

The Leadership task in taking power-to-the-edge

The place of the organisation

1. The individual can use a role as a defence against anxiety¹. For example, the nurse holds onto the professional notion of their role in order to avoid becoming overwhelmed by being personally open to the trauma being suffered by her patients.² From the point of view of the patient, this feels like not existing as a person.
2. The hierarchy of roles set up by the organisation is not only the organisation's means of defining what is to be ignored in making happen what it wants to happen.³ It is also the way the organisation represses its anticipation of that which would be traumatic for the organisation – that which it does not want to happen. For example, in a hospital ward for supporting the rehabilitation of elderly patients, the death of a patient would be a trauma for the hospital ward: it cannot be allowed to happen.
3. The hierarchy of roles is defined by power-at-the-centre in relation to a generalised relation to demand – symmetric demand. Patients become customers for the services that the hospital is offering. This power-at-the-centre can also be defined by its relation to that which cannot be allowed to happen – to its anticipation of that-which-would-be-traumatic for the organisation.
4. In taking power-to-the-edge, the relation to demand is being changed to one which can respond to the particular context in which a demand arises – asymmetric demand. With power-at-the-centre, the customer's 'deal' with the supplier is that the customer's anxieties and avoidance of trauma be displaced onto the supplier. As this begins not to work well enough for the customer, so the customer's demand becomes increasingly asymmetric i.e. as the customer expects the role of the supplier to become increasingly particular to his or her situation/context-of-use.
5. This requires that the supplier's relation to that-which-cannot-be-allowed-to-happen has to be transformed from that which is repressed to that which can be acknowledged and worked with in a way that is particular to the relation to the particular demand – albeit still with an irreducible core of that-which-would-be-traumatic. Thus, for example in the rehabilitation of elderly patients, the avoidance of the anticipation of the trauma of the bed occupant's death becomes the engagement with (and support in relation to) the family's anticipation of the death of a family member.

The challenge to leadership

6. With power-at-the-centre, the leader identifies/is identified with implementing the strategy which is also the means of repressing the relation to the anticipated trauma. However, in order to lead from where power needs to be at/is placed at the edge, this relation to the anticipated trauma has to be transformed in the leader's leadership. Reflexive Consultation is the means of bringing this transformation about in a way that is particular to the organisation.

¹ Isabel Menzies Lyth. "The Functioning of Social Systems as a Defence against Anxiety", in *Containing Anxiety in Institutions, Free Associations*, London 1988.

² For an excellent summary on the nature of trauma as something beyond understanding, see "Trauma and the Material Signifier" by Linda Belau. www.iath.virginia.edu/pmc/text-only/issue.101/11.2belau.txt

³ This results in an understanding as the management of ignorance – by organising what must be paid attention to over time, the organisation is also organising what is to be ignored.

7. Opening up the anxiety that the leader carries on behalf of the organisation is opening up second order/systemic/'Kierkegaard' anxiety⁴... anxiety that puts the leader's very being into question (as well as that of the organisation). Through being able to bear this anxiety, the leader is able to enable the organisation to bear it. We can understand more of what this means if we consider what happens when the priest or rabbi is in the leadership role.

8. The role of the priest is defined in relation to the carrying out of sacred rituals, and the rabbi is often seen similarly, a role with which s/he may collude as a defence against anxiety. However, in the pastoral role, the priest or rabbi is drawn away, to an extent, from this towards the asymmetric demands of their flock/community. The priest or rabbi therefore has to face up to and struggle with his or her own personal relation to anxiety.⁵ The avoidance of this struggle colludes with the wish of the flock/community to displace their anxieties onto the priest's or rabbi's institutional structure, and a church hierarchy or religious orthodoxy may wish to draw its strength from reinforcing this collusion. But the pastoral role demands more than this insofar as it encounters asymmetric demands from members of the flock/community that call the very formation of the organisation into question.⁶

9. What then is the ethical challenge facing the leader in seeking to repair the world? And what particular form does this challenge take for the religious leader?

The ethical challenge of the case

10. The significance of trauma is that it is that which refuses to be known, not only because to remember the thing would be to be terrified, but also because there is something about it that remains irreducible to being spoken about. What gets repeated therefore is the relation to this irreducibility, even if the form of the repetition is constantly changing.

11. The ethical challenge therefore contains a double challenge within it. Not only must that which is terrifying be faced and borne, but also the insistence of that about it which is irreducible. Not to accept this challenge is to be reduced to being the trauma's victim.⁷ Accepting it is to accept that the work of repairing can never be finished.⁸

⁴ This is Kierkegaard's 'concept of anxiety' (Princeton University Press, 1980), in which freedom appears before itself as a possibility. This opening up means that "... whoever is educated by possibility remains with anxiety; he does not permit himself to be deceived by its countless falsifications and accurately remembers the past... for him, anxiety becomes a serving spirit that against its will leads him where he wishes to go." (p159)

⁵ Sermons may provide the priest or rabbi with a means of sharing this process of self-revelation through which these tensions may be worked through.

⁶ The traditional approach to organisational role consultation is to consider the relationship between person, role and system. For a role 'at the edge', there is therefore a fourth consideration in the nature of the primary risk implicit in the current formation of person-role-system, in which the consideration of primary risk involves questioning the performativity of the organisation's relation to the demand. (See forthcoming paper with Carole Eigen to ISPSO 2005).

⁷ This is to invoke Lyotard's notion of the victim: "What constitutes victimhood is precisely that one is in a situation in which one unable to speak – not because it is disallowed or legally barred, but rather because the nature of the suffering cannot be spoken in the particular idiom that is entrenched in law." (Lyotard, Jean-François. 1988. *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute*. Trans. Georges Van Den Abbeele. University of Minnesota Press). In this sense, the member of the flock/community is rendered a victim of the structure of affiliation offered by the church hierarchy or religious orthodoxy insofar as they displace their anxiety onto it.

⁸ The allusion here, of course, is to the understanding of humanity's role as 'Tikkun Olam'.

12. But what kind of challenge is this in practice? Not only must the whole formation within which the nature of the present moment is approached be held in question, but also the formation of the moment itself. We see this challenge particularly clearly when approached within a religious frame.⁹ The following shows us how a person is implicated in how they interpret the moment, represented here by the biblical text:

“... the text is a sign that has its meaning (or refers to its object) for some interpretant (or some interpreting mind or context of interpretation). Each interpretation of the biblical text would thus represent a particular, triadic relation among sign, meaning, and interpretation. Criteria for truth would be particular to each relation, engaging biblical text and interpreter in what Borowitz would call a covenantal relationship.”¹⁰

What this triadic relationship means is that the individual is always personally implicated in the way s/he gives meaning to what-is-going-on, and although there are always ready-made interpretative frameworks that can be used to avoid being personally implicated, it is in trauma itself that the individual is brought up against the limits of this.

13. What, then, is the ethical challenge of the case? In working together, trying to pay attention to that about which we do not speak, the reflexive work is to use these silences to question our ways of interpreting the truth of what-is-going-on. The following, taken from a conversation between Susan Handelman and Gene Borowitz captures it for me:

“You, too, propose a “*reverse tzimtzum*” as a necessary step for that *tikkun*, an emptying out of the self on the model of God’s emptying out of himself in order to create a world. What, then, is the content of that self? Or as we might ask in contemporary literary theory, “How is subjectivity constructed?” A Chassidic interpretation notes that the letters that compose the Hebrew word for “I” *aleph, nun, yud*, when rearranged, spell “nothingness” *ayin, yud, nun*. If modernism gazes into the self and finds an abyss that terrifies, postmodernism accepts with equanimity that lack and seeks to turn that void inside out, so to speak. To cross and recross it. Without the voice of God, though, that emptied, contracted self can become the cynical laugh of a character from Beckett or a self trying to fill itself through games of power and sexuality as in Foucault. But if Divine selfhood is itself manifested in *tzimtzum*, self-contraction, then the void becomes the source of ethics, an emptying out of the self to give to the other.”¹¹

14. We appear, therefore, to be looking at a form of continuum describing the nature of the individual’s response to the ethical challenge. At one end is a cynical humanism – that which is ‘postmodern’ as popularly understood; ‘liberal’ as understood in the USA; and politically correct; but which is ultimately superficial *qua* there is nothing but the surface. And at the other is a fundamentalist plenitude – that which offers to fill the abyss, albeit in the manner of a mess of pottage or a Faustian pact. In between we have faith-with-

⁹ Borowitz (Renewing the Covenant: Eugene Borowitz and the Postmodern Renewal of Jewish Theology) calls it a ‘covenantal relationship’. Momany speaks of it in relation to Wesley as conjunctive. (Wesley’s General Rules: Paradigm for postmodern ethics, by Christopher P. Momany http://wesley.nnu.edu/wesleyan_theology/theojrn/26-30/28-1.htm – see also Edward Piper’s critique of Fowler’s model, used in Momany’s paper http://www.meadville.edu/piper_3_1.pdf)

¹⁰ Peter Ochs, quoted from a review of Borowitz’s book above. What is being invoked here is a Peircean logic of vagueness, the modality of the relational (in this case, covenantal) rule being that of vagueness, rather than of either universality or particularity.

¹¹ From *Reviewing the Covenant: Eugene B. Borowitz and the Postmodern Renewal of Jewish Theology*, Peter Ochs (ed) State University of New York Press. 2000.

a-small-f: the capacity of the individual to act as if s/he knows while knowing that s/he does not.¹² But we can understand this challenge in another way.

The relation to the death drive

15. If we start from the notion of the total transference situation¹³, then we can ask what is the 'organising principle' behind the system of object relations manifesting itself¹⁴. If we accept (as is argued in the TCS book¹⁵) that, whatever personal valencies we might have for particular organisations of object relations, we are dealing with an organisational object, then what do we have?

16. If we take the Kleinian route, then we have innate phantasies. "When these innate preconceptions meet with experiences with objects, primitive phantasies are formed concerning breast and penis, intercourse and reproduction. For Kleinians phantasy forming and phantasy life are thought to start from birth and to continue throughout life. All the contents and structures of the unconscious mind are thought to be organised in the form of phantasies..."¹⁶. So the Kleinian route appears to be arguing that it is as if there is a phantasy formation organising the particular organisation of object relations characteristic of the organisation. This makes sense, and we can use the notion of a 'sponsoring system' as a way of referring to the effects of such a phantasy formation, something which can be seen as operating in the same way as an ideology.¹⁷

¹² The maxim of Ignatius Loyola here puts this much better: "Have faith in God as if all success depended on you, nothing on God. Set to work, however, as if nothing were to come about through you, and everything through God alone." A paragraph in "Ignatius the Theologian" by Hugo Rahner SJ, (Cassell 1968) reads: "Consequently, this Spirit-Church dialectic in the theology of Ignatius leads directly to the indissoluble unity of tension between grace and free cooperation, between trust in God and personal endeavour. Trust in God, but never in such a way as to forget that you must do everything that lies in your power. And work, but never in such a way as to forget that everything depends ultimately on the grace of God. This is the real meaning behind the famous and often misinterpreted dialectic of one of Ignatius's maxims.....The same dialectic lies behind what the Fathers expressed in the oxymoron 'sober intoxication'. (p223) Within another formation, it becomes: "Do His will as if it were your will, that He may do your will as it were His will. Destroy your will for the sake of His will so that he may destroy the will of others for the sake of your will." Rabban Gamliel, the son of Rabbi Judah HaNasi (the Prince) ca. 250CE, Sayings of the Fathers 2:4.

¹³ Different levels of interpretation can be distinguished: level 1 – 'this is your father you are afraid of, and you feel that the man in the grey suit is your father' (in the patient's dream); level 2 – as the analyst in the session, the analyst is introducing the patient to aspects of herself and her internal object relationships that she doesn't consciously experience or know about; level 3 – the way in which patients feel the analyst is enacting, and indeed the way in which patients pull the analyst into enacting the scenarios of their inner world; and level 4 – the level 3 enactment may be necessary in order for the analyst to be aware of what is going on in the larger context, and the analyst may need to be alert to the part this larger context plays in this in relation to his or her own anxieties and defence mechanisms. The total transference situation, then, involves taking all of these levels into consideration. (description of levels taken from p87, "Mapping the Landscape: levels of transference interpretation", by Priscilla Roth, in "In Pursuit of Psychic Change: the Betty Joseph Workshop", Brunner-Routledge 2004.)

¹⁴ In considering this 'organising principle', we are therefore paying particular attention to the effects of Level 4.

¹⁵ "Working Below the Surface: the emotional life of contemporary organisations", Karnac Books 2004.

¹⁶ In Pursuit of Psychic Change, pp112-113.

¹⁷ This is the argument made in "Facing Facts: what is the good of change" (Boxer, 2004). To go further with this organisation as object as described in the TCS book... I would combine structure-and-process as inseparable (as would Maturana et al), so that the book identifies three 'logics' – structure-and-process (coordinations of behaviour), enterprise qua identity (synchronisations of outcome), and contextual embeddedness (anticipation of satisfaction-of-demand(s)). We can understand an organisation-as-object in these terms as the particular way these three 'logics' are composed in relation to each other.... in other words, the phantasy formation is the particular form of composition of this triple articulation (viz Freud's project).

17. Now we can understand power-at-the-centre in terms of the way phantasy formation is able to contain meaning, giving us the familiar formulation of the organisation that emerged post WWII.¹⁸ How, then, are we to understand power at the edge – the response to asymmetric demand – formulated as the demand for distributed leadership. For TCS this leads to the idea of protainment: “containment that can communicate the pleasures of self-discovery and discovery of the world and encouragement for exploration and curiosity”.¹⁹

18. In my paper that critiqued TCS’s earlier work *Unconscious at Work* (the dilemmas of ignorance²⁰), I pointed out the difficulties that arose in the Kleinian *oeuvre* from privileging phantasy over drive. In a Lacanian reading of Freud, phantasy is a response to drive, organising the subject’s relation to the lack, which is then itself ‘covered’ by the *objet petit a*. I would propose, therefore, that the idea of protainment is the idea that the phantasy formation *qua* organisational object is not a thing-in-itself, but is itself a response to drive as made present in the form of *objet petit a* – object, cause of desire. This formulation requires that we cease to privilege phantasy as ‘innate’ (as in the quote above). The benefit of understanding the organisational object in these terms is that we can now begin to think about phantasy formation itself and its corollary of the challenge of power-at-the-edge.²¹

19. Where, then, does this leave us with the Kleinian ‘death instinct’. In Lacanese, the narcissistic defence is formulated as a perverse structure²², so that the ‘death instinct’ becomes an effect of superegoic functioning, not to be confused with death drive, which is for the human subject the relation to the lack. If we understand this in terms of a narcissistic organisation of the subject that defends it against being overwhelmed by the other (i.e. annihilation), then we see how the basic assumption of incohesion:massification/aggregation comes into play as a primitive defence against annihilation²³. These are the two

¹⁸ And with this formulation comes all the apparatus of Bion’s work group and three basic assumptions. In effect, therefore, I am arguing that the ‘Tavistock Paradigm’ (Barry Palmer, 2001, in “Towards a Psychoanalytic Social Psychology”, Marco Chiesa, Taylor & Francis) is very effective in addressing the characteristics of ‘power-at-the-centre’, and by implication that it needs further elaboration to be able to address the problematics of power-at-the-edge.

¹⁹ Interesting to me that Lacan is invoked at this point by Clare in relation to *jouissance*, for *jouissance*, and the *plus-de-jouir*, is organised in relation to the Lacanian *objet petit a*. And the *objet petit a* is not the Kleinian object.

²⁰ In “Group Relations, Management and Organisation” Rebus Press 1999.

²¹ It is useful to distinguish between ‘boundary’, which is a 1st order effect of how task is organised (defined in Tavi paradigm terms in relation to primary task); and edge, which can be thought of as a 2nd order boundary – the edge of the world as it is known from within that particular form of (task) organisation. This is why primary risk is a useful concept, because it is about the choice of task organisation itself. It is also why it is necessary to consider an organisation as an organisation of meaning as much as it is an organisation of task. (This problematic is explored by Barry Palmer in ‘Grouping’, in “Group Relations, Management and Organisation”, French and Vince eds, OUP 1999. In arguing for a reflexive theory of group behaviour he distinguishes between 1st, 2nd and 3rd orders of articulation of grouping, in which it is the 3rd order articulation which puts into question the group itself *qua* discursive formation.)

²² For a Kleinian treatment of this structure, see ‘Psychic Retreats: Pathological organisations in Psychotic, Neurotic and Borderline Patients’, John Steiner, Routledge 1993.

²³ This is the basic assumption incohesion:aggregation/massification (baI:A/M) (‘Traumatic experience in the unconscious life of groups’ Earl Hopper Jessica Kingsley 2003). It appears to be a reworking of the basic assumption MeNess (baM) (‘The fifth basic assumption’, Lawrence, Bain and Gould, Free Associations 6, 37, 28-55 1996), formulated in relation to Turquet’s basic assumption oneness (baO) (‘Leadership: the individual and the group’, in Gibbard, G.S. et al, eds, “The Large Group: Therapy and

ends of the continuum (cynicism vs plenitude). This allows us to understand the relation of 'faith' as a being between this Scylla and Charybdis - a relation to death drive functioning that remains open to the Otherness of the other.²⁴

20. The pleasure principle, then, is the functioning of a particular phantasy formation; and the death drive is drive functioning, albeit organised by the particular way the phantasy formation structures the relation to drive functioning. So where does the aggressivity/destructiveness of the 'death instinct' come from? It comes from the defence of a particular organisation (economy) of pleasure – an investment in a fixed relation of phantasy to drive, known in Lacanese as a perverse structure.

21. We can conclude that the particular challenge of faith is therefore the ethical challenge formulated by Lacan as being 'between two deaths'... accepting having died to a fixing of the relation of phantasy to drive while not yet being dead.²⁵

Dynamics" Josey-Bass 1974). In the latter case, the emphasis is placed more on the role of the 'non-group group', but in both cases, what is at stake is the very formation of the subject himself or herself.

²⁴ This takes us back to the second order/systemic/'Kierkegaard' anxiety spoken of earlier.

²⁵ viz "The Ethics of Psychoanalysis 1959-1960: the Seminar of Jacques Lacan" Tavistock/Routledge 1992.