rather, I am a carrier of relationships, forging them into yet new relationships."

The inquiry within the inquiry

2P

The reflexive process captured here helped me understand a little better why I think and feel the way I do about the inquiry process and outcomes and how I am therefore interpreting and positing these. And also, how I am not. It describes my "partial sight and limited voice" (Haraway, 1988, p.591) and to some extent locates it, at least in its origins (temporarily, culturally). It therefore shows the limitations, biases and assumptions on which the inquiry flows and in so doing indicates spaces for other researchers, with their own uniquely packaged biases and assumptions, to join the exploration should they so wish. It's in some way holding a door open for future inquiry.

[Note: The Voices on Containment Section does the job of locating the inquiry (and my voice within this) amongst others voices from the past (distant and recent).]

Embodied knowledges and the problem of citation

On a pragmatic note this section may also help explain the absence of references and citations in some of the writing around epistem-/ onto-logies. Some things, thoughts and approaches I describe here are things I have come to know from living-being-working-becoming in the places I have existed in and with the peoples I have existed amongst. They are embodied knowledges. The vast majority of this knowledge has not come through reading about those places and peoples (although where reading *has* been possible and/or useful I have sought to deepen my exploration of the encountered knowledge, thus, I've also read a deal about aspects of Nepali, Tibetan and Indian societies I have been enmeshed in.)

For the most part I believe I have absorbed into me a smudge of what a Westerner might call their epistemologies and ontologies. Or perhaps more appropriately and accurately as is described in their words: 'I came to know' (Nepali – मैले सुने *maile sunne*). These are the origins of

¹ <https://www.swarthmore.edu/kenneth-gergen/social-psychology-social-construction-emerging-vision>
downloaded 09.06.2020

many of the embodied practices and knowledges I bring into this writing and that prove a little tricky to cite.

Why place matters (to the inquiry)

Reflexions

I am writing this from a small wooden house in the Southern Tablelands of Australia in the middle, maybe the end, maybe the beginning, in a time of pandemic and pandemonium globally. This house is cold. It is colder on the inside than outside most days. It is not the place I imagined myself into as the place of writing. It is a place where I crouch, curl over, cramp around a worn keyboard, shoulders locked into the damp air, neck distended as I spew forth words that land on the over-bright, flattened piece of gadgetry in front of me. Words already disconnected, separated, doing their own peculiar march across a white space, corralled by the angry ants of my fingertips hammering in to the silvery keyboard. No wonder it is worn.

This place. This has become my jail, my sanctuary, my respite and keeper. I am constrained, straining to liberate the words and so liberate myself. In tension. In the bloody, damp, hip aching cold. This is the place of PhD werdery, Phudding, phuddery. Immobilised. Tied, tired, teary eyed. This dam machine takes it all. This place took me in, became my refuge as the house of cards of work-life-relationships-money-movement collapsed all around. Paying that huge sum of money, not trusting the key would actually open the door, hearing it click behind me, breathing tears, relief, collapse. The world is this place. This place is the world. I infuse it with printed papers, paper the walls with scrawling maps, argue more words back and forth between my self-here, my self-there, sometimes out loud, sometimes into the walls. The words absorb into everything. This place is the PhD. Is it? Before here the PhD was stinking, screeching traffic, cycle stickiness; pounding hot, heavily through storms of engine-fumes and dust, dust, endless dust; the grinding, terrifying elevator to the chilled airiness top floor office cubicle maze; cheeky, cheery giggly namastes; glass-walled rooms with squeaky pseudo-leather swiveling seatings; panopticon pantomimes; acrid whiff of scorched cumin; polished young women, heeled and highlighted; shuffling cocks-combed guys switching it up to flirty swagger; pot-bellied 'tulo manche' burping their post-lunch satisfaction, sagging cuffs and collars, heavy shiny watch straps outweighing the god-serving rakha bands, pontificating tales of their glorious benevolence, wrist flicking the peons away; doing their leaderfulness thing.

How do I conjure that place into this place? How do I interpret, read, know that as it was? Make that this? What was that? I'm shivering. Locked against the cold. Another freight train rumbles past, walls shivering too. Place filters feelings. Place does something. Place matters.

Place matters

Not placing, not locating this inquiry is impossible. If I don't do it, you will. You will layer the knowings, imaginings, smells, hopes and fears of you-in-your locatedness into the inquiry shaping and flavouring it to make sense to your experience, spicing to your taste.

Tuck and McKenzie (2015, p.637) tell us "generalizability and universality are impossibilities anyway, in no small part because place matters and place is always specific". Every thing, event, feeling is located, grounded, situated, is of a specific 'space-time' (Massey, 1992). And therefore unique. And therefore, to know it (whatever your *it* of choice is) *it* must be locatable to you. You who is not here in *this* time-space, who sits, dances, stands in your own space-time, doing the reading, encountering the *it* through the flattened words on page/ screen. You are knowing differently because of the space-time ness of you right now. To more fully know the research, to know the researching, to critically inquire means, demands, noticing and knowing the place of it.

Place is affective (Grosz, 1993; Piele, 1998). Perhaps being *of place* is what we refer to as 'embodied experience'? Noticing and noting the emotional currencies, the haptic is to note the 'place-ness' of feelings; part of what we might call the 'embodied knowing' (Nagatomo, 1992; Hanna, 1990). Thrift, for example, talks about "spatialities of feeling" (2008, p.747), the emotional entanglements, needs and affections that do something, that shape and flow in space. Yet space is not place. Space is the void, the unlocated, un-named, identifiable only by its boundaries and lack of names (Ingold, 2011). Place, on the other hand, is named. It is inhabited by ideas and identity. 'Australia', '12 Nursery Marg', 'the park with all the rose beds'. Naming is an act of power, of claiming. Who does the naming is a political act, as we see vividly in narratives around settler-colonialism: the act of claiming a piece of land "that is already inhabited by other humans" (Tuck & McKenzie, 2015, p.635). If as Grande (2004, in Tuck & McKenzie *ibid*, p.635) claims "settler societies are designed not to consider place" then Tuck, McKenzie and many others (e.g. Tuhiwai-Smith, 2013) seek to bring place back into critical inquiry partly as a means of reparation for settler-colonialist acts, for capitalist acts of acquiring place as resource. *And also* as a means of refuting the all-pervading Western binary of human / non-human (2015). I am with them in their intention, however I am concerned that the act of theorizing place in this way, within the Western academic paradigm, might also be an act of colonizing. Not colonizing through naming and the planting of feet and flags, but through intellectual and cultural means. Thinking 'place' politically into the intellectual realm; flattening it, representing it through academic wordery seems to unavoidably separate and 'other' the 'everything-else-of-world' that Place represents. Scholarly representation nudges Places closer to I-It, it abstracts. It loosens the I-Thou relation, the attachment (after Buber, 2004). Some have attempted to bring Place to life in the academies, for example Denzin et al. (2008) intermingle academic and Indigenous voices. I have tried too, interweaving snippets of Buddhist philosophy into this paper. These bring a smattering of the richness of Place, yet still Place critically theorized remains problematic.

4P

On the other hand, the alternative, not naming, or actively anonymising place is, as Nespor (2000) noted, in itself a political act. In hiding, de-coupling or deleting place, the event becomes less, becomes incomplete. Massey (2005, p.140) goes further and describes place *as event*: "place is the throwtogetherness, the unavoidable challenge of negotiating the here-and-now". I'm not sure I agree as her interpretation seems to place us humans doing our negotiating, our agency, at the centre of place, as the main event. This seem to denigrate the 'everything else' of the interconnected, impermanent and empty existence, and drops the argumentation back into Cartesian dualisms of separation.

Whatever our view on 'Place as..' the place of doing research, and to some extent the place of PhDing, are legitimate and essential aspects of knowing and of whatever knowledge this generates. I aim to bring them here into this writing as best I am able, incomplete and demanding interrogation.

Attachment and Place: One last point on the importance of including an embodied exploration of place. Feeling our way into the research place is an act of attachment. The renewal of attachment serves to balance, to act as counter to the heavyweights of particularising, theorising and other abstracting tendencies of the 'ologies' and 'eries', specifically the discourse focused 'posts' explored in the Emptying Leadership section.

In sum, Place matters. Place has a place here.

The 'how' of representing *place* and what it does in language, in words, in discourse, is quite an absurdity. Place-ness embodied in words is quite the conjurers' trick and I lack those particular skills. Hence place remains present and also problematized in this inquiry.

A note on place in doing leadership

Place as practice, as process, as people, as performance....I notice the inter-dependence of place, perhaps even its centrality, in the lenses I've used for problematizing leadership (see The Case Studies for further exploration). Place shapes (and is shaped by) leadership.

I brought Place dramatically to life in leadership in a short piece (2016) about a friend doing leadership with-on-in the Tamur, a wild and rabid river-place in Eastern Nepal. Doing leadership here is visibly and inextricably of, for and with place. The stuff of place is the stuff of doing leadership – as the river acts, the people follow: making decisions, reflexing, feeding off the river's roar, reflexing, deciding and un-deciding. The Tamur terrifies, subdues and excites. It has influence through attachment - it has volume, velocity and currents named by friends. And it is also colonised through abstraction. The influencing is embodied *and also* rational. The interconnection real, physical, emotional and more. Leadership is of place. If doing leadership is located in the relation between actors (see Section Emptying Leadership) then place is both actor and relation. Leadership cannot be done like this any *where* else. It cannot be without place. Place and leadership transform and are transformed by each other.

5P

*"A shudder of sand dusts the tent walls as he flips over for the umpteenth time, sleeping bag mangling in the decision-burdened wakefulness of the long night. Backwards and forwards, body echoing mind – get on the river, or get out. Ke garne?
The sleepfree mangler: Pat O'Keeffe: white-water adventurer; charismatic guide and pioneer of big river journeys in the world's wilder places. A man with a fearsome reputation and, tonight, a head full of worry.
The river: The Tamur, East Nepal, swollen and huge after an extended and particularly intense monsoon. A raging torrent of boulder-wielding whitewater hurling itself furiously against the dirty spew of a dozen or more landslides that are deforming and blocking her course. A river with an equally fearsome reputation and right now, at her most violent and unforgiving."*

Figure P1: An extract from The Raft Guide and the Tamur, Jo Chaffer, 2016:

I notice also the importance of place in leadership (and leadership development) through its absence in the current world of doing leadership through screens, in the virtuality. There's a hollowness. We are all in our own places yet all colluding in the pretence of being 'in the same place' – the Zoom room, the Meet up, Team space.

Position and Place

As a friend so aptly described, doing leadership (development) online is akin to Wile E Coyote in the Roadrunner cartoon (Figure P2), running, running, running out of road, off the cliff edge and continuing to run in mid-air pretending, hoping that doing the same thing will somehow work even though *everything is fundamentally different*. Place has gone.



<https://phlbrwn.com/2016/04/26/running-off-the-cliff/> Figure P2

One suggested outcome of this inquiry is in foregrounding place through ~~containment~~ reducing the focus on the actors of the leader and followerships to a more equal and-both relationship. This is the explored in depth in the Section Emptying Leadership into Place.

My position and place in this inquiry

Why I think and research the way I do (and not some other way)

“The only way to find a larger vision is to be somewhere in particular” (Haraway, 1988, p.590). These pages are an attempt to locate my ‘somewhere in particular’ and through reflexive inquiry explain how this came to be and therefore how it is, where it is and thus also where and what it is not.

In coming to know my ‘somewhere in particular’ I have learned to establish my location on the map of knowledge, on the map of the inquiry and amongst the communities of practitioners, academics and fellow inquirers. This location temporarily provides a vantage point from which to peek out onto the vast expanse of the knowledge-world: the ‘what else’ and ‘where else’ of questions-to-be-asked and knowledge-to-be-sought; and to understand the ‘who else’ of the communities. Situating is a reminder of my smallness on the map i.e. the limitations of the inquiry. Situating, looking outwards from here, also illuminates other ‘wheres’; brings a curiosity, to travel new lines and weave new connections towards forming a more, but never actually, complete picture of knowledges. Perhaps even to extend the map itself.

The position dance: The process of asking hard questions about ‘where from, where now’ and peering into the looking glass of self-in-world of acknowledging openly the passage of influence and experience in the shaping of my current position provides a source of power (from within). Whilst some awareness of my position-now is empowering, the liberation comes not from the awareness of position but from an awareness of *not* being anchored there. Haraway tells us feminist knowledge “resists fixation and is insatiably curious about the webs of different positioning” (1988, p.590). There seems initially a contradiction in fixing something as feminist and also that thing resisting fixation. Through a Mahayana lens feminist knowledge is neither fixed nor not fixed. It has no essence, no fixedness, only position relative to all other forms and positions. ‘Feminist’ is only relative and not *a* position at all hence fixed *only* in-relation-with other knowledges and positions.

Similarly, my position-in-the-inquiry is not *a* position at all, but an ongoing dance of growing into and then releasing from multiple positions. It’s an evolving dance of positions drawn from a life of re-positioning into and de-positioning from place to place. These are epistemo-onto-logical, embodied positions evolved through a life of moving here, there and back again. The dance is an un-choreographed series of steps, hand-jams, edges and crimps. These are the positions and they are also not positions. Interconnected through movement, each is vital but is insubstantial in and of itself to linger on-at for long. Rather it is a pivot point from which to push, release and move. Each position is partial, insufficient for fixation. Touch down, drop anchor, be present, notice-absorb, act-be, pull up the anchor and release. The dance affords an accumulation of learning-unlearning, experiences and perspectives.

Coming to know a position (that it even was a position at all) often happens only in the moment of cutting the anchors. The position is only revealed (as a position) in the rear-view mirror as I lurch away. Noticing seems to be only possible as the temporary blinkers of familiarity and certainty are torn off and disregarded in the bins by the exit. Detaching informs and also usually stings a bit. Being able to release, to let go is also an incredible privilege: it affords the possibility to hover and look (back, out), to gain new perspectives; to be and do differently. And then the freedom to land, to anchor somewhere new.

Anchoring into the research place: Landing in Nepal in 2009 with my life in two bulky bags was the start of a longer, more firmly anchored position attachment. In this place I learned to notice differently. Became more 'of place'. Grew attachments. The initially startling Nepalisms became 'normal' and continuously deeper immersion led to further curiosity as 'don't know what you don't know' shifted to some small awareness of what being and knowing here might be like. Whenever I found myself in the happy position of feeling very comfortable, of feeling I'd 'come to know' Nepal, the ground would shift beneath my feet and I'd find myself discombobulated and questioning once again. Something about the place kept me constantly pushed out of 'too-safe', never into unsafe for long-enough to be completely overwhelmed, always just alert enough, critically questioning enough about what I thought I knew / was happening/ anything actually meant. Always inside-enough to stay, never inside-enough to settle. Nepal was the provocation to keep shuffling in and out of new and different positions of embodied knowing. In doing the leadership of me-in-the-world place (Nepal) was the continuing prod to keep doing ~~containment~~.

By the start of the research I'd been in Nepal long enough, to have found or put myself into situations where there was no other way than to be re-shaped a little harder, to have accumulated a few 'ofs' and yet always still be visibly, linguistically 'other' and 'othered'. And that was OK. I learned to be patient, to get comfortable in the discomfort and enjoy the frisson of being differently, belonging differently with the perspectives that afforded.

Position revealed: Once again many of the 'ofs', in my Nepali normal, I discovered only on leaving, or more precisely only on landing in the next place. That the 'next place' happened to be the UK was a double whammy. My 'normal' of life in the chaotic capital city with all of its volume 11, frenetically, hyper-socialised, hyper-visible, curious, mystifyingly intoxicating life of unending cracks and other creative-catastrophic life space-places was replaced with the silent, solitary box-units of a snidely suspicious society and its unfathomable, unspoken rules. It was like having my skin peeled off one small humiliation at a time. I felt differently, saw differently, tasted differently, thought differently, understood – not at all. I hadn't known until then how far both of my feet had been out of the UK and or realised that one foot was at least dusting through South Asian earth.

Outsider inside privilege: The dis-orientation (literally loss of the East) or 'reverse culture-shock' I felt on hard re-entry to UK life was brutal and raw. How the academy worked with its strange codified behaviours, the circular power flows and political systems; its propensity to talk to itself about itself were blindingly visible and yet no one else seemed to be paying the blindest bit of attention. It was utterly incomprehensible to me in the way that Nepal had once been. I had no sense of belonging, but a (student) number that said I belonged. I realised I was once again an outsider on the inside. And also, that this could be a very useful perspective to hold, an asset in terms of critical inquiry, I could bring different ways of knowing, different positions into the inquiry. The outsider-insider position was a privilege, if somewhat uncomfortable and, occasionally, unbearable.

I realise I have a constant love-hate addictive battle with academia: relishing the stimulation of the discourse and also enraged, infuriated by the convoluted sentences, compounded nouns, passive voices in layers of complexity and the exclusive, elitism dripping off them. More than that the seeming arrogance of belief in the newness, importance of the position, the argumentation, the striking of the pose of the rational being as lord over all other. Rational knowing – such a thin sliver, yet so revered. Rational beings, the pinnacle of becoming. The overlords of the rational organisation.

It took a long while to get it, to understand my frustration: rational is an inherently masculine trope, creating organisations built on the productive behaviour of the rational being (Burkinshaw, 2015) celebrating and elevating the heroic masculine leader in an absolute paradox of anti-rationalism. The academy made no sense. Academia was my world too and yet it so absolutely wasn't.

Dancing positions: a short history of place and becoming

"Where are you from?" I have constantly and consistently struggled to answer this question. The where of me: what does it even mean?

Where do I call home? Everywhere. The place I unpack and sleep tonight. Where was I born? Irrelevant. Which communities do I belong to? Temporarily, superficially so many. Which place do I attach to? Somewhere, everywhere, nowhere. Always in between, always moving. Dropping in, dropping out.

The question of 'from?' assumes a permanence to anchors, tethers stretching deep into the 'who' of me that don't exist and also do exist in-with so many places it can feel like a lie, a sketchy superficiality. Yet is anything but. The places I have lived, experienced, worked, played are deeply etched in my 'who', they form the stepping stones of my life-story. The being-in-place with the people-of-place has shaped, transformed my understanding of self-in-the-world, of knowing, of being and most significantly of becoming.

Places matters. Being of places matters. Places shape position through the embodied knowing, through the 'uncertificated' development programs of immersing, experiencing, reflexion, awakening, unravelling of living.

Perhaps the questions that would be less allergic and more meaningful might be: 'where have you been?' 'where have you immersed?' and 'who did you become there?'

9p

A metaphor for re-positioning:

Growing up in the UK I start with both feet firmly planted there. Years of continuous moving and shifting around the globe, in and out of the Blighted Isle and one foot lifts and floats, detaching. I step partly in, partly out. Years become decades and both feet are free. Like the fell-runner in the storm my feet brush lightly off the boulders and rocks, mostly airborne, carried along and aloft. Until Nepal. There's something here, a place to linger. Touching down, toes to the ground, one foot rests..... alert, in readiness.

Figure P3: a metaphor for re-positioning

The short paragraphs below reflect some key places that provoked, invoked becoming/un-becoming in ways which shape and inform the partial position I have today, and that are reflected in the construction of the inquiry.

On belonging and leaving

Growing up in Peterborough in the 1980s I found, fell into a tribe, a strong subculture bonded in our rage against the injustices of the world (many) and the music of post-punk noise, skate, thrashing anger. It was intense, it was everything. And I didn't know it until I left, driven out by a curiosity and a sniff of 'something else' on the breeze. I didn't intend to cut the anchors but they were cut, hacked for me by some of those I 'left'. I got a proper ass-kicking. The whole story is elsewhere (Chaffer, 2020a). Below is an extract

(Figure P4). The vicious detachment was formative in building highly sensitive antennae to 'othering', believing I didn't deserve to 'belong' and hence growing the ability to sit on the inside-outside, to dip in and out and get comfortable with this. It has enabled me to keep moving, to land anywhere knowing I was safe-enough because I could (and would) leave. I suspect my earliest, subconscious wanderings into ideas of ~~containment~~ have come from the fierce tribal loyalty and also danger of being in/out of group.

"Peterborough. I've just tripped into being 18, more of an unbecoming than a coming of age. Running helter-skelter with the coagulated oddballs and alts of music, a slam-dancing tribe of skater-punks, terror noisers, dreads and metalheads. Rites to passage entailed piling into the van, scuttering across the bleak heart of Thatcher's England to shabby, piss stained dives that bounced, sometimes literally, with big noise. The gigs – everything but the gigs. Sweaty mosh-pits, slamming into the wall of sound. Skandy noise bands, straight-edge Dischord crew, broken boned punkers, our mates up there thrashing their guts out, non-stop extreme noise....it mattered. Everything mattered, and needed sortin'. So we hunt sabbed, we 'rescued' hounds from Huntingdon, we fought skinheads, fascists and terrier boys; punished US jawheads prowling off-base for their dirty, dark alley snatch and grabs; shouted about workers' rights at McDonalds.... We tried to matter, at least to each other....a few coins shoved over when you're properly skint, a jacket to share shivering in fog-strewn, freezing subways, places to crash... always.

And still I knew I had to get out. There were places. Other places. More places than this. I'd smelled them. The places of Uncle Mick's postcards – fjords, shiny peaks, orange picking, kayaks on shivery blue water.... I had no idea why, but I had to go find out. It mattered too."

Figure P4: Excerpt from 'Un-belonging: a proper ass-kicking story' Chaffer, 2020a

Learning to blend in, getting to the inside

During this tribal period I learned a valuable lesson about making change happen. Hanging out by an autumnal thicket on the edge of a misty fen with my fellow rainbow haired, raggy-jeaned, anarcho mates watching and waiting for the mortal enemy, the hunt and hounds to get in our way before their mates the terrier-boys got in ours, I noticed the invisible. A guy, hard to describe in his non-event navy jumper and jeans, middle aged, middle weightedness, had wandered quietly over from the terrier boys brushed past one of ours, moved words across and then moved on. A few moments later the shout went out and we moved too, directly where we wanted to be: in to the path of the hunt. Of course, the navy man was one of us. The terrier boys hadn't noticed him drifting through their midst. He was indistinct, unlabelled, invisible, bold and he made change happen without us even noticing - from the inside out.

This lesson I learned to apply: the art of blending in. Not being on the outside shouting - that's too easy to other. Too tricky to accept, agree and adopt without becoming 'the other'. Be on the inside – work with, and also still retain criticality, retain perspective, keep one foot hovering in the liminal. Never really 'belong', but don't not belong either. A dance of staying true to self and also allowing self to be re-shaped by place: of being open to new positions, becoming and unbecoming.

Learning to be 'of place': shaking loose

Skip forward a decade or so from the foxes and the navy man and I have quelled my shoutiness, but not my skepsis. I have changed my clothing, but not my critique. I have once again uprooted, detached and rather blindly, blithely said 'yes' to a new place and a new position leading a small education programme in Sudan, a place at the start of the very fragile peace process and the fracturing of the whole into two new countries. After years of seeing myself as sub-culture I was suddenly part of the UN machine, part of the governance, carrying white (and blue) power. I was shocked, somewhat appalled and yet also retained enough instinct to remember the invisible navy man. Work with the power, use it for good.

Utterly out-of-my depth, I was forced to wake-up to the stark reality that I actually occupied an imperial-empirical position as I indelicately stepped from one cultural IED to the next. Perhaps not the alt. anarchist after all. Sudan was blowing my epistemological and ontological foundations to pieces. It took a back-step conversation with my trainee teachers to finally enable me to understand what was happening. These women I worked with were frequent escapees from bloody conflict; they'd lost homes, husbands and the very materiality of existence. Their every day was taken up with an endless drudgery of chores, caring for children and elders and maintaining a frugal existence. These women, who worked so hard for so little, these women felt sorry for me and they told me so. Far from having all the power and privilege I was actually an object of pity in my childless, family-less aloneness. That shook out a lot of my nonsense. My discomfort of representing the 'man', of having power-over, turned out to be my own personal phantasy.

11P

"Are we together?" this is what Christina, the young Dinka woman, a trainee teacher on our programme, would ask of our room of adult learners at the start of each session.

The tangles I had got into trying to notice, name, make-sense of, to enable and enact the invisible (to me) inter-subjective, transpersonal forces that bind and enmesh persons-in-group – the anxieties I held about getting-to-group. These tangles were simply ridiculous to the women in the room. The only woman who couldn't feel 'group' was me. I had seen only Azande, Dinka and Nuer, seen tribal difference and assumed 'no group'.

"Are we together?" Well, of course we are together – as soon as we are present, we are together. We are group. The women felt *my* lack of tribe. They had wrapped me in to the group, this thing that I couldn't even sense. Gracefully (with a few giggles), they let me in on it one baking afternoon. The group-ness, their togetherness was absolutely obvious (how could I *not* notice, *not* know this to be true?).

See Figure P5 for an illustration of group Sudan-style.

I started to see my assumptions, my stuck Western perspective and to learn to see and understand their way too.

I found out they identified me by my teeth size (short, flat), when I saw them by their skin shades, body shapes and hair styles. I learned to smell the animals freeze when the silent and deadly Antanovs approached. I learned how to click to show emotions. I stopped taking myself so seriously and opened up to being of their place. I learned how to broker the power of the 'man' for, with and of them. I learned to really be an outsider playing on the inside I had to first realise my outsider-isms, to hover up and see the layers 'of place' I had enmeshed around me and to allow a new 'of place' to flourish too.

Being temporarily, lightly 'of Sudan' woke me up to the assumptions I'd been running all my life about 'how the world is', realising that 'how the world is' was only a truth constructed by the

society I had inhabited and there were other ways to understand 'how the world might look and seem (not be)'.

The children huddled closer together, skin touching skin, seeking shelter from the curious eyes of the onlookers. They shuffled and bent their slender bodies into one another melding into a seamless bundle of body and cloth, sweat and limbs entwining forming a oneness against the many that had come to watch. Small heads tucking into soft hollows of the older, stronger ones, arms enveloping them, closing the gaps in a well-practiced compaction.

Figure P5 Extract from The Children Huddled Closer (Chaffer, 2020b)

Through *being* in Sudan, through gentle and not-so-gentle immersions in other *ways of being* of trying on being 'of' other places I learned to attach and detach, to do the hard beans of scouring out, of looking in the mirror and finding courage to let go and be and know differently. In Sudan, in other places too, I have felt, tasted, smelt and *known* the safety, one-ness of being-in-group without being swallowed up. And also of retaining, maintaining the fully alive-ness of staying alive in an unsafe, uncertain and unpredictable world.

Place, re-place-ing is a key part of the 'how' of getting to ~~containment~~.

Place does something to position, kickstarts and enables the dance towards and away from new positions.

Changing place maintains this.

12P

The transience of my life shaped a transigent, always adapting, compromising to get on the inside, shape-shifting. *And also* despite this skilful shape-shifting there was the ever present, edge of consciousness awareness of being on the edge, of being 'other'. This is the embodied aspect of hovering on the boundaries, of the partial in-out position: the acute rawness of not really belonging *here* or *there* and also the liberation of belonging *every* where and *no* where.

[On how to be an outsider on the inside: playing the research game](#)

The perspectives I bring to the inquiry are multi-coloured, multi-cultured, the *and/both* of many lives 'of' places and peoples and perhaps most importantly, from the internal-external place of the sometime outsider, liminal location. These are my positions within-outwith academia. Slipping in and slipping out, hanging out on the fuzzy borders. Struggling to retaining the insights of the external view, the placing of academia within the larger vision of all-the-other traditions of knowing, being and becoming of the world. And also entering fully into the academic processes to understand better, to respect what has good, and to maintain critical challenge not just within the academic argumentation, but of the structures within which the argumentation sits and is influenced and limited by. Stepping in → stepping out. Attaching → abstracting. I have learned too that my approach faintly echoes that of Nagarjuna (AD200) who deployed the opponent's system and tools to counter and undo their argument. I claim none of the philosophical brilliance of Nagarjuna I am merely slithering about on the surface of ignorance. Like the navy middle man, Nagarjuna deploys a strategy of working within and with an 'others' system to challenge their position and rationalisation. His brilliance is in the tactic. He challenges and ultimately disrupts not by creating a counter, the binary opposite, which would inherently entrench their position(s) but with a 'refutation-only' tactic.

“For his own part, Nagarjuna would only assent to enter a philosophical debate as a vaitandika, committed to destroying the Brahminical proponents’ metaphysical and epistemological positions without thereby necessitating a contrapositive.”

“But, in his own estimation, only by employing Brahminical method against Brahminical practice could one show up Vedic society and religion for what he believed they were, authoritarian legitimations of caste society which used the myths of God, divine revelation and the soul as rationalizations, and not the justified reasons which they were purported to be.” (Berger, undated, no page numbers)

That is Nagarjuna, or at least an interpretation of. My effort remains in staying in the *process* of critical questioning. Being in process spits out the occasional *outcomes*, ephemeral end points: some high, some low, but some thing, some place new. And from these new vantage points we may pause to peer into new territories, imaging new questions and a new process of questioning. The phase we have come through becomes the phase we are entering, another small iteration, a stitch in the ever growing and unravelling knitting of knowledge-existence-becoming. The PhD journey is spitting forth outcomes which I hope will be in service of both new knowledge and new approaches to seeking and creating knowledge, a tiny splinter in the enormity of the academic structure in service of more equitable, open praxis.

“And like all properly Buddhist methods, once this logical foil has served its purpose, it can be discarded, traded in as it were for the wisdom it has conferred.” (Berger, ibid)

About Nepal: the place of the inquiry and researcher

In these final pages I aim to give you a flavour of Nepal – of what it is to be and do there, partly to provide an inkling of what being and doing there does to becoming and unbecoming and why it is so compelling: what some of these triggers for attachment and detachment might be. It's partly also to enable you to 'read' the Studies of CoAA and CoBB from different positions: to have let go of some assumptions about 'how the world is' from your world, your current positions – to lift a toe or two. And to dance a little into a different position, re-shaped by the Nepal-ness to gain a new vantage point from which to make sense / break sense of the people, practice, process of CoAA and CoBB performances.

There is no neat 'end cap', no summing up, no sense-making to close this Section. I leave you to notice what you notice, feel what you feel and choreograph your own moves.

[A note: Cases 3 and 4 are in India and the UK. However there is no comparable journey into India – I touch down there only lightly working mainly at a distance and the key participant is not of-India, her position remains detached.

My position-in/outside-the-UK is elaborated above and throughout this thesis.]

Nepal-isms: I've been working in, travelling through and getting to know Nepal since 2003, finally moving there in 2009. In my time there I've worked with private, public and development sectors doing everything from helping deaf child artists get exhibitions, to supporting tech start-ups, teaching English, starting a mountain bike tour company, leading treks and climbs and setting up national training schemes. If you're curious and capable you can get stuff done. Until you can't. You can if you have luck. You can if you have a protector, a '*tulo manche*' (big man) who can keep other *tulo manche* at bay. You can't if a *tulo manche* decides, fairly or not, that you're fair game for bribery or just bashing.

In Nepal the line between a good happy life and death is very thin.

Frogs in a lab

A story told to me by Nepali friends

A professor departs his lab for the evening. On the bench are two tall jars of frogs. One jar contains Indian frogs. The other frogs are Nepali. The frogs, seeing the lights go off, see their chance for escape. The Indian frogs coordinate: three frogs form a row, two frogs hop onto their backs, they haul their fellow frog up and he balances carefully on top. With great effort and coordination they push and pull the last frog up to stand on the back of the pyramid. With one great leap the frog clears the top of the jar, lands on the desk and hops away. The remaining Indian frogs cheer with joy for their friend's freedom. The Nepali frogs watch on and start to create their own pyramid. The final frog is ready to hop up to the top. He clambers up. Bosh. The other frogs kick him back. He tries again. Thwack. Down he goes. The frogs fight until they are exhausted or dead.

Figure P6: Frogs in a lab – on being Nepalese

I've been in 10 day pujas with Rimpoches and masked oracles; civil rights standoffs between the Mao bhadies and the urban populace, seen the first-ever elections and first-ever Western gigs; surfed the rolling tarmac in the 2015 earthquake, been handed babies, old ladies and goats on rammed buses and been deafened by swarms of tooting Pulsar motorbikes; given a speech with the Prime Minister in a potato field and been attacked by grumpy monkeys – in my kitchen.

Position and Place

It always rains on Shivaratri. Not the day before, not the day after, but it will rain on Shivaratri. It always has.

Nothing will get done, you'll tear your hair out in frustration and despair and then it just is. Done.

You should never ask 'why'. Or ask open questions in directions. And always, always ride for the gaps when pedalling the city streets. It is the land of happy chaos. And vile persecution and cruelty. It just is.

Some information to set the scene for the research, the case studies and the world of our participants.

Adapted from my MADT Dissertation 2014 Maybe True, Maybe Not True – Better You Believe: Cultural Collision in organisational change, Nepal

Nepal is a largely Hindu (81%) country of 28 million people. Closed to the rest of the world until 1949, Nepal had been a caste-bound monarchy for most of its 250 year history until the Maoist insurgency, a 20 year bloody civil war, succeeded in the creation of a federal republic in 2007. Since 2008 there have been three national elections, a new Constitution and change to federalisation. However, with unstable and very weak governance Nepal is still one of the poorest (GNI = \$970 pa²), medium developed countries globally (HDI 147 from 187³), categorised as a fragile state, despite major international development support and heavy, but highly politicised investment from its two, vying, superpower neighbours. Nepal had seen a surge in wealth over the last decade as GDP rose exponentially, with major economic contributors being foreign aid, remittances sent by non-resident Nepalese and agriculture. However, wealth distribution is incredibly uneven; corruption is rife and increasing; pollution is making the capital unliveable; and infrastructure is minimal although the major cities no longer suffer the 12-16 hours load-shedding daily. Kathmandu, the capital, has one of the highest rates of urbanisation globally (16%) and brings with it the full range of problems resulting from no urban planning. Labour is cheap, but heavily unionised. The cost of living is escalating and the country is frequently brought to a standstill by bhande (protests), the most difficult of which was the 2015-16 border blockades that stopped the country's (legal) supplies of cooking gas (LPG), fuel, medicines, manufactured goods and food for 5 months. Initially many suffered huge hardships, especially those rendered homeless and jobless by the earlier earthquakes. The black market soon kicked in though, and by the end of month two supply volumes of most items were back to virtually normal if you knew where to look and could pay the extra. The blockades were politicised by the ruling Pahadi (middle hills castes that run government) as an Indian threat to sovereignty generating massive anti-India sentiment (#backoffIndia). The uglier truth being more in the disempowerment of the Terai (border areas) Madheshi people through gerrymandering and removal of their rights in the newly ratified Constitution (August 2015). Many are stateless (between 300,000 and 1.7 million depending on who you ask) being born to Nepalese women and Indian fathers (Nepalese women can no longer pass on citizenship to their children in the new Constitution). The blockades started as a protest at the Constitutional discrimination. Nepal is a difficult place to do business but yet a growing number of entrepreneurs thrive: some from old money, some from nowhere, some from India. The ITC sector has seen a phenomenal boom, the service sector was on an upward trajectory with a proliferation of cafes, restaurants

15P

² <http://data.worldbank.org/country/nepal>

³ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_Human_Development_Index

and hotels for the burgeoning local middle class and the swathes of Chinese and Indian visitors. Construction has been booming with the real estate glut brought on by banking sector transformation and the flood of Maoist held 'mattress money' (US\$ billions) seized during the civil war and suddenly requiring liquidation with Modi's overnight demonetisation. There is now a very visible super-rich and a fast-growing middle class stemming from the real estate bubble that has transformed many Kathmandu valley land owners from subsistence farmers to nouveau riche. Beyond this quirk, caste and traditional Hindu practice are the biggest factors shaping society and, with some exceptions, wealth distribution. Business, politics and progress are mired in mafia, nepotism and corruption – that's how it is. Much of the younger generation (20 to 30 year olds) have aspirations of living life differently, of a better society and some are making waves either setting up clean businesses and NGOs or making a stand. The old guard, the old networks are incredibly powerful though and have withstood coups, war and earthquakes.

The reality for most Nepalese is far from the happy Himalayan kingdom of shining white spires, fluttering prayer flags and simple, smiling Sherpa painted in the Western imagination.

Nepal is by and large a network-based society where people are held, with some flexibility, but held nonetheless by multiple, multi-dimensional relationships. These provide support and can be great enablers, but can also be limiting of freedom of choice and engender a degree of fatalism. Group (family, caste) supersedes the individual's freedoms and functioning and status is conferred through gender, caste and in the organisational context through loyalty.

Safety is a rare idea, one founded in family and clan – temporary at best. Critical thinking not popular or desirable. Even the highly idiomatic language predicates against it with its many set phrases. Actions, jobs within the house and roles are traditionally highly ritualised and fixed (e.g. rice is cooked in this way by this person at this time...it's not that this is the best way, there is no other way) epitomising to many observers' minds a signifier of pre-enlightenment style relation to the world: we have no control over the external and life is comprised of a series of patterned behaviours. These traits are the subtext of life 'in the village' and for some first generation migrants, life in the cities too.

See Figure P7: Safety and the State, for an illustration.



Bhande on the road to Pokhara: an example of the lack of law enforcement and ability of the state to maintain order / manage conflict. A child was killed in an RTA, the women of the house (proper bullies, well-practiced in blockades) block the road (the main artery E-W for whole country) holding up approx. 6,000 vehicles for 12 hours in an attempt to force the truck driver to return and pay up. It's not about justice it's about money. The police, APF and army attend to watch. Meantime I walked past a fresh corpse of a motorcyclist caught in the mayhem – an accident, ignored as he wasn't a '*tulo manche*' (big man) and had no villagers to act for him. There is no intervention by the state, no punishment, no reprisal. It's up to the family and their extended clan / hoodlums.

Decades of monarchist oppression and 15 years of bloody brutal civil war where Maoists and army alike tortured abducted and murdered without retribution have left many Nepalese apathetic and resigned to being screwed over. '*Ke garne*' (what to do) is the most commonly used phrase after Namaste.

Figure P7 – safety and the State

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18P

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19P



Research Project Approach: strategy, design and evolution

This section gives a high-level view of the research programme design and strategic thinking behind it. It answers the big W questions of the primary research (Why, Who, How, What, How long, When, Where, With what) and provides the rationale at the time for these decisions. It describes what I planned to happen and why. Then it critically relates what actually happened and why.

It moves through the cycles of implementation iterations as real world, academic, ethical and opportunist factors forced re-think and re-design of the research strategy (the underpinning methodology), techniques and tactics tried and evolved.

It is deliberately written in business-like language and structures to emphasise the real-world practitioner skills I've applied to the project design and delivery; and, as will be seen in the emerging strategic thinking and execution, to extend the sense of position, of locatedness, which I, as self-as-researcher, am building. It is intended as a deliberate disruptor to the researcher-as-expert position.

Understanding, acknowledging and naming the position-I-currently-operate-in has, over the course of this inquiry, become an essential practice – both a process and an output impact.

1A

Acknowledging the many influences, the dependent origination of 'how-I-come-to-know' (Garfield, 1994) matters. To keep reminding myself that this is one perspective only, and therefore that many other perspectives also exist (Star, 2010) matters. Actively seeking to avoid the anonymous, 'God's Eye' dis-abling, non-position of 'universal truth' (Haraway, 1988) matters. Acknowledging dependent origination matters because it forms part of the 'doing leadership development-ness' of this inquiry.

Specifically this Section matters in that it represents my ongoing endeavour to keep the idea of what 'doing research' looks like problematized, to keep critically testing what I am doing and why; to keep reminding myself that knowledge grows through practises of dialogue between myself and the "successful practice of community" (the origin of the "epistemic guarantee of beliefs" after Nagarjuna [Gorisse, 2009, both p.9]) in this case both the academic and practitioner communities.

Research Project Approach: Strategy, Design and Evolution



The evolution of the research project design and strategy: summary

The actual research project process flowed as follows:

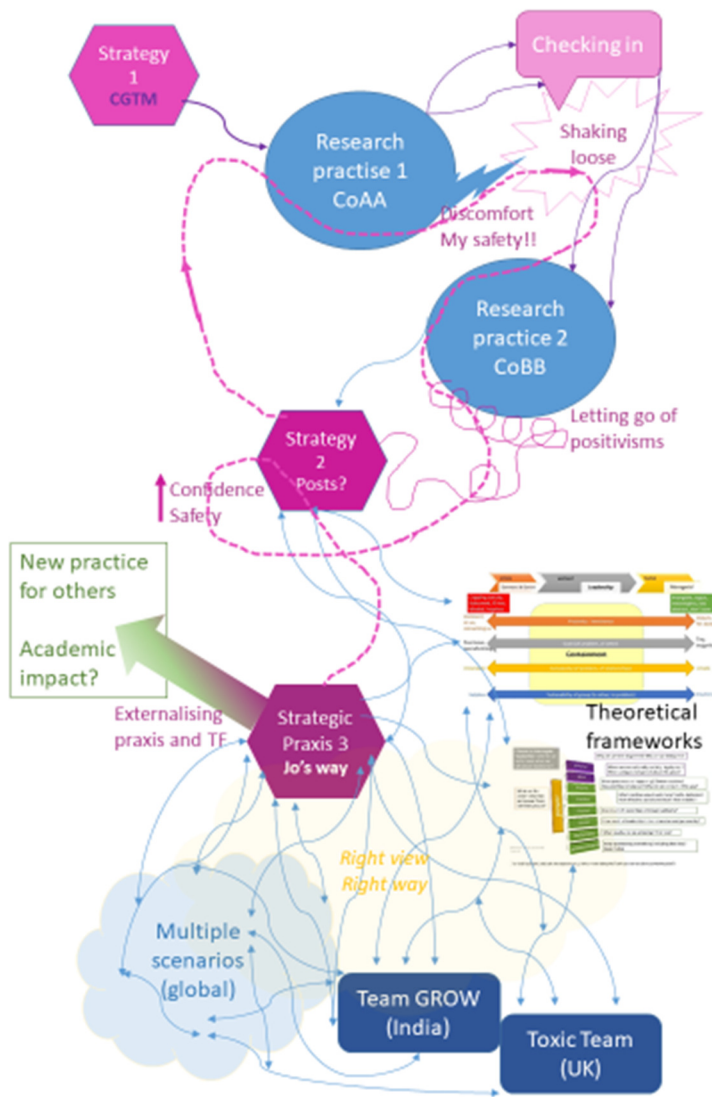


Figure A1: Diagram to illustrate the flow, iterations and increasingly messy and more real process of the research project from 2017 to 2019.

2A

Summary of the process (illustrated in Figure A1): the research strategy started with a choice to use Constructivist Grounded Theory Methodology (CGTM), shown as strategy 1. This seemed both open enough to allow emergence and also rule-bound enough to be ‘proper research’. I practised this with CoAA, but lost confidence in the validity, rigour or usefulness of coding. I checked in my codes with participants and with Nepalese and non-Nepali friends to understand more of my biases and blind-spots. Reassured the dark-side¹ practice was real, I worked with a different firm to explore the substantive area in a more hopeful context (CoBB). Feeling less under threat and more confident in my ability to analyse what was emerging, but uncomfortable with the next step in the CGTM, that of model forming. In my view, this step slid too far towards too positivism and not appropriate or useful. So, I stopped and sought new strategic insight. This came in the form of ‘the posts’² and through Nagarjuna’s middle way philosophy. What became was a *Jo-shaped* methodology³ comprising a series of malleable guiding principles for praxis and understanding that I brought to scrutiny and into play in two case studies (India, UK); into my global Leadership Development (LD) practice and into academic teaching. This last step, along with practice sharing, position statement development and modelling with other LD practitioners and agencies has now externalised and solidified useful new praxis. I hope that publication of papers drawing on this thesis might create impact in the academic world.

The research project design, strategy and evolution in detail

The business-like part

3A

Strategic plan 1: the CGTM way

Why - Aim: to understand if the stuff of ~~containment~~ was a process, practice, a ‘way’, ‘at play’ in an organisational context; if so, was this a significant aspect of doing leadership and could it be tuned up or down to become more enabling? Thus the aim was to notice, to make visible and then make use of ~~containment~~-with (research) participants.

Who with? The first participant firm (CoAA) is a Multi-National Enterprise (MNE) of around 10,000+ employees who granted access to its central teams and leadership layers based from its Headquarters in Kathmandu (Nepal). This firm is part of a wider \$1bn turnover Group I have been working with for several years. It is a third generation family-owned and run business (all male, all Indian origin/nationals) with an increasingly successful growth and profitability trajectory globally.

Why this firm? Pragmatics: I had trust, deep access and knew them enough to ‘read’ situations, but not too closely that I was or felt compromised. Because of the size I could vary the scale and scope of intervention if needed. Academically: to work within a different cultural context that should, by nature of its difference, hold up to scrutiny assumptions from the West that may / may not be helpful.

How?

I chose to work with Constructivist Grounded Theory Methodology (CGTM) as the research project design **strategy**. This enabled a structured, multi-modal and non-linear-looping process

¹ By dark-side I mean negative, unwholesome or shady practice.

² The posts – post qualitative methodologies and approaches.

³ Jo-shaped, by which I mean a methodology emerging from my experience of doing research in this time and place, co-constructed by me with the everyone and everything else of it.

of 'data' collection, write up and review, comparison, structured coding process and review⁴ from which I hoped, as suggested by the literature (see reference list at the end of the Section), theory / theories would emerge.

The rationale for this choice is explored [below](#).

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

The rationale for these choices is explored [below](#).

There were also a bundle of 'additional interventions' I made: my input to the give-take transaction of the research access negotiation. These are listed below.

Recording: I took extensive notes during the meetings (pen and paper), choosing not to ask for audio or video recordings for the sessions. I wrote these notes up as Word documents immediately after the session, using the re-writing process to reflect, add in the non-verbal atmosphere and communication. I also, where relevant, added any reactions or responses I had noticed in myself during the meeting.

Reflection: The decision to not even ask to make audio recordings was a wise one in retrospect. Trust was a paper thin veneer, to some degree an artefact of management, that enveloped the people in their 'togetherness' of 'who we are here'. Entering the physical-social-emotional space of the firm was delicate enough a process. I did not wish to risk tearing this trust veneer. The ripples across the skein I created just by being there – the tall, white bideshi⁵ woman with the bosses' patronage, asking questions, seeking ... - those were enough.

Checking with participants: I sent the write up from each conversation/ meeting as a draft to the participant for checking before taking the text as 'final' for review, coding and reflection. However I didn't do this for meeting observations nor for office / social observations, fearing that the unearthing of group dynamics, power plays etc would not be a helpful insight at that instant, and could potentially create a marked, exponentially higher degree of research-bias.

Coding: I aimed to continue reviewing, reflecting, noticing the patterns emerging until I reached 'saturation' of some description, trusting that I would know what that felt like when it happened. I chose not to enter the coding process with any predefined categories of interpretation. The only meta-codes I brought were a vague notion of 'psychological safety' and 'enough'. I chose to code by hand using print outs of my notes, highlighted, tagged, noted, coloured and re-coloured, the mass of papers appearing like some crazed ink-footed spider had run amok, but in my mind illuminating and capturing patterns, forms, essences and other intuitive and actual themes. I chose not to use any of the available software coding packages to do this, fearing I would lose the sensation of the captured words, silences, smells, body shifts, air-flow shudders, glances, intonation-pitch-pace changes that co-formed the interactions and

⁴ These terms are highlighted for their incongruency with what became a post-qualitative and then post-post methodology. In my view the terms 'data' etc are hangover constructs from a positivist, quantitative hegemony. This opinion is explored later in this Section.

⁵ bideshi is a polite term for a foreigner in Nepali

'data'. I wished to immerse myself wholly into the 'stuff' of the participants' worlds, to mingle my interpretations with their whole presence and see what happened. To work within an expansive, creative tension of 'theoretical sensitivity' (Glaser, 1978).

If it looked messy at small or large scale, it was probably right (Molloy, 2019).

Checking in again: I offered up my noticing of patterns (or codes) to the participants at the earliest useful stages. Firstly to notice what might be my 'stuff' in the noticings, my influence as researcher and allow for this in the interpretation. Secondly for them to notice what they noticed, to be co-creators of the magic codes and therefore make the constructivist element as multi-perspectival as possible. I aimed to keep the research process open, breathing and hence potentially more robust.

How long: I was present in CoAA on a daily basis over a month in the summer (pre-monsoon / end of Nepali FY) with further inputs across the following 6+ months both face to face and virtually.

Overall the interventions and conversations spread over a year before drifting into business-as-normal transactions with the Directorate (family)

When: May 2017 onward

Where: Kathmandu, Nepal all on CoAA territory

Risks / limiting factors: because of the extremely hierarchical nature of the business, with Directors holding absolute power, there was a significant risk that a) they may disable the process in some way through direct interference; b) participants would not feel able to speak openly and fully even with all the ethics documentation; c) participants may use the research as an opportunity to voice frustrations and potentially create fictional or groupthink style narratives to attack other caste / status groups within the firm. I was aware there were still whiffs of vicious anti-India sentiments in many segments of Nepali society following the 5 month border closure, riots and violence of 2015-16 winter. The family that own and Direct/ Lead the Group are proudly Indian-origin thus the research could potentially have been a touchpoint igniting nationalistic / antagonistic feeling towards the Directors.

5A

A significant other risk or limiting factor to the effectiveness of the inquiry was the possible language barrier (English-Nepali-Hindi). Speaking in English is a very desirable quality and perceived widely as a proxy for education, class, wealth and status. It is the first credential urban employers look for in a prospective employees (Chaffer, 2010). Acknowledging limitations in English was not likely, or socially possible for some of the high-status individuals (leaders) who participated in English medium rather than mother tongue. However they used English because (they felt) it was expected of them, despite their relatively low fluency and accuracy levels and my encouragement to use and responses in Nepali. Sometimes the basic language worked well causing a frank, direct expression of opinion uncluttered by socio-political nuances of the more fluent. Often it created a barrier as participants wished to keep the potentially embarrassing, exposing encounter brief and appeared to say only what they were confident they had accurate language to say.

Trades: in order to gain access to the leadership and central teams I had to negotiate a deal with the CoAA Directors, specifically with 'Adam'. They are traders by heritage (family caste) and by role so there were some hard pay-offs. These included a report to the Board including an action plan for leadership development; various direct training and development sessions with teams

and the opportunity to create a paper for professional publication and a presentation for the international professional entrepreneurs' network Adam belonged to. Keeping the trades and the research separate would prove to be difficult to manage however there was no other option in gaining such deep access.

Reflection: the tension I felt throughout the time with CoAA reflected the duality of the roles. It involved working hard to remain authentic, true and open to everyone about the hats I was wearing and retaining some clarity for myself around the purpose of each. The tension was helpful. It kept me on my toes – critically alert. Ultimately the roles collapsed into each other and the duality proved superficial

Ethics

I gained approval from the University of Cumbria Ethics Board and provided all prospective participants with information about the research aims, process and duration; about the use and storage of their information; about their choices regarding anonymity (after Tuck and Wang, 2014 and the ethics of refusal) and about the possible dissemination of outputs such as papers, presentations etc that may result from the research. All participants read and signed copies of a participation agreement. I have copies of these, as do they. The head of the firm also signed off ethics agreements to respect the privacy of the employees' participation.

All participants had choices throughout the research to become involved in review, reflection, in sense-making and in co-creation of the outputs and outcomes, including the emerging theoretical framework. Their sense making was important not only from an integrity-equality perspective, but also from a cultural (organisational, caste-class-gender and wider 'Nepali') perspective.

Reflections: the ethics documentation turned out to be a barrier to participation and created some anxiety and uncertainty amongst participants. My word was more valuable in this regard. Having to sign papers (in Nepali or in English) proved contentious and frightening for some. The practice of having papers that protect the individual is still not common in Nepali society. In the village in particular, signatures (or more usually thumbprints) are required only for official government papers, for banks, by the police and other documentation that carries the full weight of authority behind it.

The pre-emptive, prescriptive nature of the documentation meant it was difficult to respond iteratively to new opportunities for conversations, casual or otherwise.

I am sure I am not the first researcher to encounter such cultural and practical problems and I would request the University to review how it could avoid this 'top down' neo-settler-colonialist approach to knowledge, property, rights and protection of these. In some instances, the process is simply inappropriate and, as noted, has the opposite impact than intended.

Copies of all ethics documentation are available on request.

Figure A2: ethics policy and practice for this inquiry

Why use CGTM? Rationale for adopting this strategy

After in-depth consideration of around half a dozen qualitative methodologies I landed on Charmaz' Constructivist Grounded Theory Methodology (CGTM) as a way in to starting the face-to-face aspect of the study.

At this point (2016-7) I understood the world of research to be split into those positivist, truth seeking, dissecting types, most likely using numbers and other countables (the quants); and then the other lot, the qualitative, peering types, peeling back and critically scrutinising their subjects and also recognising their role in the co-construction of the world, the models and theories that emerged. Politically, socially the quants held the floor; there seemed to be a wonderful array of methodologies to choose from, if a little confusing. My uncertainty in selecting the most 'appropriate' stemmed from two factors: firstly many of the methodologies seemed so blindingly obvious as 'good practice' that I failed to believe they could be real 'science' at all (see Figure A3). Secondly (and paradoxically given what I *thought* I believed about iterative, constructivist inquiries), I struggled again to 'believe'⁶ the innumerable methodologies that seemed to be purely context specific (phenomenological), the 'here's what I did and why and now I'm calling it methodology 'X' school'.

7A

Examples of methodologies that wrapped into the CGTM but that I decided were not 'enough' at the time in and of themselves.

Action Research (AR) rejected as the named strategy, because it's too much of what I already do hence very little new to learn here; if I follow this way I'll never get out of the dark shadow of my (first) supervisor and will be unlikely to find my own voice, to be authentic to the research situation and may be limited within a paradigm that didn't afford the different ways of knowing I sought to elicit.

Participatory Research (PR) founded in a Critical Social Theory perspective, rejected because similarly to AR this strategy is already ingrained in what I do and how I practice: *of course* participants are equal co-inquirers in the research (Patton, 2002 in Benson et al 2013), *of course* their expertise in the inquiry process is of equal value. PR didn't feel critical or fresh enough to encourage the new insights that I hoped would emerge. There was also a pragmatic problem with the PR methodology: I felt the power dynamics of CoAA would restrict participants' sense of agency, of being co-owners of the inquiry and empowered to notice and act with the necessary socio-political freedom. I was concerned that overtly adopting a participatory approach may inadvertently reduce participation. PR therefore also seemed unsatisfactory.

Figure A3: some rejected methodologies

⁶ Belief is at the heart of the struggle here, rather than logic or intellectual, academic rationale. I read the words, they all made sense, and I perceived the logic, but I didn't believe. This epitomised the tension I had with the academy and its highly structured, rule-bound being oozing rational, logic-based and highly masculinised authority, all of which, I felt were a (pretty ugly) mask for what was essentially a church of place-based beliefs and personal practices that had become reified, ossified and then eulogised by super-alphas and their tribes.

Why CGTM? The highly structured approach seemed an 'easy' set of instructions to follow. It seemed to qualify with what I figured was expected of 'proper researchers'. As the 'middle ground' between 'extreme empiricism and complete relativism' (Suddaby, 2006) it seemed to be a good fit for what I thought I *should* be doing and what I *actually* believed.

Looking back I realise I was suffering from a fairly acute case of imposter syndrome and needed a strategy and, to some extent, a plan that had proper handrails. CGTM seemed, with all its jargon, its structures and process guidance, to be 'proper research'. This need was likely a hangover from my earliest experiences of research as an undergraduate student, trained in biochemistry labs with some of the granddaddies of evolutionary genetics (Maynard Smith) and population and conservation ecologies (Harper, D., Streeter, D. et al). These still held an imprint in my emotional-lived understanding of 'science' even if intellectually I thought I had broken the shackles of the quantitative world.

My apprehension about 'proper research' was also a reflection of the intimidation I felt, positioned as I was at the time, between very 'alpha' researchers and yet with very little in the way of formal guidance or training.

Happily Charmaz' eloquent refute of Glaser's somewhat dogmatic views that researchers should not be 'forcing GTM' (Glaser, 1992 in Bryant & Charmaz, 2010) i.e. should be unreflexive, empty of theory and by inference also empty of experience) was sufficient to allay many of my surface-qualms I held around getting back into tired binaries, leaky positivism and imitations of natural science. Her dynamic abductive approach correlated well with my lived experience. Susan Leigh Star's (2010) moving piece on her experience of doing CGTM brought a feminine voice that allowed for emotions in the inquiry and finally gave me the confidence and reassurance to go with a CGTM style.

8A

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

I had a decision made.

The substantive area was ~~containment~~. I stopped reading and started the conversations.

Why these tactics? The rationale for using the selected research methods

Step one: After an initial introduction and kick-off meeting with the firm's senior team, my plan was to start the inquiry with semi-structured interviews with the Business Heads. The Business Heads (BH) are the individuals in charge of the main business verticals, leading teams of various sizes on specific product lines. They form the main leadership tier below the Directors (the family owners).

I wished to get to know these people, to understand their journeys into their leader positions; to understand if they considered themselves to be doing leadership and if so, what that meant for them, and where they perceived they had developed this.

I wanted to understand their own sense of safety-aliveness-confidence in their roles (~~containment~~) and get a sense of the power flows through the firm. Most importantly though it was a place to start the process and then see what emerged.

My intuitive rationale was that by listening well, adopting the 'follower' position I would build trust, reduce suspicion and encourage relaxed openness. There were contradictions and tensions in me being me in this researcher role which I hoped would reduce assumptions on their part and create a fuzzy, ambiguous space with enough room and safety to explore their 'stuff' honestly. The tensions were several: firstly, as a female I was automatically lower status, but as a *bideshi* I was a guest and automatically granted high status. Next, this was a formal work process, but the 1-2-1 interview style presented an unusual degree of intimacy. I potentially

presented a challenge in how to speak with me in this highly codified world. Finally although I was acting as follower seeking their stories, listening attentively, I had their bosses' patronage and the authority to wield it should I so choose, as both shield and trident.

The ambiguity and approach proved successful with most participants i.e. we established trust and they spoke freely.

Step two: Having got to know the Business Heads (BH) and gained their confidence, the next step was to observe them doing leadership with their teams and then, where possible, follow up with their team members to seek their perspectives and stories of being-in-team (or not).

The rationale for sitting in on office spaces and other social areas observing people in their casual interactions and doing-work was to gauge the unguarded reactions, communications, sense of safety etc between people. I also wanted to understand what the different physical spaces-place did to leadership and ~~containment~~ (if anything).

Essentially, I just wanted to get into the firm and absorb into me what was happening (or not), to soak it up and see what sense making-breaking happened as I went in and out, shared, listened, reflected and worked out what was important with the people it was important to. To achieve a saturation of sorts.

The extra stuff – that actually became central to the inquiry

As noted in addition to what I considered to be the CGTM process, I ran a series of active additional interventions at CoAA (and then later at CoBB). These were introduced as the 'Trade offs' for permission to research. Whilst I initially felt these 'extras' were only done as the trade necessary to enable the research to take place, on reflection it is clear to me now that these more actively engaged sessions were also fundamental to an engaged and egalitarian research process. They formed part of the "single inquiry pursued via any methods, but with set coding procedures" (Stuart, 2017). They shifted the dynamic and the relationship with the participants from the passive, observed position to becoming co-researchers, co-developers in their story. The workshops and other sessions were a tangible, guided and accessible way-in to the research.

9A

The 'extras' – what and why:

A. An Appreciative Inquiry (AI) style workshop for research participants and colleagues

The most pertinent of these 'extras' was a two day Appreciative Inquiry (Cooperrider et al, 2003, Busche, 1998; Tierney-Moore et al 2014) *style* workshop session with 30-41 people (BH and teams). We introduced the themes ('codes') from the first step interviews and observations as a stimulus to considering 'best of' and 'lack' and used these to move towards a vision of 'best possible' and change pathways.

The AI process in particular opened up a pathway into thinking differently about how CoAA worked, why it worked (or didn't) the way it did and what opportunities there were to be better, within the current system and potentially by seeking to change the system. The AI process raised meaningful questions within reach of the participants ('this is something within my power'), enabled a call to action with a practical 'here and now' outcome to be picked up and made use of if they so wished.

In these workshops the CoAA people helped to interpret the first codes and evolve these both in their relevancy and meaning and as something useful to take back into their world. The codes became, as Susan Leigh Star writes, a means to "set up a relationship

with [.. your respondents” (2010, p.80). In our case they strengthened and deepened our existing relationship.

Although we were all aware the ultimate power lay with Adam and Andrew, in our sessions participants felt they had a voice and were heard. Together we co-created ~~containment~~: safe-enough to apply themselves fully, to speak up, to question and be challenged and to make suggestions, to have a voice and be agentic in changing the how of working in CoAA.

Why an Appreciative Inquiry Process (and not something else)

I’ve used a modified AI approach to get people into shifting thinking strategically about the big Ws of (organisational) being that the doing of day-to-day business rarely affords. Posited as a method for seeking and demanding excellence in order to be better, to be the best possible versions of ourselves for the challenge of doing business, can feel more ‘possible’ (yeh-I –can-have-a-go) and less punitive than other more diagnostic, problem-seeking techniques I’ve worked with. In essence AI is nothing more than a conversation starter, a gateway to perspective shifting and to connecting-differently with one another. As a process I have found it can act as a glue, growing safety and a sense of collaborative ‘inthistgether’ between people who would not normally have any formal or informal connection within the company yet who fall within each other’s circles of influence, albeit indirectly. AI style approaches can thus be a tool for doing ~~containment~~ and/ or for doing organisational and leadership development. I find much of the theoretical back drop and particularly much of the highly positivist ‘empirical evidence’ (e.g. Glaser, 2014) from the neurosciences for AI questionable (as do others for example in the debunking of the Positivity Ratio, Brown et al 2014). However, as a practice used critically, mindfully and adaptively get to ‘safer-together-more-alive’ AI approaches have their uses.

10A

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

This messy approach to methodology, being agile, seizing opportunities to critically scoop up richer, deeper and, crucially, different (types of) knowledge and understanding, to have different contributions to the theory-in-practice generation (and demolition) was a lived *and-both* bricolage. It felt more democratic, dynamic and more robust: we were re-moulding the methodology (and methods) responding to new insights as they emerged. Think and research with a Constructivist Grounded Theory to start, add some Participatory and Action principles to breathe practice into theory patterns: notice better, be alert, then try to think research differently in response to what is actually happening (rather than what I believed might happen when I was planning the inquiry). It was messy and also more ‘true’. Noticing and noting the change in research approach and cross-matching this to a palette of methodologies provided the necessary academic rigour.

I’ve detailed the extra interventions below to show what happened and how they impacted the inquiry. I also regard the chronicling of these steps as an essential small part of the often

‘deleted work’ of research, the unseen and invisible labour that isn’t glamorous enough to add to write-ups but is absolutely essential (Leigh-Star, *ibid*).

- B. **Feedback to the Directors and Business Heads:** several in person reports describing the findings to date, interpretation and suggestions for ways forward they might like to consider. These were anonymised, aggregated and presented appreciatively i.e. focusing on strengths and opportunities and using these to grow good practice and thereby address lack and threats. Why? These fulfilled the requirement to provide direction for growth and improving the CoAA position and also were useful markers in the inquiry process, prompting reflection and summarising and, most helpfully, consideration by me of what the findings might mean to people other than myself. The feedback sessions forced me to shift position from being in the research to looking back on it from a ‘for business’ perspective. The position shifting itself was helpful and illuminating. The opinions and reflections of the Directors and Business Heads was useful. The sessions also forced me to contextualise the participants’ information and opinion within the wider CoAA structure and process.
- C. **Coaching-style conversational updates with Adam** - explicit (and anonymised) dark and light side detailed findings in frank and direct conversations usually off premises and always confidential. These conversations were much more action oriented in some ways, providing the provocation, directions and recommendations about what next; identifying the support open to him and encouraging reflection and confidence to make further steps. As the key sponsor of the inquiry and the lead for CoAA it was essential he was and felt engaged, had an evidence base for enacting change both for CoAA participants and also to secure his position amongst co-Directors on The Group Board. These were practical and political interventions for the inquiry.
- D. **Presentation to Adam and Victor** (the non-family Director that Adam has tension around). The presentation of findings and opportunities for new action / strategy was requested by Adam as a political action designed to overcome resistance and find common ground for more effective team working with his co Director and a major influencer in CoAA. Adam felt Victor was a block towards more collaborative, more human and longer term strategies. He felt Victor was entirely driven by numbers: people in his teams were punished or rewarded only on the figures. Having to ‘translate’ the findings into quantitative data sets that Victor could ‘read’ was a useful challenge and forced me to think differently and, I believe, ultimately added rigour to the inquiry process. Numbers are not my generally my game. Creating this report helped me face a blind spot.
- E. **Presentation and reporting to the Group family board:** also a political act to maintain the research inquiry and a useful exercise in aligning the early findings and recommendations with the overall Group strategic direction and imperatives. Well-evidenced reporting and confident recommendations were important in maintaining ethical integrity, using my privilege for good in promoting and gaining commitment to change.
- F. **Team build afternoons** (3x 2 hour sessions) with the majority of HQ staff, initiated by HR Director as an ongoing event. These skills building sessions for staff to lead the change

needed. They also modelled the practice of creating and holding ~~containment~~. Of note is the participation of newer Business Heads and absence of older ones (and IT). The sessions helped build trust between the participants and I: people got used to me being around, were welcoming and, crucially, began to 'carry on as normal'.

- G. **HR Director support and mentoring:** having a capable and confident HR team was essential for effecting change in CoAA and therefore in honouring the participants' commitment to the inquiry. This was an important trade in terms of impact and important to do for maintaining integrity.

NOTE: The themes, ideas and practises emerging from the interviews, meetings, observation and interventions are detailed along with reflexions and sense-breaking / making in the Case Studies within the Doing Research Section

Contextual information and reflections that help place the participants and CoAA in space-time of place and position can be found in Section Position and Place

Implementation: reality check 1

After a month of full time presence in CoAA I was shattered, emotionally drained and disturbed by what I was experiencing as dark forces of power all around. Dark themes had emerged and re-emerged in the coding along continua of power, practise and emotional currents. These were characterised by 'lack' (the felt absence of) with occasional flutters of presence. I felt entangled in the web, directly exposed to some of the overt power plays by the BH and others. I was overwhelmed and unable to think critically. My personal ~~containment~~ had collapsed. I hoped I had enough 'data', enough codes and that the bigger themes emerging from the comparing-lifting-checking-calibrating-comparing cycles were 'real' in some sense and not delusions of my own making.

Reflections, June 2017: "Questions on CGTM – how many times must I recode and from how many perspectives / states of mind in order to have themes emerge that are not entirely of my own making? Even with the greatest possible focus on criticality am I conjuring whatever I wish (subconsciously) to appear, in order to support the abductive steps of theorising? Or is the coding, reflecting, critiquing cycle just a provocation for a theory generation and not actually grounded at all?"

I realise I am losing faith in the methodology and also the notion that research at this level should be a solitary affair."

God position untenable:

How had this come to pass? At this point I recognised my own bias in not seeing the CoAA team members' reflections and input as equally valuable and valid. My suspicion was that many were so oxygen-starved of positive, genuine attention that the research process had become a minor addiction, an attachment game they wanted to keep playing and that was distorting their input (inflaming research bias).

Reflections from 2020: Looking back from the distance of wintery Australia three years further on having explored a lot of 'stuff' around belonging (ref Position & Place; 'Ass-kicking', Chaffer,

2020), I recognise that the bias was my own – it was me who had got hooked into belonging, me who enjoyed the familiarity and attention.

I believe my internal balance and ability to judge was being affected badly by the power plays. I'd become too sucked in to 'the team' and was losing criticality – too much attachment, not enough abstraction.

Mixed into this was the guilt of leaving, the foreign researcher helicoptering in and out – such was my emotional rawness, the settler-colonialist stick seemed a pertinent one to beat myself up with.

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

Evolution 1: shaking loose - checking in

At this point I have oodles of 'data'; I have multiple stand-out codes / themes that have been checked-in and emerged again, followed-up on, expanded down into various rabbit holes and up into black holes a sufficient number of times that I feel satisfied that they are a meta-theme of the lived experience of leadership practice, safety and challenge at CoAA. If not that I had become so blinkered I could no longer see anything else. Either way this was 'saturation'.

Following the CGTM pathway this was now time to stop and move towards the solidification of the 'emergent theory' or model. I knew it was time to stop, for multiple reasons, however the thought of flipping from this iterative messy, unfinished process into the creation of completed theory-model-type-thing, some sort of 'truhing' device seemed to be a slide into positivism, diagnostics and grand if grounded theory. This was not the way.

13A

This guttural reaction also flipped a switch in my reflexion on my actions and valuing of the CoAA encounters. I was suddenly very unsure. Was I reifying the written word over the spoken? And the word over all-of-the-other-richness-of-experience-communication-relations? Had I blindly followed the CGTM instructions and disregarded all the practices and expertise I'd accumulated through thousands of hours of working *with* people? This was not how the reading of safe-enough, alive-enough dynamics worked. I was shaken.

Looking back from 2020 on this shake-it-up moment I recognise that I had been both true to myself, working into the atmosphere, the medium of place-people-power and its many tentacles. And I had also been following, been a follower of CGTM, a little too uncritically, largely out of fear and ignorance of what 'proper research' looked like. A little like the seduction with leadership (see Start Point) I had been baffled by the expectation of knowing what research was – and so performed research, performed researching. I'd used CGTM as a model *of* not a model *for* (see Section Doing Development).

However, the fear in the shake-it-up moment was vital. I stopped, reconsidered and detached. With the release from attachment I was able to open my eyes (and ears) to Elizabeth Adams St Pierre's work, to the 'posts' (see Figure A4).

The post-qualitative movement – a term coined by Lather and St Pierre where researchers attempt to “imagine and accomplish an inquiry that might produce different knowledge and produce knowledge differently” (Lather 2013, p.653 in Honan & Bright, 2016)

Figure A4: an explanation of the term ‘posts’

Specifically two things happened.

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

Further her articulation of the paradox of valuing face to face investigation over the written word (literature review), yet only being able to ‘make real’ the face to face through conversion to text that is then processed, reviewed and reified as ‘literature’ confirms for me the non-sense of this corrupted hermeneutic circle. I went back to my notes and to the spider scribbles. I looked again and re-weighted, re-valued the discussions, experiences, reading, observations, reflexions, emotions, atmosphere, the non-verbal and the aroma. I may have been temporarily de-railed but I had all the resources I needed to re-turn critically and with confidence-enough to work better with these. Perhaps my sleepy-eyed trundle towards uncriticality had actually been a useful near-miss and may even enable better scrutiny in future?

14A

Secondly, I found relief in renaming. Reading St Pierre’s words the itchy-scratchy discomfort I’d felt with the language: ‘data’, ‘processing’, ‘coding’ etc and other terms made sense. What was this pseudo-positivist discourse doing in a methodology defining itself as constructivist? How did this fit with epistemological pluralism? The relief on naming the abrasion was distinct. The response I had, after some reflection, was not to abandon the terms and get stuck in either inventing a new discourse or of over-explaining everything. In small and clearly defined doses this borrowed terminology also has usefulness. My response has been to incorporate and use these terms, but knowingly and with caution.

I felt reassured by what St Pierre calls post-analyses i.e. ‘begin with the epistemological and ontological commitments of the analysis’ (St Pierre, 2014 p.10).

Know your intention, practise Right View, Right Way⁷ and let the methodology emerge.

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

Checking in

Returning to epistemological commitments to *and/both*, to pluralism and equality I sought my own ~~containment~~.

I decided to bring in a different community of expertise to help me better understand and explore the emerging themes, their relevance and ‘validity’ and also my own and other biases. I

⁷ After Mahayana Buddhism

asked these different experts to come together in a conversation, an abductive group process – a kind of ‘lived’ literature review.

Specifically, I wanted to check-in on my reading of the experience and subsequent analysis of what had happened at CoAA, to understand what I may be mis-reading through lack of and/or over sensitivity. I had particular curiosity around the cultural context of being Nepali and / or working with Nepalese and Indian leadership.

Hence the next steps were the following expert inquiries:

- a. A discussion group with friends in Kathmandu who run, founded or are part of leadership teams in Nepali organisations: they are some Nepalese nationals and some internationals resident in Nepal all with many years of experience working and leading organisations
- b. A phone conversation with UK national who has worked and played in Nepal for two decades, including throughout the civil war. A climber, journalist and storyteller with a keen and critical eye, he has also worked in the development sector in Nepal and in partnership with private firms.

The conversations were enlightening and also re-affirming of the general themes and practises emerging.

For my emotional health and intellect, as much as to extend and elucidate the themes⁸ I realised I needed to immerse into a different research partnership with a new organisation. This is the second phase as detailed below.

15A

Evolution 2 – adding a second research partner

Why? – to understand containment in a new-to-me context; a fresh ‘first situation’ within which to immerse and see what themes emerged, whilst holding, but not ‘testing’ the themes from CoAA

Who? - CoBB are a small (35 person) start-up working in the transport sector using a tech-enabled, service focused business model. They have expanded steadily in their first year and have ambitions to keep scaling and to dominate the sector. Their model, their service is a first for Nepal so they are also shaping and defining the market and policy environment as they grow. CoBB is owned by the two, young male founders, supported by an investment board of fellow entrepreneurs and a staff of young male and female Kathmandu-ites.

How? As with CoAA, I ran structured interviews with the whole staff and founders; meeting observations; running two interactive AI style workshops with the senior team. At this point I was still comfortable-enough with the data collection-comparison-coding-reviewing-sharing strategy of first situation CGTM and felt re-assured that by repeating the methods within the same methodological framework I would be doing research ‘properly’. I needed some sense of restoration of faith in the process and in humanity.

How long? One month plus one week intensive several months later

When? September 2017 and January 2018

Where? At two of the company’s main operational centres in wider Kathmandu

⁸ I hesitate to call this a theory, or even a theoretical framework – these were ways of being and doing, not a ‘thing’ to ‘test against’; it sat against my epistemological and ontological premise

Risk / limiting factors – the founder’s influence was felt across the company but not as power-over, but as power-with (Starhawk, 2011), hence the risk of interference in the process was felt to be negligible. Limiting factors included the lack of common language with participants (my weak Nepali, their weak English)

Trades: no explicit trades were necessary. The founders were happy that the process itself would be (viewed as) a positive intervention and helpful in itself.

The CoBB research engagement yielded happier and useful themes than that of CoAA. The themes, (practises and states) were within the same paradigm as those from CoAA and many were along a continuum from the ‘lack’ apparent there.

The outputs, themes and practises emerging are critically explored in Section on the Case Studies.

Strategy 2 – research-enough; a new ‘ology’ emerges

Reflection, 2017: Am I lazily shifting to a positivist position: I have an ‘emergent theory’ and wish to ‘test’ if it holds ‘true’ in other circumstances? Have I just delayed sliding back into the empiricist hierarchy’s irresistible pull?

Abstraction aversion

Once more I was left with the feeling of ‘what next’ and ‘so what’ with the emergent themes. And that allergic response to solidifying what felt like phenomena-of-place and abstracting this up and out into an academic item-of-strata [family: *theory*; genus – *constructive grounded*; species – ~~containment~~] with all the concomitant shift in nomenclature and of discourse that accompanies the detached paradigm. The trouble of course is that nothing really fit well – constructive grounded ish with a dash of critical, a sprinkle of feminist and a pinch of interactional. Or maybe its psychodynamic -critical social blend with a smidgeon of action and a cup of phenomenological?

I was struggling to move towards the idea of something as notionally ‘complete’ as a theory, middle-range, grand or otherwise. This next step seemed to break the idea of knowledge as partial views being woven together, of justification-enough, of problematisation. The shift to naming and reifying emerging practices or principles into a theory, to shift from verb to noun didn’t sit well. Would this be lapsing from safe-enough into too-safe, moving from presence to past? Losing ~~containment~~?

Something wasn’t ‘right’

In favour of CGTM ... to a point: staying incomplete

Re-reading Leigh-Star (2010) I came to understand that the CGTM way could be about the practise of changing perspectives; about continuously moving between attachment and abstraction (after Winnicot, 1965); from the immersion and wholehearted experience of being *in* the ‘data’ to the distancing and viewing from afar and the seeking out of what may be different, or of ‘more’, from this refracted, reflexive (abstracted) position. In her experience doing CGTM seemed to be an uncomfortable dance of connecting and then distancing. And repeat until the

theory, grand, mid or micro shaped and formed – emerged. And then we stop, dish up the new theory on an academic plate, and move to the next new question.

Maybe I just wasn't there yet – hadn't danced enough?

But I was definitely at saturation, at which point CGTM indicates I should be there, at the happy birth place of the grounded theory. I had the theory-ish but I wasn't happy to settle. In fact, quite the opposite. The research didn't feel finished, although the work at CoAA and CoBB certainly was.

Re-narrating the CGTM process as a practise of shifting perspectives, questioning from different positions and ongoing conversation had brought me back to my underpinning beliefs around the dynamic tension of shifting as *itself* the key to exploration, to analytic rigour.

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

In other words, the discipline of the academic inquiry seemed also to be in *not fully* settling in a position. To stay grounded in impermanence and ongoing incompleteness and let these drive curious exploration and evolution.

Conversations, community, continuation to practise

Haraway (1988), ever the pragmatist, reminded me too that "situated knowledges are about communities, not individuals" (p.590). This knowledge emerging was definitely situated, of place and so far of the people. Her words re-affirmed my sense of congruency with the CGTM style dance I'd entertained so far of interpretation, comparing, choosing and building knowledge through "the emerging consensus within a community of observers" (Suddaby, 2006, p.633), the participants and my conversation partners.

17A

I needed to return to practise, to lose the researcher 'hat' and work with people on their terms, with their stuff and let the themes percolate into my practise. I needed to feel the themes at work (or not) in noticing, in self and other awareness, in unpacking assumptions and through people's choices for action and being in the leadership place.

Attachment to the abstraction - assertion

There was a second fundamental problem with the step-change of abstraction into the theory place: getting attached to the abstraction instruments and products themselves. Back to Leigh-Star (2010): she posits that codes form 'transitional objects' between the attachment and abstraction places. This may be so. My concern is that our attachment shifts from the direct experience of doing research, being in research and that we become attached to the codes themselves.

And then we become attached to theory.

And from the comfort of the attached 'found it!' place, we relinquish curiosity in favour of satisfaction.

Then we gently, abstractedly, erase the webs of causation, the dynamic process and focus solely on the 'products': the codes and then the theories.

In our attachment to the shiny new thing(s) we stop dancing, detaching, questioning, seeking justification and instead shift to assertion.

And, as is almost inevitable when we assert in the public realm through presentations, publications and the like, we become attached to the assertion.

Noting that most often (and certainly in the PhD rulebook) we (have to) make this assertion as a lone voice and not as a conversation, vying for recognition and validation, seeking consensus from the 'community' of critics.

The process seems paradoxical.

Knowledge as practise

From a different epistemological base the first phase of research (above) could be viewed as *knowledge as practise*. This was Nagarjuna's '*position*' (Gorisse, 2009). Following the classical Indian tradition of argumentation we develop the epistemic guarantee i.e. knowledge is that which is justifiable, based not on an 'out there' reality, but on the agreement of a (scientific) community. Where Nagarjuna differed from the Naiyayikas was in refuting the *uniqueness and finality* of the consensus process: this can and will change. Knowledge, as with all phenomena, "is a purely arbitrary slice of space-time chosen by us as the referent of a single name, and not an entity demanding, on its own, recognition and a philosophical analysis to reveal its essence." (Garfield, 1994 p.220). Knowledge is practise. It is a temporary being, both becoming and un-becoming. And empty of 'it'.

Reflecting on this position it seems any thesis is unlikely ever to settle and nor should it. There will be new perspectives emerging, new conversations, new justifications demanded as time and space changes. What we can say to 'have knowledge' in the here and now is we have justification *enough*. No claim is indisputable. No proposition is universal. [Similarly when seeking to negate an assertion or thesis, we are not saying it is not true (an anti-statement), we are saying there is insufficient justification, *not enough*.]

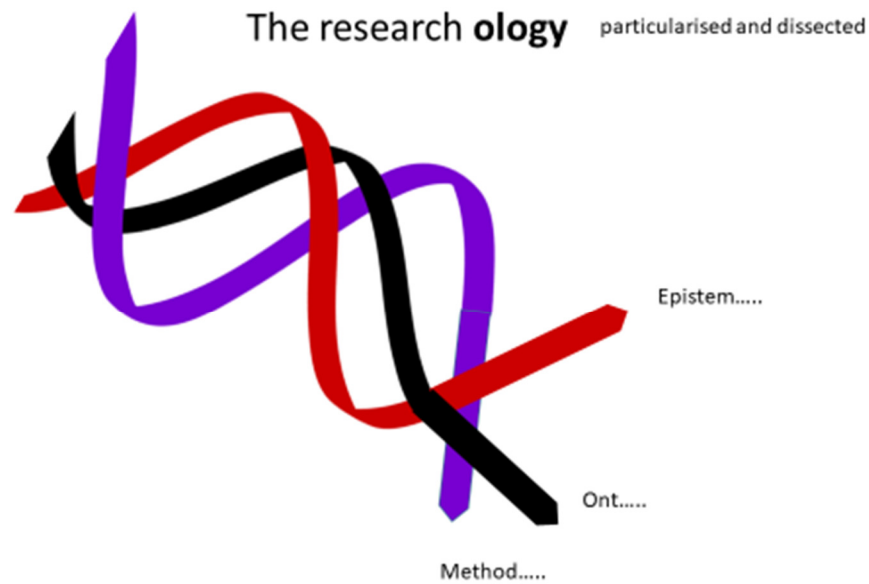
So my thesis of ~~containment~~ does not exist nor not not exist. It is empty of its own essence ('or as the Tibetans say, it does not exist "from its own side"' Garfield (1994, p.220)) i.e. it is dependent on everything around, it is entirely contextual. It occupies a situated position.

Thesis-as-practise

If ~~containment~~ was any 'thing' it was a practise, a lived and felt verb that needed to be lived and felt in practise as embodied knowledge. Knowledge as practise. Thesis as practise.

The final emerging research strategy (an -ology of sorts) was to bring the dance, the themes (a pinch of CGTM), critical questioning (a dash of posts), thesis-as-practise into a community of practise: to do leadership development until there is justification enough, until reaching saturation in practise, for ~~containment~~.

At this point the splitting of the research inquiry into its various 'ologies' has revealed its limitations: the 'ologies' interdependencies are metaphysically reduced and recombined into a single, more useful, 'inquiry' whole (see Figure A5).



Showing belief – knowledge relations: interconnections, non-binaries and flow

Figure A5: a research 'ology'

Strategy 3 –the final 'ology': ~~containment~~-as-practise, research-as-practise

India

I took my evolving knowledge-as-practise, research-as-practise ology next to India, to an organisation within which a female leader was struggling in multiple ways with 'her team' – performance, harmony, even existing were highly problematic to the point of grievances and formal disputes. We referred to them as Team GROW, India.

I worked with her both ~~doing containment~~ and extending her (and by dint of the relational nature of it, also their) practise into ~~doing containment~~ better.

The methods and approach I took were of a professional practitioner offering support and insight (doing leadership development) whilst being explicit that this would also wrap into and extend doctoral research. [I sought and got written permission using the ethics board approved documents.]

As practise and research are in this case to quote a favoured Nepali-English idiom 'two sides of the same coin' there is a single critical narrative of this episode, sitting in Section on The Case Studies as The Case of Team GROW.

UK

Similarly, I took my evolving knowledge-as-practise ology to a UK based 'toxic team' scenario, also seeking verbal ethical consent from the team and the female leader. This too is a single critical narrative located in Section on the Case Studies.

At this point the formal 'doing research' ends, however the knowledge-as-practise is also now part of my doing leadership practise and has become entangled into, infiltrated and absorbed

Research Project Approach: Strategy, Design and Evolution

into me-doing-leadership-development-with multiple other actors over a subsequent year of professional practise globally.

It has also informed delivery of academic Leadership Development modules and thus been exposed to more critical perspectives, more voices and more evolution.

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22A

Glossary

Andrew – CEO, lead director of the Group, eldest brother of the family owners.

Adam – Director overseeing the biggest companies, including CoAA, in the Group and my key contact for this inquiry.

Business Heads – leaders of product areas; the principal relationship manager for manufacturers of the goods CoAA distributes across the country.

The Group – a family owned collection of around 35 companies in Nepal, S Asia and the US.



Voices on ~~containment~~



About this Section: what and why

This Section brings together voices and ideas from many different knowledge worlds: from Western academic fields; from indigenous people's territories and from major world philosophies. And the weaving of my evolving and also critical voice into theirs. There are theories, models, practises and ideas. Some have direct, tangible relevance to ~~containment~~ as theory-in-use. Some are less complete, more oblique. Almost all use different types of discourse. All together they form a rich fabric of contributions, a patchwork of perspectives of many shades, tastes and textiles to become an assertion that is (and should stay) incomplete and yet is also complete-enough to commit to. A type of bricolage (after Levi-Strauss in Mambrol, 2016) that is never finished, and maybe never be wholly 'new'.

1V

The purpose of bringing in these voices is both supportive of the style of the standard literature review and may also feel different. This section is in service of both establishing a niche for ~~containment~~, showing difference-enough to be a recognisable contribution (distinguishing it – making it the focus) and also showing the notional agreement of a constructed community-of-interest (a kind of fantasy football team of philosophers, psychologists, scholars etc) that ~~containment~~ is already an aspect of their understanding and being (albeit in different words): a thread in the weft, imperceptible and indispensable.

I draw upon Nagarjuna to set-out the philosophical base for my approach. Working from the premise that nothing is independent (a central tenet of Buddhism), it follows that the sense of an assertion of knowledge (or proposition) is inherently interconnected and interdependent on the one asserting or proposing and also those receiving it. Knowledge creation is a relational process. Specifically, Nagarjuna posits that the act of asserting X means “to commit oneself to give justification for X” (Gorisse, 2009, p.4) such that X becomes a belief that is knowledge (as opposed to one that is not). Nagarjuna considers that *justification* is felt to be achieved i.e. that knowledge is formed, when a *community* (we) has reached the consensus that there is ‘an equilibrium’ between X as belief and “successful practice” (ibid, p.4). In my case the belief I am asserting is that ~~containment~~ plays a role in leadership and is a practice that can be developed in support of doing leadership better. I give justification for my assertion across the whole of the thesis from the doing of the research to the observation of the theoretical framework playing out. The ‘community’ is the assorted people and peoples presented here in this section. The

consensus is an artefact of my own making and is offered for critique, challenge and the weaving in of your and other voices. The end point represents consensus—enough, justification-enough for ~~containment~~'s becoming in to belief that is knowledge.

You are invited to add your voice in challenge, in support, in argumentation, in reflection. You might choose to take the position of the Opponent in the Dialogic tradition. Or just read and question, noticing what emotions and thoughts you conjure (and possibly questioning where these have come from and why).

On abstracting-attaching

The central ideas of abstraction-attachment are founded in the work of Donald Winnicott, psycho-analyst and paediatrician. The ideas, his work and how these influence my thinking on ~~containment~~ are detailed further on in this Section.

Much of Western scientific practice pushes us to take a whole 'thing' and attempt to get to its 'thing-ness' its unique essence, to seek difference, to distinguish and thereby understand it¹. Whether this be through truth seeking positivism, or less surgically, through post-positivist epistemologies, we particularise, attempting to separate out the universal chaff from the unique codes of wheaten essence. Having carved out a thing's thing-ness and named 'it' we then re-locate it within a class of other, to our mind, similar things. It becomes a 'type of.'. We abstract. We hope the abstracting brings us greater understanding and greater knowledge (and with this the potential to manipulate, move and re-order?). In cutting in and zooming out we create new knowledge, new objects: in dislocating the thing-ness from the thing, from context (after Ingold, 2011) we may see (useful) patterns and a bigger, different picture. We find different perspectives and new insights. We abstract.

In taking the 'thing' of 'experiencing leadership in "optimal collaboration" (Crook, 2019) and chiselling down through the conceptual layers to seek out its thing-ness, to attempt to notice, name and, to some degree classify (or at least locate amongst sibling thing-nesses) I have sought a new (and hopefully helpful) perspective. I have abstracted ~~containment~~. This is the academic condition that binds this inquiry in its (Western) place.

In this Section I have also attempted to abstract, to untangle and extrude from my 'knowing' the ideas, theories, practice and reflections of academics, practitioners, philosophers, friends and others that have wrapped themselves together as 'my knowing' of the experience of ~~containment~~. And then place them back in their respective classes, their 'type of' thinking, in order to allow ~~containment~~ to have its own wings, to be distinguishable (and not just stuff I think-notice-know-do) and therefore open for critique, to be dissembled or developed by others.

Those are the abstractions and how they may bring insight.

And in diving deep into the granularity are we not, somewhat paradoxically, not getting closer to our subject, our thing, but getting further away? This is the tension I have felt during both the seeking of distinguishing features, of the essence and also of untangling my own knowing from

¹ The ideas highlighted in this paragraph are explored in much greater detail in the Research Approach Section (methodology).

others. The more I asked, the more I picked at threads, the less I 'knew'. I felt a sense of loss – and also being lost. I needed tethers, to re-attach, to regain the sense of the thing as a whole.

For many other peoples of the world there is only the whole: 'it' does not exist, it is empty of essence (of thingness) and is merely processes operating in a network of impermanent causes and effects (e.g. Buddhist philosophies); the whole is substance, indivisible, its thing-ness non-extractable (e.g. Confucianism, Taoism); or just form that is temporarily inhabited by an essence (e.g. animist beliefs such as Bon, Sherpa). These ways of knowing also inform and shape my way of knowing. In my practice and approach the haptic, subjective, embodied, spiritual understanding, being and becoming has as much validity than the intellectual. It has informed therefore the ideation, the philosophising behind ~~containment~~. However, it has felt wrong to bring isolated perspectives or snippets, to dissect and extrapolate from these spheres to make them West-best-customised and force-fit them into an ill-fitting academic jacket. You may hear their influences throughout the study or feel the inflections glancing your own belief systems, but there are no citations here. The knowledge, understanding and personal-professional growth I have from these philosophies, beliefs and ways of life was gained through absorption. The knowledge is embodied. I have lived worked, listened to, been tutored by (accidentally and formally) people for whom these ways of knowing and being and becoming are part of the fabric of everything. It feels wrong and disrespectful to even attempt to cite from Tibetan yak herders singing mantras on a trail; observations from Sherpa friends in how they are with each other; from the Pangboche Rimpoche's 6 hour aung puja; from after work conversations with Chinese academics ... they do not nor, should not be made to fit the superficiality of the academic box.

3V

I *have* however, added a few small slivers of reflections on practice at the end of this section. I wish they were more substantial – their thinness is a result of my feeling my way into the 'rules' of the PhD.

Summarising

In summary then I hope my contribution lays somewhere in the combination-of and tension-between the abstraction and attachment of understanding of ~~containment~~ as a differentiated, part-of class and ~~containment~~ as integrated aspect of whole. It's in the *and/both* that sense-making, that belief-to-knowledge consensus may be most robust and useful.

What follows is an attempt to unpack, to abstract my knowing of the last two decades and to bring this up to date with the explicit seeking out of others' views, of the possible places in fields that I've undertaken in the PhD journey.

A note on bias: These voices from different literatures are presented with the following disclaimer: I'm aware of selected ideas, authors and practise that resonate, that I find useful or appealing in some way. I have also attempted to bring contrasting, challenging voices – those that jar or are not useful – to provide balance, to be a fearsome interlocutor in an effort to ensure the assertions are as robust as possible, so that I and others may have confidence-enough to join the fray and give doing ~~containment~~ a go. I'm aware that I have bias, that to some degree I *have to have* bias to supporting, affirming arguments otherwise this inquiry would never have happened and certainly never have had the confidence to conclude.

These voices are not conclusive. Neither are they the lowest hanging fruit.

A note against teleology: any sense that the ideas and literature presented show purposeful progress is mistaken. The only progress has been that of time through the PhD. The ideas, the contributions, the evidences are more akin to vegetables, herbs and other flavourings thrown together to present as a thick broth. They may complement and also detract from each other. Add more if you like.

It's a *soupe de jour* not a recipe.

To whet (or perhaps diminish) your appetite, and give advance warning for those with allergies and other biases, the *soupe* contains the ur-form of ~~containment~~ (no line); psychological safety; psychodynamics with essence of psychotherapy; evolutionary psychology and group psychodynamics; experience of being in practice, being led with ~~containment~~; of Japanese intersubjective, problematized practices and reflections on these.

Psychological safety

There is a reasonable body of work on psychological safety that informs fields and practice in psychology, behavioural sciences, management and leadership, organisational sciences, healthcare and social sciences (Newman et al., 2017; Edmondson et al., 2014). In entering this study, in developing the idea of ~~containment~~, I am accepting psychological safety as a credible premise that has both validity and usefulness to scholars and practitioners, not quite a black-box of science (Latour, 1987): a knowledge-belief still evolving and also evolved-enough to not need to wholly unpack and re-substantiate. The scholarly-practitioner community seems to have reached consensus-enough for this.

4V

It is worth stating what I understand by safety for the context of this inquiry. Secondly, there is a summary of what has been studied, and what has not, with specific reference to the interplay of safety and other variables, notably problematisation and its synonyms.

Kahn's work in 1990 brought psychological safety back to life after a couple of decades of neglect following Schein and Bennis' original research in organisational change (1965). Kahn (1990, p.708) describes psychological safety as "feeling able to show and employ one's self without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status or career". Edmondson (1999, p.305) shifted the concept to a group level perception: a "shared belief that the team is safe for risk-taking" therefore different from cohesion, group-think and uniformity, and more than trust in that it encompasses group norms / the transpersonal relational aspects of group. Others have added variations and layers to this definition, but, as Newman et al. note (2017), most studies and certainly those in the organisational fields where safety seems to be most widely deployed, have used Edmondson's definition as their start point.

Two meta-studies of psychological safety bring illumination to the antecedents and outcomes i.e. what supports development of and what is influenced by psychological safety (Newman *ibid*). Within these the authors note influences of leadership behaviours in safety perceptions, albeit many studies cited use heroic leader stereotypes who are modelling behaviours (social exchange) that their somewhat inert followers are affected by (e.g. Hirak et al., 2012). Edmondson (2014) suggests that group safety "does not emerge naturally" (p.39) i.e. it needs attention and work. She also notes that this 'burden' is not the responsibility of managers alone i.e. individual and group agency may be required. The authors acknowledge there are few

studies on the 'how' of developing psychological safety and nor on the dynamic aspects of safety as it ebbs and flows and its nurturing, maintenance or repair. Finally, there is little exploration on the absence or lack of safety.

All studies except one showed some correlation and often causality between psychological safety and the other factors measured e.g. performance, creativity, learning. Interestingly the exception is **critical thinking** as shown in Kayes, 2006 study of group critical thinking in college students. It should be noted that this is one study only, and I would argue flawed in that groups were artificially created for the purpose of the study i.e. they were collections of people who may or may not be in group. Other studies e.g. Liang et al. (2012) note the positive influence of high psychological safety on voice, that is the *confidence* to critique, but this is not the same as criticality per se. So we can, somewhat tenuously, suggest that whatever group members, leadership or other factors are doing to contribute towards building (or breaking) safety is not the same as that required to build or reduce criticality. That is, something other than safety is needed to encourage and enhance critical thinking. What is this 'other' thing? And is it a 'thing' (an object e.g. people who are already critical thinkers) or a 'practise' (we need to encourage, train or support criticality)? And are the two antecedents compatible or mutually exclusive – can you have safety and criticality at the same time? Edmundson (2014) calls for further research on the boundary conditions – what other factors affect / are affected by safety. It's at this fuzzy boundary of safety and criticality (or problematisation), specifically in the form of antecedents to doing leadership that the idea of, and inquiry into, ~~containment~~ locates.

5V

The authors note a gap in methodologies, with the vast majority of the 110 studies reviewed, using positivist, quantitative strategies with a bias towards Edmundson's 7 item scale (a psychometric) as the measuring instrument. Edmundson herself calls for greater methodological diversity (2014). Similarly most studies have happened in Western, N. American, cultural spaces and most in English language. Few have studied safety in groups from Asian or other cultural meshes and as far as I'm aware none to date have looked through other epistemological and ontological lenses.

Only Pearsall and Ellis in their 2011 study looked at the impacts of being too-safe, noting the increase in unethical behaviour, specifically a super-safe group space enabling team members to suggest and then others to support unethical propositions. What happens to teams that feel too-safe, get too powerful, that start to create their own phantasy and relinquish checks and measures, or morals? How is risk taking affected? Or learning? Performance? These are questions left open and that I have picked up in this inquiry.

Also of note: previous studies mainly apply or make assumptions about safety in teams, with a little around individuals and some organisational level. There is scope to understand safety (interacting with other variables) in families, communities, movements and other relational configurations of people.

[From evolutionary psychology: social emotions and group decision-making](#)

Where have the processes of feeling safe-enough evolved from? Why do we have these and how do they serve us? These are my natural science roots peeking through, a nod to empirical needs, and a personal belief in the power of evolutionary processes on all aspects of human existence, including relational behaviours.

Being an effective group (or tribe) was an essential pre-condition to survival around 300,000 years ago in the main hunter-gatherer, longest evolutionary stable period of human evolution. Being of-group, sociality, is a pre-requisite for survival (multiple authors cited in Tindale & Kamada, 2017). Research from evolutionary psychodynamics and evolutionary leadership (Van Vugt & Shalvey, 2008) indicates there are mechanisms that have evolved to support group function and performance. Moreover even though the *how* of surviving and the impacts of being 'other' are somewhat different in our modern world than the physical imperative of life on the plains, the research also suggests that these mechanisms are still 'at play' in groups today.

Firstly, there are mechanisms (processes) that support safety of the group from others (other groups, the world at large). For example, Abrams et al. (2015, in Tindale & Kamada, 2017) showed favouring 'our' group over others and rejecting 'outsiders' make groups more successful. Some studies purport these favouring-othering mechanisms are so engrained that there are physiological and neurological bases for these behaviours (Arrow, 2007; De Drue et al., 2010 in *ibid*).

Secondly, there are understood to be evolved processes that support safety of individuals-within-group from each other i.e. group coherence and cohesion. Perhaps the most powerful and widely acknowledged are the social emotions, transpersonal emotional currencies that affect our own emotional state through the feelings, thoughts etcetera of others (Halari & Parkinson, 2008), and which also are 'contagious' across groups, which help shape a whole group's emotional state. As you can imagine this contributes strongly to our sense of belonging, our sense of identity gained from the group (syncretic sociality, (Bleger 1977)). Whilst there are several theories around how and why collaboration strategies, including social emotions, evolved (Tomasello et al., 2012) and there is ongoing discussion on their categorisation, their role in sociality (setting and holding of social norms etc) is generally widely accepted (Halari et al, 2008).

6V

Social emotions are part of a suite of processes enabling social cognition, the ability to imagine other people's mental states and to interact. They are sometimes referred to as moral emotions as judgement is an essential facet (alongside perception and memory) and they form part of the idea of morality and moral decision-making (Schweders et al., 1997). Social emotions are understood to be part of relational functionality: they drive the mitigation of negative behaviours (and potentially the people behaving negatively); they reward positive behaviours and generally contribute to intra-group safety. For example, guilt, shame and embarrassment may have evolved to deter us from hurting someone or failing to repay them; and anger and contempt are very effective social emotions for punishing cheaters (Kerr & Levine, 2007).

Social emotions such as shame are extremely powerful. They are evolved to, and can, have significant impacts on group dynamics and functioning. It therefore seems reasonable to suggest that a key practice of leadership must involve working with the social emotions, perhaps helping the group become emotionally literate (being able to articulate the emotional currents they notice) and thus empowered to make more and different choices and actions.

In addition to the moral-social emotions aspect of psychodynamics and leadership studies show there may also be evolved decision-making mechanisms that reduce or reduce the impacts of intra-group dysfunction (Levine 2017; Laughlin, 2011). By group dysfunction I mean things such

as blind-spots, group-think, ‘we are good, we are unstoppable’ type phantasies resulting perhaps from complacency, over-confidence, a lack of criticality, an unwillingness or inability to challenge a majority, ‘bad’ (incorrect / unhelpful) or more dominant opinions. Tindale & Kameda’s (2017, p.676) meta-study suggests people have:

“evolved to solve problems associated with group life (Kameda, van Vugt, & Tindale, 2015). For both accuracy and acceptance, it appears that human groups evolved formal and informal decision-making procedures (e.g., quorum rules in consensus decisions) and built-in psycho-physiological algorithms (e.g., social influence in combined decisions) that took into account the collective preferences of the group”

So if we fail to work into psychodynamics, into the pre-conscious, tacit life of groups we may be failing to access evolved mechanisms that may help restore safe-enough. Conversely leadership that develops ways to work *with* these mechanisms may have advantage. Could it be that these mechanisms also play a part in keeping us alert-enough, problematized-enough to prevent complacency reaching ‘dangerous’ (to group survival) levels? It’s impossible to say within the scope of this study, but at least the models emerging from evolutionary psychodynamics do not appear to contradict or overtly challenge the prerogative for leadership practises in this realm.

Psychotherapy and psychodynamics

My entry into the idea of (inquiry into) ~~containment~~ came through the study and practice of facilitation in groups and through the fields of group psychodynamics and hence deserves some exploration. The spark that ignited my curiosity was the conspicuous recurrence of dualities, notions of opposing forces or processes which seemed to run consistently through much of the theoretical modelling, practice and observation of (group) cases in the psychological and psychotherapeutic work I have encountered. Whilst many of the works reviewed here and throughout this thesis present these various modalities as binaries (i.e. dualities emphasising their *either/or*) I have instead sought to take an *and/both* perspective, working in the in-between, *with(in)* the relations and tensions of these differently aspected forces or ideas. Attachment *and also* abstraction. Both Western *and* non-Western. Etcetera. In describing differences, of position, aspect or something else, the abstraction to and naming as duality offers the opportunity to perceive a larger whole, a continuum (itself an abstraction of a larger interconnected substance) and to think differently and have different choices about practise and theory. Thus using dualities to notice the interconnectedness, the relational space in-between is the seemingly paradoxical entry into the idea of ~~containment~~.

This *and/both* approach has become of the foundational approaches of this entire study and runs throughout all of the Sections.

Collapsing dualities into the pivot point of ‘enough’ may be the end point.

Donald Winnicott and attachment – abstraction

I have adopted and adapted paediatrician and psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott’s work on separation-attachment throughout this thesis, re-thinking separation as abstraction and focusing on the dynamic movement of abstracting and attaching, the verbs rather than the nouns. By abstracting I mean the de-personalising, zoom out towards ordering, differentiation and

structure. By attaching I mean the warmth-seeking, wholehearted drive for connectedness and belonging. These dynamic pushes and pulls seem emblematic of many of the dualities encountered in theories and practice. They resonate. They echo throughout the development of the problematized-enough abstracting, energising, innovating, away-from of ~~containment~~ and its parallel attaching, enmeshing, towards of safe-enough.

In Winnicott's (1958, 1965) world separation (abstraction)--attachment was a dynamic process occurring through childhood into adult life as the child alternately moves towards or away from the attachment to the nurturing parent and home and into independence and adulthood. The relevance of this process to the scientific inquiry was brought to life by Susan Leigh Star (2011) in her description of doing Constructivist Grounded Theory Methodology with the scientific community and noting the deleted work of doing research. She noticed scientists out in 'the field' almost apologetically balancing the abstracting intellectual language of species spotting 'real' research work ('adult *Felis concolor*') with a swift (attaching) emotional response ('oh, hey little guy').

Tim Ingold (2011) similarly uses this premise in his writing on names and how we use these to attach to, to locate humans (that's Ranjan from Sydney) and to abstract, to dis-locate non-humans (it's part of the *Taxus* genus). He notes how we place different values on the located and unlocated and how this influences our relations with these 'others'. As I explore in the 'Emptying Leadership' Section it is precisely this different valuing of the named actors (leaders, followers etc) and the *everything-else-of-leadership*, ('context, 'situation' etc) that I wish to challenge and to re-balance.

8V

Winnicott introduced the idea of transitional objects (1965) to describe things like a comfort blanket that, he suggested, reduced the anxiety of separation and also the smothering of over-attachment. Leigh Star (ibid) considers research codes to be 'transitional objects' attaching us to the experience of research and the abstraction to theory.

We might consider leadership as a form of transitional object, operating somewhere between the safe-attachment of group-belonging (the primitive group) and the drive to keep abstracting, problematizing and moving somewhere (potentially forward) by individuals, sub-groups and even the group itself as it innovates, ideates and critiques (the task group).

Two further ideas to bring from the Winnicott repertoire are those of the 'good enough' mother; and the word containment in its unadulterated un-scored form.

I have adopted the use of 'enough' as the key to doing the complex balancing act, the dance of both leadership and ~~containment~~. Where Winnicott and I differ is the attachment of 'enough' to a person, for example a leader-figure.

Containment (no funny line) is unpacked and explored below.

Containment (no funny line)

In Winnicott's world containment was 'a holding environment', specifically the conditions needed for successful psychotherapy (Iszatt-White & Ralphs, 2016) which in themselves substitute the 'holding' (literal and metaphorical) of the infant by the mother (1958, 1965). This represents the attachment, and safety of the world. In this ur-meaning the containing is done by

a more powerful actor for and on behalf of the other. In my adaption of containing *anyone* is able to instigate (and destroy) holding environments. That is, the doing of ~~containment~~ isn't an activity limited to a powerful, parent figure (anyone can do it for anyone else): containment is unshackled from power-over. The second adaption of containment to become ~~containment~~ is the inclusion of doing critical problematisation. Thus containment transforms from a static, bounded noun done by one person for others to a dynamic balancing dance of safe-enough, problematized-enough: a verb for all. Using Winnicott's terminology we might say that that ~~containment~~ is the optimised transitional object in practice: the practice of multiple good-enough 'mothers'.

Containment as holding environment is relatively widely used in organisational development as a safe space. It is generally created for employees experiencing negative emotions especially anxiety, by an heroic leader figure. Hawkins & Shoet (2012) used the metaphor of a bucket. Others (McKinsey, Cotter in Iszatt-White & Ralphs, 2016) inform us of some of the leadership actions required to provide containment for others, such as being able to reassure with calm and clarity. I do not doubt that researchers have observed these actions in some workplaces and noted their effect in building a sense of temporary refuge, a bucket. However, I would argue such practices are unsustainable and also undemocratic, grounded as they are in the notion of a benevolent leader-figure using their power-over the un-agentic employee. In my experience, buckets overflow, get leaks and require a causal power to fill them up. What I observe is that the actions Hawkins et al. prescribe for creating buckets are visible, simple acts that any person people can make, but only *if* they notice and judge the actions are needed, *if* they feel enabled, *if* they are capable etc. Doing ~~containment~~ requires more and *is* a more complex, blurrier, messier and more democratic dance than just the filling of buckets.

9v

My own introduction to containment came from the fields of group psychodynamics in outdoor experiential learning via the work of Martin Ringer (1999, 2002, 2003, 2017). Ringer described containment as "the boundaries around the group that enable it to conduct its business with a reasonable sense of security and without interference or harm" established through a shared understanding "that the group is purposeful, bounded and safe" (p.2, 1999). Ringer attributes the role of kick-starting the creation of containment to the facilitator or group leader. This role then transitions to that of group members as the group matures through 'linking', a process of creating connections within the group which, in effect, replaces the containment provided by the facilitator. In his earlier writing Ringer famously uses the metaphor of group moving from raw to cooked egg as the role of the facilitator (the shell) diminishes in establishing group cohesion.

In his world safety is a product of good-enough containment and 'effective linking'. Thus Ringer's intra-group linking (and also thereby exclusion of out-of-group) is the boundary creation, is the safety creation: it *is* the doing of containment, of holding. The two processes seem to collapse into each other. I see the collapsing and concomitant shifting of the locus of agency as *the becoming* of group, as a complex, dynamic own-entity ("group-in the mind", 1999, p.3), albeit as a dance of becoming-unbecoming rather than a linear process.

Ringer notes the limitations of the egg metaphor specifically the fixed, immotile nature of bonds in the 'cooked egg' compared with the dynamic process of linking in cohesive groups (1999). He

talks about the *quality* of linking and its contribution to safety, thus alludes, to but doesn't specifically name safety-from-each-other within group (1999, p.3)

He notes that shared understanding of purpose (why are we here) and psychological depth (also an aspect of purpose [what are we here for], of identity [who are we] and norms [how should we be]) are part of the construction of the container. These seem to be as much an aspect of linking as of problematisation. Without a clear and present purpose and depth, that the group gives (suspended) attention to (French & Simpson, 2014), shared understanding and cohesion fracture, and safety is negatively affected.

Expanding the complexity of forces at play in the life of groups as understood through decades of practice and critical thinking in group psychodynamics, outdoor experiential learning, psychotherapy and beyond, is beyond the scope of this study. However, this body of work forms the bedrock on which the idea of ~~containment~~ was conceived and informs my ongoing practice and exploration in the context of ~~doing containment~~ within leadership and leadership development.

In the following paragraphs I focus on the relation between such forces and our habit of expressing these forces in pairs, as dualities.

Dualities expanded

Psychotherapist Wilfred Bion's (1961) thesis of dualities was around the group itself. His thesis proposes a work group attending to the task at hand - an explicit visible group (or team perhaps) which is running alongside, usually in tension with the second, the basic assumption group. The basic assumption group attends to the emotional currencies, the primitive mental state, is mostly sub-conscious in operation and tremendously power full. Within this individuality may feel subsumed by the group. Bion (1961) posited that the three basic assumptions of the latter group ('recurrent emotional states') were dependency, flight-fight and pairing. Of these *dependency* concerns the security-safety of the group, which in Bion's view, necessitates turning to an individual (the 'leader') for protection. He believed each group has a leader: an operative leader (the therapist in his case) who keeps the work group on task; the leader of the basic assumption group on the other hand "embodies and expresses regressive, uncontrollable and negative drives" (Neri, 2006, p.34). This seems to be an easy re-working of the god-demon/ good cop-bad cop trope. It's a little too easy. However, the idea of there being tensions between different group and leader manifestations remains compelling. Neri continued the theme of dual groups re-working the basic assumption group to enfold Bleger's (1966) ideas of syncretic sociality: the evolved, felt, non-verbal connectivity, and sense of oneness between individuals that stabilises the group and provides a sense of familiarity and belonging. Neri claims shared experiences, shared rituals and routines, "the sharing of physiological rhythms, a common perception of space" (Neri, 2006, p.35) are all contributors to this shared identity group. Other authors assert that this emotive group is a type of *field* holding historical 'affective deposits' (Correale, 1991); a pool of transpersonal feelings, ideas and relationships (Baranger, 1961-2; Di Trapani et al., 1994) and 'depository' for various (psychotic) aspects of personality (Bleger, 1966). This less visible group certainly seems to hold a great deal of power, of potency that can either enable or utterly disable interpersonal relations, groups and teams. It is a place (or entity) that requires the attention and skills of group members, of leadership.

Neri believes that leadership of this group (within setting, field, atmosphere etc) is provided also in the emotional and spiritual domains through a figure he calls the *genius loci*. Neri's duality is less about good-bad, but rather about drivers towards order (by the work group leader) and towards harmony, identity – the group's essence (*genius loci*). The *genius loci*'s actions may feel disruptive, creative, or chaotic whereas the operative leader works in the thinking domains of ordering and productivity. In his 1998 book, *Group*, Neri proposes that the two leaderships cannot be held by the same person. I disagree and believe it is possible for one person to hold both roles and also to have multiple actors taking on and letting go of these roles across the group membrane. In my opinion it is the *movement*, the shuffling between roles, we might say the *dynamic modality*, that enables ~~containment~~ and other affective-intellectual / tacit –explicit leadership practices which nurture both the spirit-purpose-identity of group and it's performance and sense of progress. Who holds these roles and for how long is less important than the interplay between them. Neri himself notes that certain functions of therapy groups e.g. localisation (Foulkes, 1975) are likely a result of the "synergy between operative leader and *genius loci*" [my emphasis] (Neri, 2006, p.43).

So by attending to psychological safety (emotional -power flows) *and also* performance (task) the group's needs are met and it is also able to function.

Flinn (2019) brings the duality of roles directly into the leadership development sphere deploying ideas from psychotherapy (Behr & Hearst, 2005) of dynamic administration, the role of creating and managing the group. The dynamic administration functions of time-keeping, furniture and space management seek to add order. This might be interpreted as working with the task group, for group performance. However, Flinn notes that the impact of effective dynamic administration is both on the group's functionality (more people arriving on time; knowing the rules enables people "to more readily engage with the primary task"(p.161)) and also on the affective states by "containing some of the anxiety of not knowing" (p.161) and by "allowing me to relax and focus on what might not be being said" (p.159). Perhaps this is a collapsing of the duality, the forming of synergy between task and affective functions and the balancing of both groups' needs through doing ~~containment~~?

11V

From practice: as reflexive researcher

Less the *voices* of others, but the presence, the being with, within the atmosphere with others, these notes are also important contributors to the community of knowing. Embodied haptic, smelt, sensed, less easy to articulate or granularise the following notes reflect my experience of the practice of others-in-~~containment~~ through their doing and being and also from the narration of the practice (indirect experience). In this section I put my self in the research adding my "personal experience as a legitimate source of knowledge" (Etherington, 2004, p.19.).

Yogic noticings: balancing~ dance the line ~

Kathmandu, a sunny room, muslin drapes billowing in light breeze, the shouty streets of central Thamel below. Early morning. A room of aspirant and real yoga practitioners with Teacher at the front and centre.

Notes. January 17th 2017

“Teacher: Firm, positive, intentional voice – soft but strong. Gentle but assertive body movements. Direct. Speaking directly to group (‘you’) moving to ‘we’

Talked about commitment generically (New Year’s resolutions), use of Milton language (as we all know) to shift to reinforced message (half commitment leads to half actions)

Talked about intention and intentionality generically then shifted to ‘call to action’ to notice and define our intention for this moment and this one hour

About making space (clearing outside noise) and fully occupying the space

Mindfulness directions

Option to choose to stop, to protect self at any point – given as an equally valid path – not as ‘weak’ choice

Throughout: *Found ways to remind of intentions – to bring focus back into the moment and the purposefulness of the moment*

In closing: *provided a transition / permission (?) to move from the present moment and allow the rest of life / the rest of world back into consciousness*

Reflections: *Prior to the session – remember the teacher as having been ‘good’, positive experiences in her classes. Expectation therefore is of feeling ‘good’, challenged but not over stretched...*

12V

Concern a little for others in room – sometimes the yoga Nazis are sneaky

Concern for own ability – aware of physical and emotional problems

But feeling settled nonetheless – know where things are, what the system is, feel less likely to feel stupid and clumsy. Feel able to focus – relaxed and reassured – able to let go enough (no tears) – able to focus without resistance”

The teacher provided safety through explicit rule setting, boundaries, intentions – created a structured space, wove the tentacles of her expertise, pragmatic authority through the room, the people. We were neither group nor not-group. Safe-enough from each other, from our inner negativities and voices, from the screeching world outside with all of its stuff. Connected through the atmosphere, through the sprays of sunlight, through the ahhh-oh-uh-cow noises of bodies moving in and out of tension, the diffused shape, colours, textures on the edge of vision. We are together and not-together. Neither alone nor not-alone. We have woven our syncretic sociality, our safe-enough space, our sense of belonging.

“This type of bond has no need for words and would actually be disturbed if anyone spoke. In other words, although there is no interaction and the two do not look at or speak to each other, there is still a syncretic sociality. While a description of their behavior suggests they are isolated, the two are in fact in a state of fusion and not of separation.”

(Bleger, 1966, pp. 68–9) describing a mother and son in one and then two rooms.

Notes, 2017 continued: Directed, led. Moved through assertively, demanding our attention, paying attention, noticing-differently, considering-differently, moving into our inner world, into our physique, physical world, feeling the hardness of the floor against a hip, adjusting, re-placing. Alive-enough, confident-enough. We are wakeful and not-wakeful, awake to our wakefulness. Balancing.

Teacher led. I-we followed. Led. Teacher followed. I-we-T-led. I-we-T-followed. Stepped up-stepped back. Danced the dance separately-together back and forth along the fuzzy line called 'enough'.

Safe-enough, connected-enough, alive-enough: this was my experience that bright sunny morning. Was this an example of containment?

Ba 場

I was introduced to the Japanese concept of Ba 場 by educational specialist, Prof Inoue, at a talk one winter evening in Lancaster (Inoue, 2017). He talked about *ba* as a 'key arena for knowledge and practice creation' in schools across his native Japan. The closest translation of the meaning / essence of *ba* is 'intersubjective space'. There's no equivalent in Western languages. In schools the practice of *ba* is teachers getting together at the end of each teaching day, reflecting on the teaching-learning experiences and sharing personal meaning making to create group meaning and new knowledge. The purpose of the sessions is explicit, broad and shared (the intention is to support personal and social development in young people). The group is informal, power-dynamics are not hierarchical. There is structure in the form of timings and space. The (new) knowledge is embodied through both brains – the mind and the intestines.

The process and practice of *ba* in this setting seems very much a possible practice of doing containment: the teachers intentionally co-create a safe-enough space for problematisation and critique of what could, under other conditions, create feelings of personal vulnerability and exposure. It foregrounds doing containment as theory-in-use, albeit in educational context of leadership development.

Important concepts Inoue alerted us to are:

Jikkan 実感 gut feeling - this is fully emphasised in Japanese education

This legitimised and systemic acknowledgment of embodied knowing was a burst of oxygen to the embers of my own gut-feeling that doing containment requires attention and validation of sensing, sense-making and breaking beyond the intellectual.

Takumi 匠 artisans – skills backed by or founded in deep wisdom and insights about life,; skills are generationally held i.e. have a form of mutable heritability

Skills and personhood are inseparable

Omoi 思い a deep seated feeling integrated with your thinking,
intention and passion that penetrates your mind;
a driving force for practice development

Takumi and *omoi* have resonance in Western philosophy (for example Tim Ingold's (2011) descriptions of skill and the skilled worker, the artisan) and in leadership development (Harrison's metaphors of the skilled musician improvising together but separately to create jazz, (2016)). All of these instances build on years of practise, of effort and experience. In the West we limit our looking back to the personhood, usually to adulthood however, akin to *takumi*, Mahayana Buddhist practice acknowledges the echoes of previous generations' craft and the dependence of the actions, skills and drivers of a person on those *karmic foundations*. Dependent origination, the idea of causality and interconnectedness is how the world is according to the Buddha's teachings. The ideas of attachment stem from the ignorance that things have essence, or actual form that can be grasped and that we crave and that this is brought about through contact, through sensing. If we relinquish these notions of permanence and separation, the intersubjective safe-enough, alive-enough space of containing of *ba*, also becomes possible to hold temporarily, until it too eventually also collapses. This dependent origination is elucidated in the twelve limbs (see Figure V1 and further exploration in Position and Place.)

An 'essential of the Buddha's teaching and enlightenment' (Komito, 1987), the **twelve limbs of dependent origination**. Each limb is dependent on the others but not caused by them:

1. Ignorance (depends on death and vice versa)
2. Karmic foundations (traces left by previous actions which are distorted by ignorance)
3. Consciousness (depends on distortions caused through previous actions – traces in memory)
4. Name and form – the psychophysical entity: name = feelings, perception, the immaterial aspects of being; personhood
5. Six sense fields – the gateways of the eye, nose etc including mind
6. Contact – coming together of an object of perception, a sense organ and a consciousness
7. Feelings – pleasant or painful or neither pleasant nor painful; there are 6 classes all dependent on their sense organ
8. Craving – arises in dependence on contact i.e. crave for feeling (and grasp to hold on to it)
9. Grasping
10. Becoming – the cycle of grasping after the transitory
11. Birth – depends upon continuing to grasp after life, after "I", but I is transitory so birth is in dependence of becoming
12. Death, grief and suffering

My interpretation based on Komito's transcription of Nagarjuna (1987)

Figure V1: the twelve limbs of dependent origination

If the practice of developing and using intersubjective space has such centrality in a highly structured, regulated sector such as education, presumably with recognisable impacts, there is precedent for at least exploring similar practices in other scenarios. How much is encultured? How much is universal? Can I also practice *ba*? Can anyone?

How do I learn from *ba* for my own practice and for this inquiry?

The intentionality, the deliberate and consistent setting up of *ba*, of stepping into hard questions in a safe space spurred new thoughts: doing ~~containment~~, creating, maintaining and dissolving pre-conditions for doing leadership, requires both action and reflexive inaction, explicit and tacit, positive and negative capabilities (Simpson et al., 2002). Prior to this I realise I had been heavily weighting the quietly invisible, tacit processes of ~~containment~~. Whilst ~~containment~~ itself was likely still a pre-conscious realm the doing of it, the bit for leadership, of course required explicit, intentional, structured actions – to communicate and formalise doing ~~containment~~ as the inter-personal work and responsibility of everyone, of the group.

As with the practice of *ba* in schools, formalising, naming, structuring and locating doing ~~containment~~ democratises and liberates it. It also makes the paying attention to challenge, problems or opportunities inescapable, gives it imminence and proximity.

Reflections

The knowledge of these voices and practices in the world has both raised my confidence, my sense of it's OK to keep going (safety) and raised reflexive, defracted questions. They heighten and extend the moves of the dancer along the line of 'enough'...

Writing this section has been disturbing, uncomfortable and difficult beyond the obvious difficulties of academic writing.

I struggled with the paradoxical position of untangling multiple, varied and various influences that I've spent the last twenty plus years extruding, absorbing, adapting and adopting into my praxis, and the last four stimulating and soaking into my critical understanding. This felt like a particularising of an (incomplete) whole; an act of academic destructivist deconstructivism. And yet I also sincerely believe in acknowledging the influences instrumental in shaping my being, doing and knowing. Attaching the voice to the words, the experience to the influencer has been tricky and also a necessary rigour.

I've felt ~~uncontained~~: lost in the fog of uncertainty of where, whom, why and how; overpowered and overwhelmed by the sheer scale and volume of the luminaries' published words; stuck, apathetic and incapacitated.

This struggle happened in the first phases of the time of corona, adrift and uncertain in a foreign land.

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17V

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The End Point

The Point

The End

End Point



All the way throughout this PhD thing I've been struggling with the 'containment is' question. It's been variously: a verb, a theory-in-use; a theoretical framework; a theory-in practice; a dance; a practice; an art; a craft. It's problematic - a very slippery fish indeed.

1E

In much the same way as I managed with leadership (See Emptying Section) I've been asking the wrong question: the question of more usefulness is not "what is it?" but "what is it 'for'?"

Asking 'what is it?' firstly requires 'it' to be a discrete entity. This is fine for linguistic purposes, for ease of representation and reference, but deeply problematic as an onto-epistemo-philosophical premise. It has no essence nor does it not have essence. And if it doesn't have essence it cannot have causal powers: magical abilities to *do* something to us/ me/ you / the world. It does not have agency until I-in-relation-with-it asks 'what could ~~containment~~ be for?'; 'what is it for here and now?'; 'what do I want it to be for?'; 'what do I want it to do?'. The question is pushed back to the asker, demanding our agency.

Within the Case Studies and Voices Sections I have struggled with the idea ~~containment~~ might be used as a diagnostic, and railed against this ('a positivist trap, holding power in the diagnoser and not the diagnosee' I thought). A quote attributed to Kenneth Pike (in Tannen (2002)) speaking on the warring conflict in research(ers) reigned back my ego: "Most scholars are wrong not in what they assert, but in what they deny" (p.1661). In denying the application of ~~containment~~ as diagnostic I was firstly, suffering from too-much attachment and secondly, denying that it could be '*for*' many things. And that the selecting of the '*for*' was in the relation with the chooser in their situation, applying their mind (brain-body-environment). Not for me in a God-position to dictate.

Attachment, and its interconnected counter, abstraction, have formed major dynamic forces-choices throughout this inquiry: I have been perceiving and trying to understand their role in doing leadership (the attachment we have to romantic ideals of either heroes or

collectives--the abstraction into endless theories that detach us from the bloody-beautiful hard-beans of being in-relation); in doing research (my codes, my theories, my way -- assuming the on-high God position); in the place-position of me in the inquiry (the places and people I attach to -- the painful liberation of detaching and the constant dance along the boundaries of in--out; of belonging--other and what this affords (and also impacts) on me-as-researcher); in the Case Studies (intractable attachments to power-friends-toxic-relationships-numbers-ideals -- abstraction of performance, values) and in doing development (attachment to outcomes -- abstraction to check-lists).

The attachment--abstraction relation is just one set of many balancing duos liberally smattered throughout this inquiry. Other examples of two poles that tug differently at each other here include: structure--spirit¹; diversity--group think; distant--overwhelm²; critical--comfort; conflict--consensus; with--lack; and perhaps most noticeable in their positive absence, lead--follow. These doublets are important here *not* for their relative positions, but for their positional *relations* (to each other, to the object of attention, the actors, the everything-else-of-world). Yin-yang like, the presence of one instinctively implies and brings forth the other, or more accurately the *question* of the other.

'Is there structure *and also* spirit?' 'If process, then *also* outcome?' 'Consensus means no conflict?'

Lead (*and also* follow) Group think (*and also* diversity)

 2E

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

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

¹ Following psychodynamics and the dual Dynamic Administrator – Genius Loci roles

² Of challenge, problems - proximity

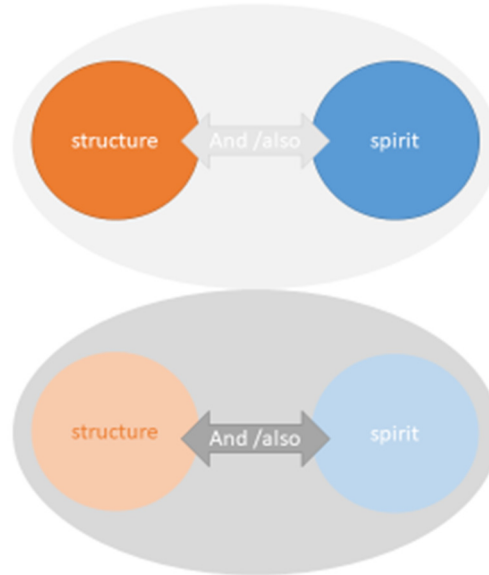


Figure E1 –using dualities for rebalancing, refocusing on the relation, and the ‘everything else’

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

3E

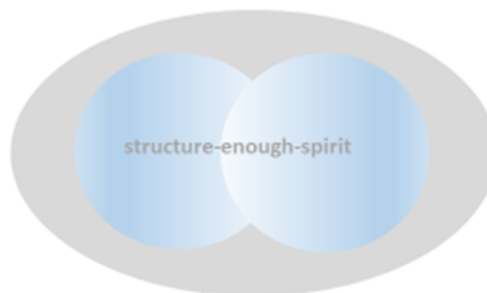


Figure E2 collapsing dualities – interconnected, dependent origination

Structure becomes structure-enough; spirit becomes spirit-enough and in so doing they gain agency, they gain the potency to *do something*, to be in service of: the obvious question that follows any ‘enough’ is ‘enough for *what?*’

So if we turn away from considering dualities as representations ‘*of*’ (the linguistic sense,) and instead choose to cognise with the non-representational, the agentic ‘*for*’, these dual-positional-relations can be put to use to aid inquiry, noticing, calibrating, choosing, action – they become a tool *for* doing leadership and its development. Hence, the next addition this inquiry brings to practice, to practise, is re-focusing and dissolving dualities and using these as a tool for exploring our ongoing re-positioning and re-relating with the subject-object-stuff of world, for ~~containment~~.

Exploring relations with ~~containment~~

The two words I have been using to conceptualise ~~containment~~, safe and problematize, are, as thought, in relation with one another, however in a rather disorderly conditional relation. The

Case Studies would indicate the relation is more complex, much messier than the metaphorical seesaw which I had first imagined them onto. Unsurprisingly one does not have causal powers over the other. The studies indicate that when we act to increase sense of safety there is *opportunity* to problematise more or better. It is possible, but it is not automatic. A safety spring does not release criticality; a switch does not flick to 'on'. However it is possible even in situations of systemic un-safety to create bubbles of sporadic safe-enough conditions for initiating problematizing. And then problematizing *can* hold the problematisers temporarily together-enough to either override our fears of each other and-or of an external for the moment of co-critiquing. We saw these bubbles of safe-enough, critical exploration to some degree in CoAA, and also in Team GROW and Toxic Team. The people in these places were briefly prepared to step in to actively become agents for safety, to give collaborative criticality a go: to try the ~~containment~~ dance.

What changed to enable this shift in behaviours? Firstly, the positional leaders made a decision and took action to approach the situation differently. Secondly, in two cases (CoAA, Toxic Team) they changed the mix by introducing an agentic 'other' (in this case, me, as researcher) lending their authority to this figure who was otherwise largely unknown to the group and thus unhindered by (unhelpful) assumptions. The art of introducing was critical – an invitation to do-with rather than a done-to; to enter into relation-with. There was trust-enough to try. The dynamic shake-up was furthered by a shift in Place (physical place for the Toxic Team, 'atmosphere' for CoAA), in Practice (how they engaged e.g. speaking to a third space for Team GROW; in movement based storytelling for Toxic Team); in an alluring and meaningful Purpose; and a change in Pace cracked unhelpful Processes (habits). It is possible to break the habits of negative behaviours and improve sense of safety-enough, to initiate problematisation which in turn generates further safety-enough to continue. This could perhaps be viewed as a form of Problem Based Learning (PBL) (Marra et al 2013) where the Problem participants tacitly seek to address is group psychodynamics and safety, facilitated by leadership.

4E

The question is 'how did they come to seek?'

Choosing causal relations with: Applying ~~containment~~ ideas as a tool for understanding in the first two Case Studies and as a tool for intervention in the second two has for me-as-researcher, been insightful and useful. For the participants it too seems to have had positive impacts, enabling leaders to untether from their 'stuck' (relation) with their teams and similarly for all participants to at least briefly had a respite, a taste or model of and for different and better ways of being.

It is of course entirely possible that *any* intervention would have stimulated similar impacts – that just being part of doing research was enough to do development. Perhaps the key is in the *active choices* made by all parties to use the research intervention *for* development, for better. chose a causal relation (as opposed to an entertaining, adversarial or any other relation) and then actively enacted this for and with each other-researcher-world. I suggest that the 'how' of the interventions used (i.e. the differentially propositioned and enacted Ps) to some extent reinforced these initial choices *for*. They enabled, stabilised and enhanced further enactment and exploration, providing reaffirming feelings thus validating the initial 'step into' decision to seek. The decision-intervention became a semi-virtuous circle.

A note: Reading this paragraph you could choose to view this inquiry as a type of action research. You may also read this study as a participatory research adventure. Others may prefer to see this as the autoethnographic study of the researchers' journey. All these perspectives have merit, these assertions could be justified within your particular community and they are also dependent on you and your community's relation to each other and the assertion. They are a function of the degree of attachment you hold. They may be helpful. And not helpful.

The complexity of the Study situations, particularly when placed within and of the wider organisational-socio-political worlds, requires I would posit, further and more ~~containment~~ 'bubble' creation. Further ~~containment~~ bubbles may act as ongoing nudges to: build sustainable safe-enough, problematised-enough practise - to enable ~~containment~~ to become 'sticky'. Further practice of ~~containment~~ may gain enough momentum to challenge and evolve the structures and systems within which the 'bubbles' are held.

The questions I have now are 'is it possible to do this more, to increase and sustain ~~containment~~?' 'Can doing ~~containment~~ be contagious?' 'How do we foster lapses, afford rest from the attentive, dance and discomfort of doing ~~containment~~ and also shimmy back in again? Do we even need to rest or is ~~containing~~ restorative?'

And if all the above, 'what is the role of Place and the other Ps in doing, cultivating and also being able to unhitch from ~~containment~~?

What are the P lenses for?

5E

If doing ~~containment~~ is about supporting increase and decrease in sense of safety and activating and de-activating problematisation

And doing development is best supported with tools, guides and other structures that we have actively chosen to be in conditional relation with

Then leadership (whoever is doing the supporting of the ~~containment~~ processes-practices) would benefit from tools, guides and other structures to support them.

This is what I suggest the P lenses *for*: supporting the practice of problematisation.

P lenses – where are they now?

Throughout this inquiry the P lens idea and 'set' has grown, reduced, shifted and changed: I have added the P of Pace (in Study 4); Place has shifted further in to the light and Problematisation has become both a P and a purpose (for) of the lenses.

The whole set can be a tool for problematizing, thus a tool for doing leadership and for doing its development. The use of, determining the 'for' is up to the inquirer, the questioner and their own position at that space-time. [Health warning: problematisation could potentially become an endless recursion – this, also, is a choice.]

My choice is not focus on any one P in particular, but to focus on the dancing line between, towards, away from each of the Ps: the line of seeking 'enough'. I choose the ongoing dance of balancing-re-balancing as the doing of ~~containment~~, as the doing of leadership. The 'enough'.

I choose to explore the relations of leadership *with* the inherent emptiness of the Ps. This is the practice I choose to practise.

On Practise: To that end, perhaps the lenses need one final (for now) P: practise (with an s), the act of honing ones' skill and craft (in problematizing, in doing leadership). If we accept the premise of knowledge-as-practise (after Nagarjuna), then this is thesis-as-practise. As noted previously, Joe Raelin and others (2018) assert leadership-as-practice. If leadership needs an 'as' (and I am not sure it necessarily does) then I propose it is PractiSe with an S.

Leadership as verb: the doing, the discipline, the consistency of building ones crafts and most of building the practice of choosing practises and practices wisely. *For* using all the 'e's of cognition. And *for* avoiding 'magical thinking' (see below).

On supporting the development of safety, of safe-enough

As we have seen, there is a relatively large industry and body of work dedicated to supporting the development of psychological safety in groups and in organisations³.

So what does this inquiry add, if anything?

Firstly, the re-assertion that paying mindful attention to and actively seeking to calibrate and optimise the sense of safety of people-together is a valuable practice for (all) those people-together-in-leadership. It is not the work of the few, but the many, to keep the thicket dense-enough with relational tendrils. It is the work of the many to ensure those tendrils are not sustained by toxicity, unwholesome attachment or other responses to lack of safety. It's a re-assertion that safety is an ephemeral, syncretic sensation that is as much of-place, of-the-echoes-of-what-came-before, of-the-physicality, of-the-atmosphere and medium of group-place, as it is of the actors. Continuous re-balancing for safe-enough is as much about the 'where' as the 'who' in both 'what' we notice and what we choose to adjust.

Secondly, the act of problematizing together, can itself contribute to improving and strengthening intra-group relations and hence degrees of safety.

Thirdly, re-emphasising attention to the balancing of structuring-order-seeking and freedom-spirit-seeking dimensions of both in-group dynamics and in our practising of group leadership. Holding an ever present attention to structure-enough, rules-enough in order to locate us, to clarify position and place by what it is and what it is not (where the edges are) can provide a sense of identity and protection. The structuring aspect must be balanced with attention to freedom-enough, autonomy-enough and spirit-enough in order to explore on *our* terms and to step-up and step-into being fully present and empowered.

On safety and speaking-up: a correlation noted in many previous studies (e.g. Bienefeld & Grote, 2014; Nembhard & Edmundson, 2011; Holland et al., 2011; Newman et al., 2017). In CoAA, a place where lack of safety, where fear was palpable much of the time, people were unafraid to speak-up. In fact, speaking up *in spite of* the fear and risk, in order to generate visibility was a move to be rewarded and applauded, a heroic gambit that may eventually bring a 'hand of God' moment i.e. be career changing. The *very lack* of safety made speaking up

³ Google generated 225,000, 000 responses to 'how to generate psychological safety in the workplace'

desirable. Conversely, in CoBB where diversity was ostensibly welcomed and people felt often overly comfortable and too-safe, speaking-up was under-played. It may be that people had lost motivation, simply couldn't be bothered or didn't want to rock the very comfortable boat. The 'why' is as yet unknown, but the 'what', the lack of voice, was apparent, as were the impacts of speaking-up or not.

There is therefore an opportunity for further research to explore the relations between 'sense of safety' and speaking-up. I suspect 'enough' might be part of the critical inquiries.

All the above points on 'safety' can and I believe should be held up to scrutiny – be problematised. I notice power, practice, practise, place etc are themes and therefore suggest directing the P lenses to explore safety and safe-enough.

The P lenses can also be a tool 'for' doing safety.

So what is ~~containment~~ for?

From this inquiry, at this point in time and place, the '*for*' I choose (and that I recommend via the justifications raised throughout this paper) is for waking up and staying awakened. Cognising ~~containment~~ as a tool used as a reminder *for* noticing, staying ever present and alert; *for* choosing and acting and reflexing. Deploying ~~containment~~ is *for* remembering to cognisantly wrap reflexion around all of these verbs: reflexion-in-noticing; reflexion-in-choosing; reflexion-in-acting and, without disappearing into a very large rabbit hole, reflexion-in-reflexion. It is *for* the discipline not to disappear into the "magical thinking" (Little, 2019) of ascribing 'causal powers' to things such as leadership, leadership development, to society even, but to retain the locus of agency in the self-in-relation to these concepts. There is no magician causing the lights to come on, merely conditional relations.

7E

To give leadership causal powers over followership, those folk "wholly dependent on the supervenience of [...] *hyperagents*" (Little, *ibid*) demotes the non-leaders to role of mutable, infantilized and willingly oppressed.

To give 'leadership development' causal powers over wanna-be-(better)-leadership imagines the developpee to contain a homunculus leader within, that can be released through the magical 'switching on' by the developer (indeed, the marketing of some development programmes claims to do exactly this (e.g. IMD [Business School](#))). It imagines both have essence and one essence has power that the other does not. It demotes the leader(ship) to followership.

To give 'society' causal powers over me, over you, as I have discussed earlier invoking Foucault (social control), Habermas (consensus-seeking) and others also implies society is a 'thing' with both essence and power, a power which I do not.

Giving causal powers to others is an easy slip to make and perhaps makes life easier. If the causal power lays in something else or someone else it removes some, perhaps all, responsibility for that thing from me. It also provides a sense of structure and adds certainty when we judge things to be going well – when we have trust in these 'social imaginaries' (Little, *ibid*). And, of course, something or someone to blame when we judge things to be going badly – when we lose trust. Gemmill and Oakley (1992) described such false attribution of causal power to leadership as a sort of 'social pathology'. They drew on Jung's work to claim leadership and other fantasies

“perform a psycho-social function...[] they answer a need for immanence, intelligibility and agency in a world otherwise disappointing, incomprehensibly complex and directionless” (Little, *ibid*, p.3)

I initially made the same slip myself in seeking direction, certainty and permission to proceed ‘as a researcher’ from the imagined leaderful voices of Charmaz, Leigh-Star and the Glaser-Strauss combo of the various Grounded Theory Methodologies. I assumed, to some degree, that the causal power of Constructivist Grounded Theory Methodology (CGTM) would somehow ‘flick on’ the researcher switch in me. It took a while to feel safe-enough and confident-enough to raise my critical voice and step up, step into and take on the research methodology, the approach designed in-relation-with place and the people of that place. It took a while to re-envision CGTM as a model ‘for’ enabling research rather than ‘of’ doing research, to re-model my relation with it.

~~Containment~~ and consensus

It seems in our current place in the modernity many of us have a preference for placing agency with ‘the other’. For example: “it made me feel”; “the news made me anxious” and from faculty on Leadership Development Programmes: “the university wants”. Who is the university if not its people? Who is in charge of my feelings if not me? It becomes difficult to retain difference in feeling, in action, in voice when society / leadership / some ‘other’ is perceived as ‘at cause’, rendering us helpless to feel, do or think differently. I would suggest we are in the midst of a wider malaise where there is little tolerance or space for difference of opinion *and also* to have acceptance and belonging. If you want to be with us, keep consolidating and deepening the group-think. To have an opinion on any issue that is not with us is to be ‘on the other side’ and therefore to be shamed, outed. The opinion may be perceived to challenge social justice and thus commit a double-crime. In recent times we have seen these divides escalate and entrench (e.g. Black Lives Matter, BREXIT, masks on—off) and increasingly large moral cudgels used by government and movements alike to drive us into consensus. Why might this be? It could be a deepening seeking of security, of sense of safety in a world made ever more frightening, uncertain and unstable, at least in our narratives, if not in actuality. It seems the consensus project has tipped too far into too-safe (when within) and in doing so actually heightened the un-addressed, underling fear of other and othering. Too safe is not safe-enough.

Within the great wash of consensus, there is much unvoiced difference and differences. I suggest we need a space to acknowledge, express and engage with these. Expressing *and also* engaging with difference requires confidence-enough to step into our own agency, feeling safe-enough and critical-enough to speak up, stand up and act. And also to listen to, to hear and speak with others with different ideas and opinions too. The Swedish Democratic Party of yesteryear were, I would say, right to politick with ‘Secure People Dare’ (Nuder, 2012). The daring required today is to dialogue with, to step into rather than hector at a distance, and to critique (seek conflict) that is “recurrent and respectful rather than violent and destructive” (Machin, 2019). Perhaps ~~containment~~ may serve more widely as a tool *for* personal, group and societal re-balancing?

Developing ~~containment~~

Drawing on development practises from outside the Western paradigm, beyond the hegemonic modernity project, has prompted exploration of the locus of agency – the ‘where’ we ascribe causal powers to. In both the slivers of Buddhist and Hindu development practices I’ve touched on there seems a common thread of consistency, disciplined regularity and acceptance of doing the work oneself, quietly on the inside – with help, with support and guidance – but the doing of development is down to self-within-the-mesh; self being interconnected with and interdependent on all other living and non-living beings of world(s). In contrast, it seems inherent to our individualist, rule-bound societal structures of the West that we understand ourselves as disconnected, as unique entities and, in the smaller frame of leadership development, largely without causal powers, waiting to ‘be developed’. The plethora of programmes, trainings and other structures offer to do this for us. I wonder if sometimes the very act of signing up de-agentices us, we place ourselves in the ‘feed me’ position (and then reinforce this transaction with payment).

Perhaps there is an opportunity is to offer a ‘foundational’ programme⁴: a training in how to choose, how to use, to purpose (and then to let go of) training programmes, gurus, books and the day-to-day experiences of living and being, in service of developing our leadership – to make visible and useful dependent origination? Specifically, with regard to ‘pre-purposed’ leadership development ‘stuff’ we may need to work harder to create our ‘for’ for these tools, to establish our own causal relations. Hence a foundational practise may be that of critical, ‘recurrent and respectful’ dialogue with the leadership stuffs’ designers, purveyors and fellow users to create place-space for our own purposing alongside theirs. By generating conflict-enough we may even find consensus-enough to evolve development practices and this ‘stuff’ and thus to evolve knowledge-as-practise.

Perhaps some key foundations are in learning how to practise, to re-imagine longer timelines, to re-focus, to use ‘enough’ and also ‘and also’? To keep shifting positions, tether-untether, avoid ossification under assumptions? Practising the dance? Perhaps this is a programme on doing ~~containment~~?

At the heart is the idea of practising exploring, of curious seeking: whether this is in critical questioning, critiquing, or by actively staying in ‘the centre’ and ‘coming to know’:

“I very seldom ask questions. I find more answers come when just sitting into this. I have passed through all the chakras asking many questions and now knowledge comes readily.[...] Actually I am just staying in the centre, staying in the centre is key.” (Neupane, 2020)

Figure E3: a Hindu perspective on exploring without moving

Questions, questions

At the Start Point I noted several areas that I hoped this inquiry could contribute to and posed some questions to explore. So where are these questions now?

⁴ Programme seems deeply problematic as a word with its inferences of commercialised, politicised agenda, but I fail to find anything more appropriate here

The first question was to understand whether doing ~~containment~~ is something that happens, or could be described as happening in the world beyond writing and thinking. And if so, is it useful? Within the Studies of this inquiry, my answer is yes to both.

Does it help us do leadership better? Yes, to some extent in the situations in GROW and in the Toxic Team.

Does it help us do developing leadership better? This is yet to be seen beyond the examination of my own practice. Is there enough here for other practitioners to pick up and try? I hope so given the reflections on doing development around critical exploring on models 'for' and specifically an invitation to use the P lenses 'for' doing problematisation, for doing development.

Reflexion: now, coming towards the end this morning I liberated the itchy-scratchy tussle with the remaining words headed out into the dense freezing fog, pedalling ideas around, seeking release with the release of movement and energy. There have been many moments of fog in this journey, some terrifying in the detachment, the sense of loss, of being lost and uncertain, not confident-enough. Some fog has been a joyful escape, a quietening of senses, of the overwhelming voices of the world-in-turmoil.

What matters

In the Start Point I offered some thoughts on what mattered: why this inquiry mattered to me; why, of all the leadership development possible inquiries, ~~containment~~ mattered; why locating this in Nepal mattered; why position matters and more.

10E

What matters now? All that I Started with, and more. More is mostly around the importance of Place in doing development, in doing leadership. The PhD journey has revealed this more than any other aspect. The changing world has exacerbated this.

Place and the pandemic: What the pandemic has done for 'what matters' in this inquiry, is, like a great deal of the other more profound impacts, is to scrape away all and any superficial nonsense, make-believe and whimsies to reveal the awkward, the uncomfortable and the now unavoidable. The loss of Place in our group and leaderful meetings in the flattened online space has been for me, dramatic and damaging. I've been noticing the attrition of and adaptations we try to make to existing relationships and the clumsy, hard-to-grasp atmospheres of the new. This has become a differently dimensioned struggle to work with safe-enough, to let go-enough and trust-enough, to stay alert-enough, to reveal-enough, to speak-enough, hear-enough with our antennae muffled and voice mute. An ache has replaced place for so many. For others loss of convened Place, not having to physically, verbally jostle on others' territories has perhaps provided sanctuary. How do we re-balance, do the dance of 'enough' in this placeless space? Is it liminal or just empty? The placeless space is here to stay, at least for a while. Re-calibrating and learning how to do ~~containment~~ here matters.

Place for critical dialogue: Place (and concomitant Practices) that support critique, allow for and encourage opinions that may not match the consensus; places that bring partial voices from different positions. This matters.

Personal place: on a personal note learning to stay in one Place without overwhelm; retaining criticality, staying alert and attentive without movement; practising self-~~containment~~ to develop

practices of leadership and its development. Learning that I do need and value having a place – painful lessons bringing new choices.

The academy as Place: I've found nuggets of brilliance, of challenge and of wonder within some of the texts from and conversations with the academic world. And yet my overriding sense is that people in academia suffer the academic strictures – that academic places suffocate more than they support. The tendrils of the academic thickets seemed thickened, inflexible and often unwholesome in their interconnectedness. I've felt confusion at the disdainful reproaches for looking to other ways of knowing and being; the shutdowns to my critical questions on 'why' is it this way, and how this works etc. I'm left wondering if the consensus project has permeated the ivory towers. If those trapped within feel unsafe in their too-safe world.

Still, I feel a sense of loss as my very flimsy connection to the raw, hard, process and practice of the inquiry comes to a close.

The academy matters too. Or at least the idea of the academy matters. Perhaps it needs to re-establish place.

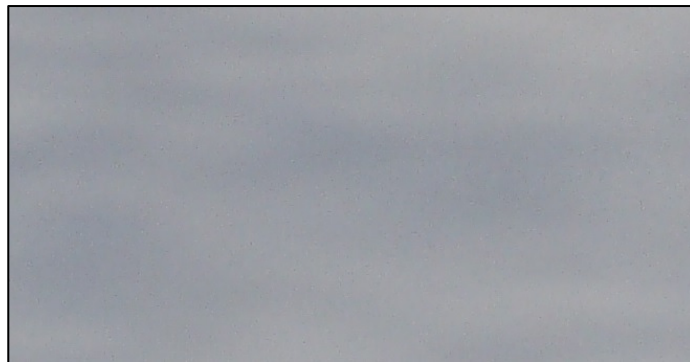
Final words

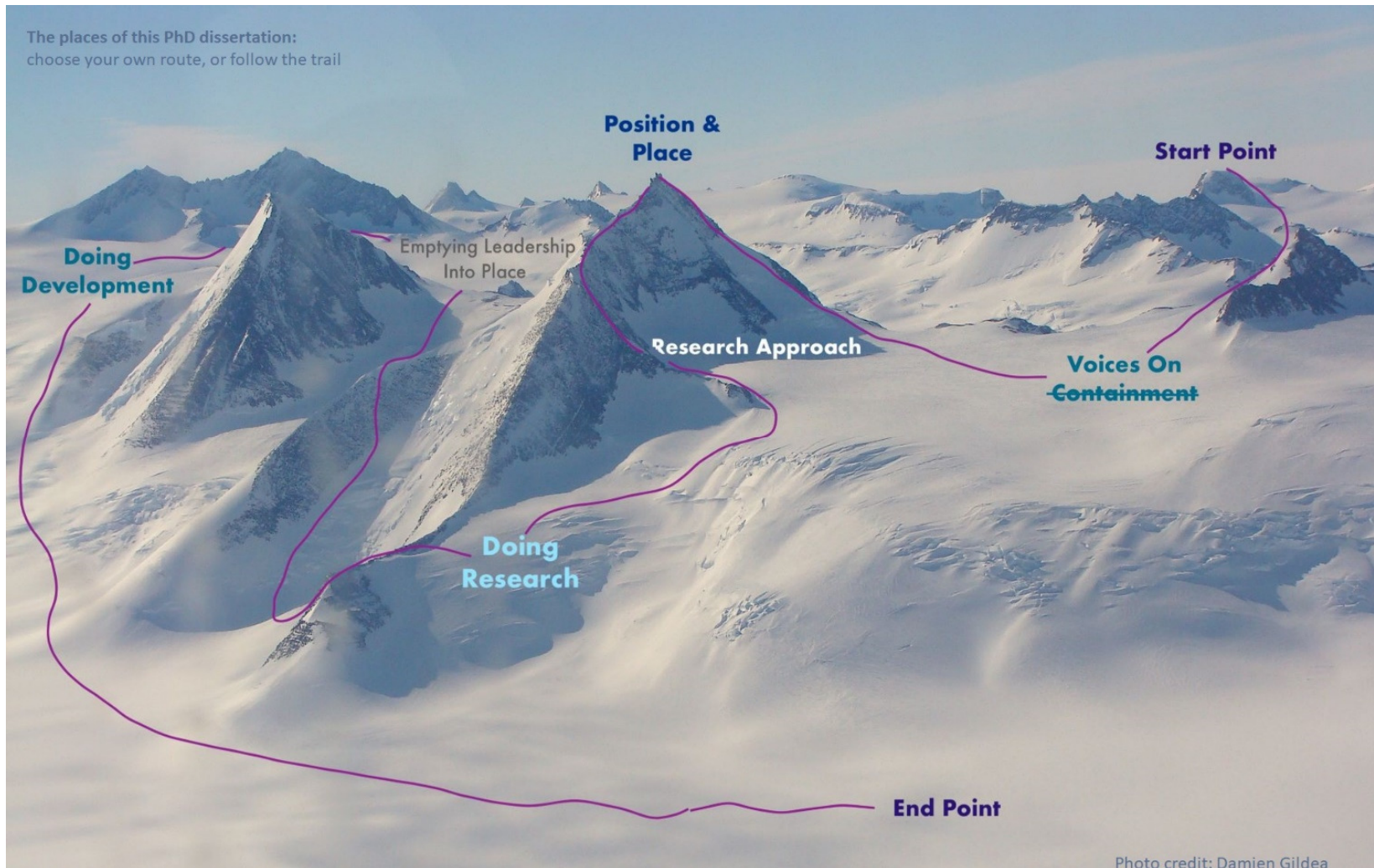
At the risk of becoming a pithy meme, the summation of ~~containment~~ in leadership development is in not settling. It is in ongoing seeking; dancing along and around safe-enough – of all the 'enoughs'; and keeping exploring:

If you critically accept the idea of ~~containment~~ proposed in this thesis, it is within your ken to choose what it may or could be 'for' in your mind-body-world. If I believe I can 'tell' you then I am guilty of magical thinking too and the whole thing has been in vain.

Keep seeking, keep questioning, keep dancing the line.

11E





12E

Which line did you take? Draw your route if you wish.

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Epilogue – the cutting room floor assemblage

A request to find ‘radical’ Jo, unshackled from the politics of playing the PhD game and also very much still trapped in the PhD game.

This section is a response to the conversation started with the Examiners (Kevin and Lucy) and is in many ways a continuation of that vibrant and stimulating exchange.

The challenges were to bring to the fore, the radical, the reflexive, the challenging and critical voices and positions I have taken throughout the thesis – to stop doing my own personal ~~containment~~ and dance into the realms of bold, stand-up and self-at-centre and therefore potentially into vulnerability and not-safe-enough. And to affirm a different sort of contribution from the mundane, but useful P lenses I have used to look through, my tool kit, reminders to think, reflect and understand differently after practice.

Contribution: a new approach to methodology – adding movement and collaboration

Reflecting on my frustrated and fuzzy attempts to articulate what I felt was the intangible essence of doing ~~containment~~, I noticed I was trying to explain by emphasising and re-emphasising the –ing of all of the keep-ing, do-ing, problematis-ing s. The –ing is the continuous tense, the tense of movement. Movement is in the synonyms I’ve used throughout this thesis, synonyms from dynamic action to dancing. Movement is at the core of doing ~~containment~~; movement is the continuous attaching and abstracting; the breaking and forming and re-shaping of new relations; the occupation of new positions – new perspectives; the interruption of grasping (or its antidote). Moving between too safe – safe – unsafe /too uncertain – critiquing – uncritical. Continuously. Not seeking equilibrium, but seeking calibration.

X1

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

My position is that methodology is empty, it has no essence nor does it not have essence. It is only a ‘thing’ (and each type of methodology is only a thing) for conventional reference i.e. it is convenient to make methodology an ‘it’ through using names for these temporary slices of time and space. I believe methodology itself (as construct) has become reified, a technology of power. And the various methodologies, the abstracted categories and ‘types of’ have also become reified, been given essence, and this has often been for political reasons, not ‘science’. The ‘how I chose to inquire’ frameworks were once personal stories (what I did) that were inherently politicised (why I did this). For example, Glaser and Strauss’s imperative for developing their (grounded theory) methodology was, in part, as a rebuttal to the ‘only good science is quantitative science’ dogma of the 1960s and 70s; the ‘posts’ are also a political response to US quant-qual interplay. Sometimes we even select particular methodologies e.g. action, refuting, feminist, *because* of their political position. Yet when we deploy them we tell the story of their objectivity, their systemic, scientific nature with regard only to the specific political lens we

choose to inquire through. Then we conveniently forget all the other politics the methodological choice inculcates, holds in its karmic foundations. We tell only the story of the inquiry within the accepted research wordery paradigm, commenting on only the aspects we are expected to comment on (limitations, biases...), deleting the rest. And so we reify and ossify the methodology through weight of usage. We calcify any criticality out of them. The inherently political and personal attachment becomes the abstracted validated, verifiable contribution. It is an academic form of cognitive dissonance. Having found success with our preferred storyline we then attach our own careers and professional identities to them. This attachment presents fantastic opportunities to dive deeper, to develop and critically explore the craft of approaching inquiry in our preferred way. However there is the danger that our attachment and familiarity (our habitus) grows ever bigger blinkers that may stop us noticing and understanding in other ways. Perhaps disconnecting us from others' realities and ways of being and knowing and possibly reinforcing our own belief cycle as we observe only the types of research outputs constructed by this methodology view – we build the walls of our own paradigm.

I wonder if we spend more time ensuring we are still on the rails of our chosen methodology, putting more energy and attention into *doing the methodology* than doing the research, than inquiring.

And we can also adopt an *and also* approach, democratising the positions, loosening our attachment and opening our ears to other ways of experiencing and doing the inquiry.

Take this thesis:

- This inquiry can be viewed as action research, and should be if we choose to emphasise the difference it has made, is making to the participants and their situation.
- This inquiry can also be viewed as participatory research, and should be if we wish to emphasise the egalitarian participation of all actors, and place, and the different expertises and experiences they contributed.
- This inquiry can be viewed as auto-ethnographic if abstracting outwards and seeing the researcher as object of inquiry, the artefact of the research (although I have objections to this perspective, see below).
- This inquiry can be viewed as phenomenological, attaching inwards to specific situations and the meaning making we sought to derive.

It is all of these and also none of these, not completely. These are all partial positions we can (and should) move between. In moving we are forced to consider what we are losing and what we are gaining, the usefulness, the bias, the limitations of each *in relation* to the thing which we are inquiring into. If we never quite settle, we have to keep an open, curious mind and keep alive the struggle to not be entrapped (get too safe) by what the methodology points us to, but to what might be happening outside of these limiting frames. If what is happening could be better understood by using a different lens of inquiry, a different methodology, then dip into your bag of methodological knowledge and use your practical wisdom and courage to try that something different. Or something new.

Planning an inquiry – real world adventures

The notion of planning the inquiry, choosing and fixing a methodology and methods to inquire into a situation we as yet know very little about (and if we do, then why are we inquiring) is antithetical – like choosing to use flippers and snorkel, yet having no idea whether we are travelling in water, air or land.

A methodology is a type of strategic approach. As any inquiry situation is a reflection of (and connected to) the world we are in, it is highly likely to be riddled with chords of volatility and uncertainty. It will, without doubt, be far more complex (politically, socially etc) and ambiguous than we could ever have begun to imagine before setting out on our research. If an organisation, a firm, created a strategy that was not grounded in analysis of 'what is', took no account of the interplay between itself and the operating environment and did not build in regular review and course correction steps, it would very likely fail, and it would be wildly derided for its fecklessness. So why would we expect a researcher to do the same with their strategy? Especially a PhD candidate, ostensibly a newbie to at-scale research?

However we do have to start our inquiry somewhere. To start with a curiosity, maybe a question and with at least an outline of the *initial* strategy to inquire with seems prudent. As we move positions, as we calibrate more deeply into the 'where, who, how' etc of the situation, as we learn how to be with and in it, as we attach, maintain the discipline to de-attach, to step back and out and ask: 'knowing what I now know, is this the best methodology to continue to explore with?'; 'and, what else?'

And re-enter, and abstract, and step in and step out Moving, critiquing, changing positions, shifting place enough to stay attentive and not subsumed; attuned and not attached.

To the academy: Embed problematizing of methodology into the PhD 'rules'; create the imperative and expectation that methodology will and should change when inquiring into practice.

Collaboration in curious conversations: the PhD improver

X3

The doing ~~containment~~ of methodology is made all the easier, more robust and more insightful if not done in isolation. What I notice from my perspective may not be what you notice from your perspective, bringing your life-work-practice experience, skills and biases to bear. The dialogue, discussion, exploration that having multiple insightful minds coalescing around inquiry into the inquiry, would, I believe, bring richness, breadth, depth and the needed agility to doing research better. Collaborative conversations that can be legitimately acknowledged and attributed as a method, a contribution to the inquiry and the PhD process would not only add to the research, the generation of new knowledge and practice, but would mirror research processes in the post-doctoral and contract worlds; go some way to reducing the stresses and strains of holding the PhD space emotionally and intellectually; and encourage inter-disciplinary, cross-sectoral working. Step away from the heroic researcher myth to democratise and liberate doing research.

To the academy: Build 'ba' into the Doctoral School process for scholars to critically inquire into their inquiry strategy and beyond. En-structure, reward and recognise their contribution and the practice this builds.

Contribution – me as artefact, relations as artefact?

I notice I resented and felt slightly aggrieved at the idea that I am "an artefact of my research" (Kevin Flinn, 2020). I accept and am reassured by the fact that I have changed and I have developed through the PhD journey, from an auto-ethnographic perspective, to which I am aware Kevin (Flinn) has attachments, my change may seem like an output; but don't call me output¹. On the contrary, I see my

¹ I'm minded of an indigenous PhD candidate here in Australia naming a chapter 'don't call me data' (Carpenter, 2020)

change as the investment in the PhD journey – an input not an output, what I gave not what I gained. Kevin’s perspective is the right perspective from where he sits. *And also* there are other perspectives on what this thesis purports to achieve and how, and these perspectives are as valid as mine or Kevin’s for these readers in the time and place in which they sit. We can afford this multiplicity because this thesis does not exist ‘from its own side’, it is in itself, just one glimpse, one slant on the interconnected, impermanence of this inquiry.

There is a possible of artefact of the research, following the argument above, I believe the artefact is *the critical relation* between myself and the research, the changing ‘it-I’ positions of the methodological movement.

The contribution: paper, PhD and *lungta* prayer

Flinn used an analogy of the PhD being but a single piece of paper stacked on top of a pile of other pieces of paper. Whilst I appreciate the sentiment of inconsequence (and the freedom this brings), it jars. Firstly, it assumes teleology – that there is progress just from being new, linearity. Why does the metaphorical paper not go into the middle of the pile or get stuck to one side? Secondly, if the metaphor of this PhD (and from previous comments, my journey) is paper then it is wind horse: the small pieces of paper carrying prayers and mantras that are thrown into the wind as they do in Tibet. Airborne the *lungta* dissipates, transforming-decaying as it interacts with weather and world, and in so doing enhances the throwers’ *lungta*, their “the state of having positive energy alongside physical equilibrium and psychological composure and clarity” (Karma Phuntsho, 2017, no page numbers). In this way the PhD documents, the wordage and symbols, these are my mantras here to be thrown into the ether to continue their ongoing mutability, landing where they land, transforming and being transformed by each new encounter, each place. I am not the PhD. I have served it and it, I hope, serves me.

Which returns us once again to movement.

Interchangeability: mirrors and parallels

What I noticed as I re-read and reflected on the words that form this thesis and my memory of the lived experience of it is the interchangeability of certain aspects of both:

Leaders – Researchers: interchangeable in the narration of the seductive heroics of the super-charged individual and the tremendous good that can come from people assuming either of these roles. The heroic narrative created by the academy (the Research Excellence Framework saviours; building reputations and bringing in the money) is an elevation and also a trap – what else could it be when occupying an ivory tower?

The academy – CoAA: a powerful place of fear and vulnerability populated by disparate ‘teams’; by good people and the shaking, shouting *tulo manche* elevated by dint of sheer personal and political push. A place we go to connect, to create friendships and seek kinship. The difference is the academy dare not look out to the parallel, the rest-of-world, which confuses and threatens with its difference. Too safe in our domain and so unsafe we dare only look back to our own narrow past for points of reference. Like CoAA the way to get ahead in this un-safe place is to speak-up, to get shouty, get a thick skin and wait

for the hand of god to swoop you up – “well done son, you’ve survived the ordeal, welcome to the academy”. In some ways the PhD process is an act of submission, a pilgrimage: you give your self, your whole self to the higher, brittle cause of ‘new’. Practising ~~containment~~ was my way of staying safe enough. This was my methodology: a discipline to stay alive-enough, stay on the outside-enough, a way of being and being curious that I didn’t allow to be swallowed up by the academy.

The other way to understand all of the above is to look at your palm and listen

<https://open.spotify.com/track/1U89xhVwOiWVo4AJa5ONXv>

More, you want more!

There is nothing more to give. I feel this ask not as the liberation ‘to unshackle’ as intended. It has become a trap – playing another game to even hazier rules. What am I writing this for? I am not sure. Who am I writing this for? For the examiners. And what is it they want? What is their expectation? What is in this new demand? It is still within the PhD so cannot be the free expression, the non-word, the breath I exhale. I’m feeling angry and confused writing this End of Ends: for all the requests to liberate, to hear the more radical this is STILL the written word; it is STILL me alone in conversation only with myself; it is STILL everything that it was and has been. It is STILL riddled with disillusion, STILL stuck in the academic paradigm and STILL of it. The more I write the less certain I am. What do they seek? What must I produce? I’m unravelling. It was enough. The thesis. This is a push away to the extremes, there is vulnerability. The tension of movement is gone, the seeking, and with it the energy and drive. Now there is just drifting. Untethered. Not released, adrift in the void, the wardrobe door somewhere out there and beyond warmth, sunlight, rest.

I played the game, now please let me out.

X5

Cathryn Carpenter, (2020) in conversation.

Kevin Flinn, (2020) in conversation, in examination.

Karma Phuntsho, (2017) *An introduction to lungta*. Bhutan Cultural Library, Virginia University online <http://bhutan.virginia.edu/subjects/7314/text-node/39421/nojs>

Keep it positive

- Discuss
- Explore
- Challenge

And always keep in mind the GOAL
**'to have the BEST possible CoAA' we can possibly
imagine and make happen**

1. The power of numbers

Strength

- We use some numbers (sales targets) to drive performance, to drive growth, to create pressure, to measure success

Lack of / negatives

- Documentation (words) to create systems; transparency; consistency; sharing knowledge; telling the stories
- Numbers that link people and performance (measuring more than just sales)



Sales
targets

Consider all the other things we measure /could be measuring – the other numbers that would help drive long and short term success, performance and impact on our people, others, communities, the environment, Nepal.....

1. Numbers in CoAA now

- Where do numbers work well?
 - How are they a strength?
 - With whom?
 - What numbers specifically?
- What do we miss when we focus only on (some) numbers?
- Should we use numbers more? (if so, what, when, where, with / for whom?)
- Do we have too much number strength? (should we use them less, if so which ones, where?)

In the best possible CoAA numbers would...

this is a statement set about NOW – not future / dream

- Numbers work well with: the principal company, vendors & distributors; competitors; management team
- New target number: Be in 1100 crore club. Other Numbers: sales targets; sales achieved; profitability; involving all departments and people
- What we miss when we focus on numbers only: HR development; systems & process development; enthusiasm; creativity & innovation
- Should we use numbers more? Yes – sales numbers; daily / always; with team and company

[The team set a target number / goal (be in 1100 crore club) but were less critically evaluative of the number as strength bias / opportunity (not how CoAA will 'be' in best case). More exploration needed here to understand the links between: numbers and people / numbers & performance; numbers & company health – how we use this goal to drive and sustain change and development – not just rapid (potentially unsustainable and damaging high growth). JKC]

2. Interaction – friendship – collegiality मित्रता

As a strength

- In small groups
- Within teams
- In informal spaces and places
- Informal – social chat
- Sometimes between manager and junior
- Real respect, trust, affection, care, support, loyalty

Lack of / negative

- Between teams
- In the office space
- Professional dialogue low
- Positive interaction absent
- Silos

2. Interaction in CoAA now

- Where is interaction strong and positive?
 - How is it a strength?
 - With – between whom?
 - What types of interaction specifically? Why?
- What (types of) interaction should we have less of? (who, where, when, why, how)
- Should we have more interaction / relationships? (if so, what, when, where, with / for whom, how?)

2. In the best possible CoAA interaction would mean:

- Weekly meetings between department heads only to discuss general problems faced during work. Not an agenda based meeting
- Sitting arrangements of business heads should be in such a way that they can interact as per need
- Cross-brand ASM meeting on a monthly basis
- Representative from accounts to be present in matters having financial impact

(common themes of more open interactions – more joined up working – more structures and systems in place that professionalise and formalise interaction. Practical. JKC)

3. Work ethic मूल्य काम गर्न

As a Strength

- We respond well to pressure
- We work hard
- We value hard workers
- We work to get the job done

Lack of (negative)

- Downtime / off-time
- too much pressure
- What else could we value?
- How else could we work?

3. Work ethic in CoAA now

- Where is the work ethic strong and positive?
 - How, when, where is it a strength?
- Is there a time when the work ethic is too much? (over work, too much pressure etc.)
- Are there places / times when we need a stronger work ethic (do more)?
- What else could we value as well? (lack areas)
- How do we value, recognise and reward hard work? (do we always?)
- What suffers when we work too hard/ much? Quality? Creativity?

3. In the best possible CoAA hard work would mean:

- Giving your best to everything that we do
- Awareness of pressure where it is used in a constructive manner
- Work/life balance is achieved
- Be pro-active (not reactive)
- Where we encourage or make space for creativity and have empathy for others
- An intra-department or inter-group meeting are held regularly, where communication allows for recognition of hard work and shown value

(themes around balance, recognition and care around what we value plus more togetherness – new structures, systems that enable and protect this New structures that allow us / permit us to work differently (not always at 100km/hour). JKC)

4. Flexibility – openness (to opportunity)

मौका गर्न खुलापन

As a strength

- CoAA has an open, ambitious mind-set
- It's good to speak up (and challenge)
- It's ok to try new things
- To do things differently
- To take opportunities

Lack of (negative)

- Constraint, rigidity
- Stability
- Consistency, coherence, cohesion
- Defensiveness
- Learning from doing...

4. Flexibility – openness to opportunity NOW

- What and where and how do we see / feel this in CoAA now?
- Where / how is it too much? E.g. too much challenge / ego vs harmony? Individualism vs Team
- Are there places and times we could be / have more flexibility and openness to opportunity? Is it open for all?
- What else could we value as well as this? (lack areas)
- How much are we learning from trying new things (near miss / fail / wins)?

4. In the best possible CoAA openness to opportunity would... HEADLINE ONLY

- Delegation of authority
- Flexibility in terms of policies (competitive salary, perks & satisfactory level of rewards)
- Rewards & recognition

(This looks initially like a request for more power, money and self-interest. How does this contribute to flexibility and openness to opportunity? However it makes sense with the accompanying notes. Request for greater parity between BH and junior employees. More upward flow of ideas and info (and across?) – having a voice at all levels – more democratic process. Better parity and recognition of all inputs. Better team working – less stress on individuals. Requires new structures – cross-team management (internal) rather than vertical pressures. Requires new systems and processes to capture achievements, to enable more dispersed decision making, input and localised accountability. Recognition, reward responsibility through more collaborative integrated leadership and team working. More succession planning – career development, pathways and opportunities for individual, team and idea growth. JKC)

Suggest we look at where we 'lack' now and flip this to a what we want/desire for the future.

4. Openness to opportunity NOW...(1 of 2)

- *From the direct notes not flipchart. Suggest we look at where we 'lack' now and flip this to say what we want/desire for the future.*
- CoAA is growing in rapid speed but still there is a lot of openness and flexibility with top management + BOD
- Too much:
 - sales VS logistic – clash – work target / deadlines
 - Egoistic situation created in work but harmony is personally maintained
 - Individualism – few people have lot of work load which has made individual centric rather than team work
- Yes it's flexible as we are allowed to speak out as much we can / share ideas and implement willingly and try new work. This gives the platform to grow more opportunity and harmony
- Delegation of power and responsibility. Accountability should be supported with authority
- Proper SOP, dissemination of info within chain & dept
- Huge contrast between BH and lower level employees (and within lower level employees)

4. Openness to opportunity NOW... (2 of 2)

- *From the direct notes not flipchart. Suggest we look at where we 'lack' now and flip this to a what we want/desire for the future.*
- Employees down the line are not getting an opportunity / platform to give their input. Feels alienation within the company
- Open and ambitious at one level and not at every level
- High employee turnover across the verticals
- Power of authority – allow people to take decisions and motivate them for more creativity
- Employees don't have secure future due to which they are trying to look for other opportunity. Entry level staff take CoAA as a training centre. No clear future goal.
- Employees don't consider them at par with competitor same turnover companies in Nepal in terms of salary and benefits / perks due to which self-esteem is very low
- Dissatisfaction among.....

5. Being believed in – supported- protected

विश्वास गर्न

समर्थित

सुरक्षित

As a Strength

- Feeling believed in and supported in all we do
- Feeling recognised for what we do
- Wanting to protect our teams

Lack of....

- Believed in and recognised for who we are / our potential
- Feeling overlooked, ignored, unappreciated
- Unreliable, un-trusted, suspicion
- Taken for granted, vulnerable
कमजोर

5. Being believed in – supported – protection NOW at CoAA

- What and where and how do we see / feel this in CoAA now?
- Where / how is it too much? (stifling, oppression, powerlessness)
- Are there places, teams and times we could be / have more support, protection and faith? Does everyone have this (who should)?
- What else could we value as well as this? (lack areas)
- What are we not recognised for / supported for?
- What happens if you're in the middle of the bell-curve (not awful, not brilliant, just good)

5. In the best possible CoAA support would...

- Not considered

6. Sharing learning, knowledge, info

As a strength

- We have a lot of experience
- We share what we've learned with others
- We feel our duty to support other's growth
- We like to advise and give guidance
- We share intel / info

Lack of

- Sharing across and upwards
- Systemic sharing /structures for..
- Cross-learning (platforms)
- Multi source (too much 'be like me')
- Self-led learning

6. Sharing learning, info and knowledge NOW at CoAA

- What and where and how do we see / feel this in CoAA now?
- Where / how is it too much? (too open, disempowering, parent-child)
- Are there places, teams and times we could be / have more sharing learning and knowledge? Does everyone have this (who else)?
- What else should we share?
- How else should we share learning, info and knowledge? (lack areas)
- Where else?

6. In the best possible CoAA sharing learning, info and knowledge would...

- As far as sharing learning, info and knowledge is concerned it needs to be inculcated believe in a quote: 'leaders create leaders'** and we believe in....
- We have to believe as one team as "CoAA team" breaking the silos
- Support our team logically, rationally to guide them in the right way
- Recognition should come at right juncture as Henry Ford said "I recognised my employee before his sweat drop could come down"*
- Yes we do have team work but it needs to create more bonding amongst "CoAA"
- I-I-I – exit / We we we – enter

(team ... togetherness.. cross-sector working, removing barriers, culture shift – recognition for who we are and HOW – development as professionals – mentoring?. Some unpacking of quotes needed here... more to explore. JKC)

7. Being a self-starter आत्म-स्टार्टर

As a strength

- We're used to 'learning from scratch'
- We can get smart / ahead even with no help
- We are resourceful and find a way

Lack of

- Availability of and access to help / support / resources
- Wider, deeper learning (it's a just-enough to survive approach)
- Cooperation, collaboration (silo)
- Risk taking, creativity (narrow focus)

7. Being a self-starter / initiative NOW at CoAA

- What and where and how do we see / feel this in CoAA now?
- Where / how is it too much?
- Are there places, teams and times we could show more initiative and be more self-reliant? Is everyone like this?
- How else could we harness initiative and make it even more powerful? (lack areas)
- What else could we do to speed up and support self-starters?
- What happens if you're not a self-starter but need a hand?

7. In the best possible CoAA being a self-starter would...

- Commandable hand-holding process
- Working for Vision VS working for Survival

• *(too vague – lets unpack this. JKC)*

8. Attracting good people

As a strength

- We're great at selling ourselves to attract good people to the company

Lack of

- We also attract people who don't fit / are toxic (then keep them)
- Growing and retaining good people
- Getting the best from our people

8. Attracting good people NOW at CoAA

- What and where and how do we see / feel this in CoAA now?
- Are there places, teams and times we could be attracting more good people? Maybe from within? Maybe from partners/ stakeholders?
- How else could we attract, grow and retain good people and make their impact even more powerful? (lack areas)
- What else could we do to help good people fit in quickly and effectively?
- What happens if we've attracted the 'wrong' people?

8. In the best possible CoAA attracting good people would...

- No time to explore this

9. Being proud of.. गर्व

As a strength

- We're proud of being part of something fast-growing, professional, strong
- We're proud of our brands
- We're proud of our products
- We're proud of our innovations
- We were proud of our response to the earthquakes

Lack of / negatives

- Everyday pride in our people
- Pride in ourselves
- Eagerness, alertness, hunger (over-confidence?)
- Humility
- 'don't care attitude'

9. Being proud NOW at CoAA

- What and where and how do we see / feel this in CoAA now?
- Where / how is there too much pride?
- Are there places, teams and times we could be more proud / confident? Is everyone like this?
- What else could we be proud of?
- How else could we harness pride and make it even more powerful as a motivator etc? (lack areas)

9. In the best possible CoAA being proud would mean

- A good place to learn / gain experience in multiple tasks
- At anytime / anywhere we can directly interact with bosses without any hesitation
- We can always share innovative ideas and CoAA is always willing to trial the same

(themes of openness, flexibility, risk-friendly and positive culture of interaction / communication. These say something about being proud of HOW and WHO not just WHAT – comments JKC)

10. Action oriented कार्य उन्मुख

As a strength

- We get things done – and quickly
- We like to be seen to be doing (getting hands dirty)
- We like to be doing / busy-ness

Lack of

- Time-out / down-time
- Time to think
- Reflection, consideration, strategic thinking
- Too much action (stress)

10. Focus on action in CoAA now

- Where is the focus on action strong, positive and super-effective?
 - How, when, where is it a strength?
- Is there a time when the focus on action is too much? (lack of planning, cooperation, preparation, reflection, active learning)
- Are there places / times or teams when we need a more action oriented approach?
- What else could we value as well? (lack areas)
- How do we value, recognise and reward action? (do we always?)
- Are our actions always SMART? Could we do less and achieve more? (exhaustion, tension, lack of productivity)

10. In the best possible CoAA being action-oriented would...

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List of Figures

Figure reference	Section	Page	Notes
RM1	0. Read Me	6R	Map of thesis sections, landscape and optional journey
S1	1. Start Point	1S	Early thoughts on
S2	1. Start Point	3S	Visualising containment
D1	2. Doing Development	3D	Some of the core concepts of Buddhism
D2	2. Doing Development	4D	The Hindu Asrama – development stages
D3	2. Doing Development	13D	A metaphor for doing leadership development
L1	2. Emptying Leadership into Place	4L	An evolutionary journey through leadership
L2	2. Emptying Leadership into Place	5L	mismatches in expectations of leadership across evolutionary timelines
L3	2. Emptying Leadership into Place	6L	P lenses for interrogating leadership meaning
L4	2. Emptying Leadership into Place	10L	P lenses rebalanced: paying attention to Place
L5	2. Emptying Leadership into Place	11L	A vision cartoon
L6	2. Emptying Leadership into Place	12L	Looking for leadership: a cartoon adaption
L7	2. Emptying Leadership into Place	12L	Rebalancing fields and objects in leadership
P1	2. Position and Place	5P	An extract from The Raft Guide & The Tamur
P2	2. Position and Place	6P	Wile E Coyote running out of Place
P3	2. Position and Place	9P	A metaphor for re-positioning
P4	2. Position and Place	10P	An extract from a Proper Asskicking
P5	2. Position and Place	12P	And extract from The Children Huddled Closer
P6	2. Position and Place	14P	Frogs in a jar – on being Nepalese
P7	2. Position and Place	17P	Safety and the State
A1	2. Research Approach	2A	The messy research process
A2	2. Research Approach	6A	Ethics – policy and practice in this inquiry
A3	2. Research Approach	7A	Some rejected methodologies
A4	2. Research Approach	13A	'The posts': an explanation
A5	2. Research Approach	18A	A research 'ology': recombining dependent parts
V1	2. Voices on containment	14V	The twelve limbs of dependent origination
C1	2. Doing Research – The Cases (ONE)	7C	Showing what happened when: the research intervention journey at CoAA
C2	2. Doing Research – The Cases (ONE)	8C	Extracts from interview record with M7E, a Business Head. 'Chocolate' is a major brand.

List of Figures

C3	2. Doing Research – The Cases (ONE)	9C	Office observations and reflections
C4	2. Doing Research – The Cases (ONE)	10C	Extract from a meeting observation with the entire team of Area Sales Managers (ASMs)
C5	2. Doing Research – The Cases (ONE)	11C	The final comment by a BH after a 90 minute interview. My annotation: I'm feeling played
C6	2. Doing Research – The Cases (ONE)	17C	Themes within 'knowledge is power'
C7	2. Doing Research – The Cases (ONE)	18C	Mara, the demon
C8a	2. Doing Research – The Cases (ONE)	18C	Codes from a different headspace
C8b	2. Doing Research – The Cases (ONE)	19C	Phase 1 and 2, from dark to light codes – the power of the coder
C9	2. Doing Research – The Cases (ONE)	20C	Themes explored as strengths and lack with the teams' outputs at the two AI workshops
C10	2. Doing Research – The Cases (ONE)	20C	Sample slide presented at AI workshops
C11	2. Doing Research – The Cases (ONE)	21C	The Group Foundational Values
CB1	2. Doing Research – The Cases (TWO)	42C	Sliding scales, Wicked problems, Leadership and the dance from 2017
CB2	2. Doing Research – The Cases (TWO)	42C	2018 version of the P lenses framework for interrogating leadership – the first tool for doing containment as theory-in-practice
CD1	2. Doing Research – The Cases (FOUR)	61C	A fragment of my notes from the Group Session
CD2	2. Doing Research – The Cases (FOUR)	68C	The updated, refreshed P lenses
CD3	2. Doing Research – The Cases (FOUR)	69C	Refocusing attention on the balancing act, the dance of doing leadership 'enough'
E1	3. The End Point	2E	Using dualities for rebalancing, refocusing on the relation, and the 'everything else'
E2	3. The End Point	3E	Collapsing dualities – interconnected, dependent origination
E3	3. The End Point	9E	A Hindu perspective on exploring without moving

List of Figures